

# LACE-Phare CBC

## Assessment Report: SLOVAKIA – AUSTRIA

### 1 Profile of the cross-border region:

#### 1.1 Definition of the border or cross-border region

The border line between Slovak Republic and Austria in the length of 106 km follows almost exclusively the river streams of the Morava/March and the Danube, the second biggest European river. The only artificially demarcated part of the border was created South from the Slovak capital Bratislava –area on the right bank of the Danube. The Sk-A border line which represents 6.3% from the total 1,672 km of the Slovak state border) means for Slovakia its only very important border to EU countries and the border with the Shengen regime. The South and SW districts of Bratislava-city are located on border triangle Slovakia-Austria-Hungary. From natural point of view mainly the lowlands and middle high hilly areas create the immediate border regions on both side of the SK-A border.

The **Slovak part of the border regions** is represented by three districts from the Bratislava-Region: Bratislava IV, Bratislava V and Malacky and one district from the Trnava-Region: Senica. The total number of inhabitants of the mentioned for districts was 351 036 (state to January 1, 1998); their surface area 1,824 sq. km; population density 192.51 inh./sq. km. Both regions (provinces) are eligible for financing from the Phare CBC Programme.

The **Austrian part of the border regions** is represented by three districts: Bruck a.d. Leitha, Gänserndorf (the main share of the border line) and Mistelbach in Weinviertel. The total number of population is here approx. 200 000.

#### 1.2. Political / administrative structures

**In Slovakia:** since the last implemented administrative-territorial arrangement (July 1, 1996) are in operation eight provinces/regions with regional state administrative councils and together 79 districts (“okres“) with district state administrative councils. At regional and district level does not exist the self-governmental structure. This structure exists, besides the national parliament only at the lowest administrative level – at the municipalities level (together 2 878 communities, incl. 136 communities declared as the towns) with the elected self-governmental councils of local governance. For cross-border co-operation the most important administrative structures are the Regional Councils. This situation would be significantly changed after introducing the new concept of decentralisation and modernisation of they public administration (most probably to become into force during the year 2001). The new self-governmental structures with the elected regional parliaments with the strong competence file will be at the NUTS III level the most important administrative partner for cross-border co-operation. The considered newly established regional self-governmental system would respond to the NUTS II (four “great“ regions – West-, Middle- and East Slovakia and Bratislava: at present time with only statistical and partially planning functions), NUTS III and also NUTS IV level. The number of self-governmental regions is still under consideration (most probably 11 + Bratislava, the capital). Alternative models are also under consideration as regards the future existence and competencies of the district state administration offices.

**In Austria:** The territorial-administrative structure of the Federal Republic of Austria consists from nine provinces (regions; in German: Länder) – the NUTS II level. The provinces are subdivided into NUTS III level – districts, in German: Bezirke. The fourth governmental level is formed by the local municipalities (communes and towns). All these levels create the Austrian self-governmental structure.

### 1.3 Main socio-economic characteristics

#### ***1.3.1 Economic structure***

An important aspect in the economic relations between Slovakia and Austria is the great difference in their GDP per capita – their income, production and infrastructural levels. Only the expected growth of GDP in Slovakia could diminish this difference in the next years. The border regions are characterised – in generally – as the peripheral one. The Slovak-Austrian border region is an exception from this point of view. Both capitals – Bratislava (Slovakia) and Vienna (Austria) are situated with regard their whole state territory in extreme geographical positions: Bratislava extreme westly and Vienna extreme eastly. Both capitals from economic point of view are evaluated as the economic poles of their respective countries. The hinterlands of both capitals make profit from this situation; of course this profit is less significant with the distance increase from both centres.

In the framework of Slovakia Bratislava-Region has the best infrastructure, R+D potential, FDI concentration (approx. 60% of the Slovak total), the highest average registered number of employees (more than 26%) and the lowest unemployment rate (5.1%). Except Bratislava Region, all other regions of Slovakia have 10-20% of population employed in the primary sector, 30-50% in secondary sector and 30-50% in tertiary sector. The Bratislava Region has 69.7% of employees in tertiary sector, 27.5% in secondary and only 2.8% in primary sector.

On the Austrian side the primary sector is much less important, although in some parts of this border region, especially in Weinviertel, the share of the primary sector in the total employment is relatively high (18%), while the secondary and the tertiary sector varies in average from 30-37%, respectively 43-60%.

