

The Population and Transportation Infrastructure of Slovakia during the Second Republic in the years 1938–1939*

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Abstract

The main article's goal is to analyze the impacts of territorial changes dated in 1938 (the Munich Agreement, the Vienna Award, and the Polish territorial claim) on the population and transportation infrastructure of Slovakia. In the area of transportation infrastructure, we focused on four key areas: railways, roads, river and air transportation. According to our own research, we can state that the territorial changes affected the Second Republic viability. As a result thereof, the state lost total 30% of its territory, where approximately one-third of the population lived. In relation to transportation infrastructure, many main routes and roads crossed the new state borders. In this way, the surrounding countries were able to restrict transfer through their territories and thus paralyze inland transportation.

Keywords: population, transportation infrastructure, the Munich Agreement, the Vienna Award, interwar Czechoslovakia

The main goal of the presented study was to analyze the impacts of territorial changes dated in 1938 (the Munich Agreement, the Vienna Award, and the Polish territorial claim) on the population and transportation infrastructure of the then Slovakia. These territorial changes caused interior political crisis that resulted in the declaration of the Slovak autonomy and, last but not least, they represented a radical intervention in the economic and national structure, and in the territorial integrity of the Republic. In the area of transportation infrastructure we almost exclusively focused on the research of consequences of the state border changes on four key areas: railways, roads, river and air transportation. According to our opinion, these areas were the most important for the state functioning during the period in question. Calculated values of reduction of territory, population decrease, railway routes, road network, etc. in Slovakia are usually compared in the study to the data of the stated losses in the Czech territories, or in the whole Republic, respectively.

In relation to the time period, in the study we deal with a rather short time period from September 29, 1938 till March 14, 1939, since it closely correlated to the territorial changes

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that had occurred before cessation of so called Second Republic (that existed from November 22, 1938 till March 15, 1939). Some sources mention earlier period, or other sources were used with outreach to the period of the Slovak State.

Territorial changes and decrease of population

Before the state borders change, overall territorial area of Czechoslovakia referred to 140,493 km², thereof the Czech territory covered 52,062 km², the territory of Moravia and Silesia covered total 26,808 km², Slovak territory covered 49,006 km², and the territory of Ruthenia covered 12,617 km². As of December 01, 1930, total headcount of the population of all nationalities in the state reached 14,729,536. As of the above date, population in the territory of Czechia reached 7,109,376, the population of Moravia and Silesia reached 3,565,010, the population in the territory of Slovakia reached 3,329,793, and in the territory of Ruthenia it was total 725,357 citizens.¹

As a result of cession of the territory to Germany, the Republic lost the territory of total 28,639 km² where total 3,635,970 citizens lived.² Hungary was ceded total territorial area of 11,840.24 km² with 1,027,117 citizens after the Vienna Award held on November 02, 1938 and, following the negotiations with Poland, total territorial area of 816,27 km² with 228,763 citizens was ceded. Thus, the Czechoslovak Republic lost total territorial area of 41,295.51 km², where total 4,891,850 citizens lived at the time according to a census dated December 01, 1930.³ Having compared the status in 1930 to post-cession status, we can say that Czechoslovakia lost 29.39% of its territory in total, with 33.21% citizens registered therein. We should stress that total percentage of the population loss was lower since a part of these persons from separated territory returned back to the Republic.

Determination of new state borders based on ethnic approach was problematic. Negotiators representing Czechoslovakia required application of the population data from 1930. Finally, the international committee enforced the statistical data from 1910 that expressed definitely less exact data than the statistical data from 1930. In the example using the Czech territories, the magazine *Statistický zpravodaj* [Statistical Journal] dated 1939 stated that the lost territories increased by the area of 3,725 km² with approx. 498,000 citizens as a result of applied outdated data from 1910. Upon the return of mainly Czech state employees with families from the ceded territory, the figure decreased approximately to 350,000 persons.⁴ Referring to the Hungarian and Polish cession, a similar situation occurred also in the re-

¹ *Sčítání lidu v Republice československé ze dne 1. prosince 1930. Díl I. Růst, koncentrace a hustota obyvatelstva, pohlaví, věkové rozvrstvení, rodinný stav, státní příslušnost, národnost, náboženské vyznání* [Census in the Czechoslovak Republic dated December 01, 1930. Part I. Growth, Concentration and Density of Population, Gender, Age Structure, Marital Status, Citizenship, Nationality, Religion], Praha, The Státní úřad statistický [State Statistical Office], 1934. 27–28. Caused by almost 8-years passed between the last complex census and territorial interventions that occurred in 1938, the resulting census data are incorrect.