#### ***1.3.2 Employment***

Bratislava Region has the leading position in economy of Slovakia. Position of this region is expressed by its lowest unemployment, the highest unemployment rate have two East Slovakian regions – Košice and Prešov with over 20% of unemployment rate. Unemployment rate in Austrian regions vary between 6-7%. The possibility of daily/weekly commuting to Austria is used to a relatively great extent from the Slovak side, in spite of the provisions in the labour market protection policy in Austria.

#### ***1.3.3 Agriculture***

The best situation in many subregions is in specialised wine production areas (SE slopes of Small Carpathian in Slovakia and Weinviertel in Austria). There are examples of co-operation, e.g. at the newly established farm specialised on asparagus production at Vežké Leváre, Slovakia; in many sub-regions the traditional farming gives way to farms based on rural tourism (agro- and eco-tourism) development.

#### ***1.3.4 Infrastructure***

From Slovakian regions the Bratislava-Region has the best level of infrastructural development. In spite of its development in the last period - the number of cross-border check points with Austria is still insufficient. The cross-border road transport is hampered by the

relatively long waiting times at the borders. The intensity of navigation on the Danube – in spite of the fact that the river is a part of the important European water route Rhine-Main-Danube is under the expected level.

### ***1.3.5 Environment***

The immediate SK-A border area on both side of the border line is well preserved in most cases (also due to the “iron curtain border regime” during the 40 years of totalitarian regime). The geographic position of the Sk-A border region in the centre of Europe and on the boundary of the Carpathian mountain and the Danube – Pannonian lowland allows for a rich diversity of flora and fauna. The actual estimates of biodiversity of Slovakia is high, e.g. there are 40,000 species of fauna in Slovakia. The 62 species of fish that were recorded in the border Morava river and its tributaries make this one of the biodiversity hot-spots of Europe. In 1992, the Morava floodplain was designated by Bird-Life International as an internationally important bird sanctuary. Extraordinary import are also the aquatic and wetland habitats protected by the Ramsar Convention and the Záhorie Protected Landscape Area in Slovakia. On the other hand the whole border region suffers mainly from the both polluted main rivers. Agriculture is responsible for a lot of pollution and for a large extent for the impoverishment of the soil. Much depends on the use of manure, pesticide and the crops that are produced and the way of crops cultivation, e.g. for the groundwater pollution.

## 1.4 Degree of cross-border co-operation

Cross-border co-operation exists traditionally on various levels and forms and has been rapidly developing since the period of “velvet revolution” in the late 1989 and the very beginning of the 90-ties. A lot of family and friend relationships from the earlier periods are developed here. But because of the political and economic situation during the 40 years of totalitarian regime, the activities related to cross-border co-operation were limited to some, mainly cultural and sporting events and tourism.

Since 12/1997 the three-countries Euroregion Weinviertel (Austria)-South Moravia (Czech Republic)-Záhorie Lowland (West Slovakia) does formally exist. Also the twin city agreements and other bilateral co-operation agreements between local/regional governments are quite popular. The atmosphere for cross-border co-operation is here very good. Traditionally good contacts between people of both nations, similarities of culture (between all three countries) and languages (between Slovaks and Czechs), and last but not least lack of any significant history based tensions belong to the most important supporting factors of mutual cross-border co-operation.

The EU support for cross-border projects was not available until 1997. In spite of the fact that the real CBC has gradually developed since the early 1990's, the activities connected with the creating of CBC structures are fully developing in Slovakia only after parliamentary election in 1998, because of the new orientation of foreign policy towards EU countries and to CBC generally. Until this time its size was much below the region's potential and needs.

## 1.5 Barriers to cross-border co-operation

Big rivers, as mainly the Danube is and partially also the smaller Ipe<sup>3/4</sup> River is, represent a natural barrier to cross-border co-operation and communication because an opening of a cross-border check point is connected with the construction of a new bridge, which requires specially in case of the Danube to implement an expensive project. Other natural barriers on the border line practically do not exist. However the insufficient number of border crossing

points and the roads to them, as the concrete result of insufficient infrastructure, creates another type of these barriers. Also the frequently appeared long waiting/queuing time at the customs is not a stimulate factor for cross-border co-operation.

The general lack of financial resources for cross-border projects including difficulties in meeting the minimum required own contribution as well as various competencies and level of independence in making decisions in both countries make cross-border co-operation – mainly in economic/entrepreneur's sphere – even more difficult.

Insufficient social and technical infrastructure at regional/local level is a barrier to more intensive social and cultural relationships among the people and the existing legislative norms did not allow for communes and towns to develop CBC, as it was mentioned already, in economic sphere. The latter barrier would be possible in the near future after new legislation would come into force to eliminate.

## 2 Structures

### 2.1 Cross-border structures

The most frequently appeared cross-border structures that exist are:

- Cross-border agreements between various local authorities which have been formed as a result of the need in practical co-operation of the municipalities
- Cross-border agreements between various local authorities, which have been formed as a result of requirements of EU programmes to facilitate future projects (e.g. Phare CBC)
- Special committees or working groups (e.g. Joint Co-operation Committees - JCC) established to tackle common problems such as waste management, drink water supply, air pollution, transport and tourism and
- Cross-border structures within the AEBR Euregio and/or their ambitious to be incorporated to the AEBR Euregio in future.

The Declaration on trilateral CBC in the form of **Euroregion Weinviertel (Austria)-South Moravia (Czech Republic) and Záhorie Lowland (Slovakia)** was signed in December 1, 1997 in Mistelbach, Austria: from the Slovak side it was signed by the Regional Association of Záhorie together with the Association of Towns and Communes of Záhorie Region (on behalf of three districts – Malacky, Senica and Skalica), from the Bohemian side the Regional Association of Towns and Communes of South Moravia (on behalf of four districts – Bøeclav, Brno-countryside, Hodonín and Znojmo) and from the Austrian side the management of the Weinviertel Euregio (on behalf of four political districts – Gänserndorf, Mistelbach, Hollabrunn and Korneuburg). The total number of inhabitants is approx. 650 000. Also a crystallisation point for improvement of the regional integration was declared.

The three territories are connected with a long-term historical and cultural tradition. There exists a lot of co-operation on the cultural, incl. sport exchange, tourism as well as environmental activities. Cultural understanding and a mutual confidence are the necessary steps for further co-operation – mainly in the economic sphere. Since Autumn 1998 an Euroregional Clearing House was created at Zistersdorf, Austria and since 1999 an Euroregional Fund for implementation of small projects was established.

### 2.2 Other structures/authorities/social partners engaged in CBC

Other actors involved are: municipalities, especially those involved in twin-town relationships, regional development agencies, chamber of commerce, several schools, cultural

establishments. Necessary is also to mention the special importance of NGOs and other non-profit organisations.

A new **Project on Revitalisation of the Vienna-Gyor-Bratislava “Gold“ Triangle** is under preparation. A series of professional meetings and conferences on different levels took place in the last period. Most recently a symposium on cross-border co-operation between Vienna and Bratislava (June 20-21, 2000 in Bratislava) was headed by the Lord Mayors of both capitals. The negotiations touched also the above mentioned “gold ” triangle, incl. the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest Czech city – Brno, mainly in the sphere of the transport infrastructure.

### 2.3 Activities/services

There are many excellent examples for the successful co-operation. E.g. within the Weinviertel-South Moravia-Záhorie Euroregion the successful co-operation in agriculture, agro- and rural-tourism, educational programmes, TRICOM – trilateral co-operation in telecommunication linkages up to information transfer can be mentioned. At the university level projects for students under the EU Tempus Programme brought together students from different countries and branches.

### 2.4 Awareness of cross-border co-operation issues/knowledge of CBC programmes

Despite the fact that the cross-border relations has in the studied border region already a tradition, there is a lack of practical information and knowledge about the possibilities for cross-border co-operation and programmes; therefore a goal-oriented implementation of the public awareness programmes in this sphere are very important. Many have good ideas for project development, but they are not enough awareness of exact requirements of these programmes. On both side of the border there are several co-ordination offices assisting in the understanding of CBC programmes; these offices have to be more active. The awareness of mechanism of such programmes is still relatively very low, there is a lack of practical skills and information about preparations of concrete programmes and projects, proposals for Phare CBC and other projects potentially supported by various funds, there is a lack of information about the possibilities to get this support, about conditions for it, etc. It is necessary to spread the information about EU programmes. A special attention should be paid to explain the aim of common long-term planning, programming and strategy building aspects. Taking into account the expertise gathered by the euroregions, they can be used as “antennas” in getting through with information and advice to regional/local communities. They can play an active role within the implementation of the Phare-CBC programmes.

## **3. Programme related activities**

### 3.1 Strategy development

**The Strategy Framework for Cross-border Co-operation Development in the Trilateral Border Region Slovakia-Austria-Hungary** was completed at the end of 1999. This framework, which processing was supported by EU through the PHARE CBC Programme, is oriented for creation of an overall comprehensive strategy as well as of an institutional framework for implementation of this strategy in Slovakia. Also on Hungarian and Austrian side of the border are similar projects under implementation. Austria through the INTERREG initiative has a Multi-Annual Operational Programme. Also Hungary has prepared a corresponding development strategy for its territory bordering to the Trilateral Area with Slovakia and Austria.

In spite of the fact that the Strategy Framework's priorities were oriented to the needs of the Slovak institutions and regions, co-ordination work with the Austrian and Hungarian institutions has been implemented. All three countries declared their intention to develop their border regions even in a more co-ordinated way.

This Trilateral Border Region belongs to the most dynamically developing regions even in European context (see e.g. the Empirica Bonn, FRG study, 1994). This has a tremendous effect on the economic, social, scientific and human potential of the region. Unlike in the other border regions located mostly in the most peripheral zones of their respective countries, there is in this region a realistic aim to reach a very high standards mainly in the field of infrastructural supply, entrepreneur's environment, education, R+D and services by applying a well co-ordinated development concept.

The following priorities are essential in the region: (i) development of networks, technical, mainly transport infrastructure; (ii) economic development and further stage of establishment and support of SMEs; (iii) tourism and support of cultural heritage in the border area; (iv) environment and rural development; (v) human resources development, incl. institutional capacity building on regional and local level, vocational and higher education, demographical processes, creation of job/work market, commuting, settlement system, social infrastructure.

Specific proposals for the Phare-CBC Programme, in the form of sets of measures and their submeasures were formulating with respect to the following criteria: (i) consistency with national and regional development needs and priorities; (ii) consistency with priorities for cross-border co-operation; (iii) development of integration character of actions: the future individual projects being mutually supporting; (iv) exhibit synergy with projects carried out under other national and/or international development programmes, especially within the Slovak Republic's and Hungary's Phare-CBC Programme; (v) offer of the prospects of long-term sustainability; (vi) build on the successes of previous CBC programmes; and (vii) be accompanied by funding as well as administrative/institutional structures, appropriate for implementation.

**The development strategies of local and regional governments** are only partly completed; especially in Slovakia it would be the priority of these governments after implementation of the prepared reform of public administration with more competencies to regional/local self-governments. Normally the CBC is an important part of such a strategy.

Within the context of accession strategies and the implementation of SPP programmes, some of the border administrations are assisting in the preparation of various SWOT and regional analyses studies on behalf and under the leading of the central government. These strategies have to be taken into account, too. It is necessary the cross-border co-operation issues to implement into these strategies as their very important integral part.

### 3.2 Programming, especially PHARE CBC related

The regions are gradually acquiring more programming experiences in the context of the preparation projects related to Phare-CBC. A lot of educational activities ought to be done in this sphere. In this respect setting and definition of priorities are the crucial issues. It is necessary also to include to cross-border co-operation to regional and local development/structural plans.

The preparation of the basic Joint Co-operation Programming Document which is a pre-condition for Phare-CBC implementation, is under way and should be completed in due time. The Phare-CBC Programme for the Slovak-Austrian border will hopefully be launched in 2000.

### 3.3 Management of programme implementation

#### **3.3.1 *Small Project Funds***

Small Project Fund (SPF) creates an integral part of the Phare CBC programmes. The specific goal of SPF is to initiate these small projects which are leading to the improvement of co-operation among inhabitants living on both side of the state border. The Co-ordination Offices are responsible for the tendering and promoting of the SPFs. Important are pre- and post-monitoring as well as implementation of selected projects. This means the necessity of direct co-operation between agents on both sides of the border. Nevertheless, a joint secretariat should be established (on cross-border level) which would enable the promotion of more joint projects.

JCC can approve small projects, after the Memorandum on Understanding has been signed between the countries respectively. The Euroregion Weinviertel-South Moravia-Záhorie created a Small Project Fund by which small project (e.g. for innovative cross-border activities), which could be promoted by organising common meetings and exchange of experiences/information and knowledge, can be supported.

#### **3.3.2 *Other aspects of programme management***

The administration of Phare CBC includes the whole range of management tasks, incl. day-to-day contacts with the applicants, providing them with information and advice and then the contacts with the selected beneficiaries, providing them with advice and support in implementation and financial reporting of the projects.

CE has been also involved in the CREDO Programme in 1998. Compared to the SPFs the CREDO Programme was limited to providing technical support for the programme's implementation, preparing the work of the Regional Border Committee (RBC); launching call proposals, gathering the proposals, performing formal conformity check and submitting projects to programme's PMU for further evaluation. The RBCs were presenting to the European Commission via PMU their recommendations. In CREDO the euroregions were neither involved in final selection process nor participated in supervising implementation of approved projects.

### 3.4 Project development and implementation

Several of local authorities together with business organisations and NGOs have received funding from Phare programmes and some are engaged in cross-border projects. Most have concrete ideas for future projects but are finding it difficult to develop the project proposals and secure funding from the appropriate funding authority or programme. Co-ordination of the programmes financed from various sources, incl. the EU sources, is missing.

The Phare CBC SPF model, being genuinely decentralised has proved to be much more efficient than the highly centralised CREDO system, which was built on a principle of equally centralised approach to all eligible borders, regardless of the fact, whether they had had relevant experiences/structures (like euroregions) or not.

## **4. Specific/Sectoral Actions**

### **4.1 Economic Development**

More business forums, fairs, exhibitions and trade missions ought to be organised. Actions on support by revitalisation within the common project on agriculture and industry. Studies on potential of economic CBC and of preservation of traditional crafts have to be carried out more frequently. Support of SME development. Development of entrepreneur's activities

based on CBC. Industrial Park Jarovce-Kittsee, Science and Technology Park (also with Austrian participation) in Bratislava, General Development Study for Vienna-Bratislava Agglomeration. With the TRICOM-Project (Trilateral Tele-Communication) a modern information system will be set up, by which access to CBC information would be facilitated and co-operation obstacles would be dismantled. A special information network will be set-up for the agricultural sector (rural settlement).

#### 4.2 Tourism

Actions for different forms of tourism development (e.g. agro- and eco-tourism within the framework of the renewed family farms with bio-food production). Maps, promotional activities, publications, web-pages. It would be useful to co-ordinate information system for tourists (e.g. the wine routes, castle network, spa visits), concepts of for cross-border tourist trails, cycling and hiking routes (pilot or sample projects cyclotourist routes interconnecting SR/A/H/CZ), concepts for regional folklore, crafts and traditions, development of regional museums – all to attract more tourists. Also the neighbouring water-works Gabèlkovo built on the Danube with its vast recreation potential can attract the development of tourist's activities.

#### 4.3 Training, Education and Labour Markets

Workshops and different forms of educational/training activities for increasing of qualification of different target groups with multipurpose orientation to enhance effectiveness in cross-border co-operation. School exchange and also a basic co-operation of universities have been established.

In the INTERREG IIC – Operational Programme CADSES framework the University of Agricultural Sciences in Vienna is processing the project “BRIDGE Lifeline Danube” which idea is to intensify partnership for cities along the Danube and to initiate a process of co-operation among the universities and city planning departments under the motto “Planning, Learning and Working for Real”. One of the first activities started in 9/1999 was a concrete measure to build a bike bridge between Slovakia and Austria across the Morava River near Devín (co-operation with Slovak Technical University in Bratislava).

#### 4.4 Environment

Cross-border co-operation in the area of environmental protection, common protection of the landscape protection areas, educational programmes for environment and its individual elements and factors. Exchange of experiences in environmental education programmes Co-operation by fulfilment of international conventions and agreements in the environmental sphere. It has become obvious among environmentalists that the traditional approach toward protection of biodiversity, which is based on isolated conservation of selected territories and species, lacks efficiency. Environment does not know borders – e.g. the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy is in the Central European space an extraordinary topical matter. For rural settlements would be useful if more communes would be engaged to the “Village Renewal Programmes” on both side of the border line. In 1999 the Network Project on Renewable Energy (biomass-, solar-, wind-, and geothermal energy) was started within the Euregio Weinviertel-South Moravia- Záhorie. INTERREG II Trilateral Project EREG (Regional Development in Trilateral Border Regions) – for 1999-2000 is oriented on environment protection, development of tourism, agriculture and preservation of cultural monuments.

#### 4.5 Socio-Cultural Aspects

It is necessary to continue in organising of a lot of cultural events, incl. presentations of the traditional habits, folklore activities and euroregional crafts and trades. Continuation of organising of specialised cultural events oriented to CBC (e.g. Neighbours – Friends, Theatre Without Borders, folk culture events, sport competitions, bridges of European youth friendship, Euroregional Christmas carols' concerts, special concerts of local symphonic orchestras (e.g. from Hohenau, Austria in its twin commune Moravský Svätý Ján, Slovakia) and theatre festivals.

#### 4.6 Transport

Improvement of transport infrastructure, incl. the navigation (use of the Danube (and the low parts of its tributaries) as the important European water route Rhine-Main-Danube. Improvement of transport infrastructure and more co-ordination in its development (actual example is the new ferry boat across the Morava River between Záhorská Ves, Slovakia-Angern a.d. March, Austria: the preparation of the necessary infrastructure at Austrian Angern a.d. March did not follow the date of infrastructure development at Záhorská Ves) for support of cross-border co-operation.