² "Obyvatelstvo. Naše nové hranice" [Population. Our New Borders], *Statistický zpravodaj*, 1939, vol. I., No. 11–12, 348.

³ *Ibid.*; "Obyvatelstvo. Naše nové hranice II" [Population. Our New Borders II], *Statistický zpravodaj*, 1939, vol. II., No. 1–2, 1–4.

⁴ "Obyvatelstvo. Naše nové hranice," 348.

43 km² with 15,500 citizens as of December 01, 1930.⁸ Thus, Slovakia lost the territory of total area of 10,575.44 km² with total 878,762 persons living there. Within this cession, Hungary received the largest area of 10,317 km² and 853,884 citizens, while Poland got „only“ 215.44 km² with 9,378 citizens.⁹ In this way, Slovakia remained with the curtailed territory of total area of 38,430.56 km² at the end of 2018, and total 2,451,031 citizens (referring to the data from 1930). Expressed in percentage, it referred to 21.6% loss of total territory of Slovakia and 26.4% loss of the Slovak population.

Transportation Infrastructure

Railway Network

Transportation infrastructure represented another area that was affected by the changes at the state border. Within it, railway, road, river and air transportation was seriously impaired. Total length of the railway network in Slovakia and Ruthenia reached 3,969 km during the period before the Vienna Arbitration. Following the territorial changes, 1 110 km of total railway route length was lost, corresponding to 28% loss compared to the original status.¹⁰ Slovakia itself lost approx. 930 km of railway tracks.¹¹ Summary of the whole-country losses represented 4,758 km, which corresponds to 35.1% of total railway network length.¹²

Almost all major railroad tracks were broken and some of them were completely ceded. Catastrophic situation was reported within two most important railway tracks in Czechoslovakia. The main railway line Praha [Prague] – Žilina – Jasini [Yasinia] passed eight times through the ceded territories and the railroad line between the Czechoslovak capital city and Slovak capital city passed nine times through other country territory. In this way, the surrounding countries were holding in the Republic, being able to restrict railway transportation through their territories.¹³

Mutual connectivity between particular regions of Slovakia was interrupted as a result of lost railway tracks, for example Lučenec – Plešivec – Rožňava, Čeklis – Nové Zámky – Levice or Kostol'any nad Hornádom – Slanec, which, among other problems, caused also serious economic damages. Many industrial factories encountered problems in the form of significantly impaired railway network with Ruthenia.¹⁴ Complicated access to the east-

⁸ ZEMKO, Milan et al. (2012), *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918–1945* [Slovakia in 20th Century. In the interwar Czechoslovakia 1918–1945], Bratislava, VEDA, 482.

⁹ „Obyvateľstvo. Naše nové hranice II,“ 2–3.

¹⁰ *Slovenský priemysel roku 1939* [Slovak Industry in 1939], Turčiansky sv. Martin, Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1940, 99.

¹¹ FALTUS, Jozef – PRŮCHA, Václav (1969), *Prehľad hospodárskeho vývoja na Slovensku 1918–1945* [Overview of Economic Development in Slovakia 1918–1945], Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry [Political literature publishing agency], 314.

¹² OLŠOVŠKÝ, Rudolf et al. (1963), *Prehľad hospodárskeho vývoje Československa v letech 1918–1945* [Overview of Economic Development in Czechoslovakia 1918–1945], Praha, Státní nakladatelství politické literatury [The state political literature publishing agency], 491.

¹³ FALTUS – PRŮCHA, *Prehľad hospodárskeho vývoja*, 314; OLŠOVŠKÝ, *Prehľad hospodárskeho vývoje*, 491.

¹⁴ *Slovenský priemysel roku 1939*, 100.

ernmost part of the Republic caused problems to chemical company Firma Lučobný priemysel Dr. Blasberg at Likier, which was getting its basic raw material (wood) mainly from the Ruthenia forests. Following the railway interruption, the company lost its supplying area and had to address the competent authorities with request for support.¹⁵ It was not the only case; majority of factories were affected in this way.

Not only the railway tracks were affected by losses, since the state had to leave 154 engine-driven and 887 steam locomotives to Germany, together with 29 thousand railway wagons. Hungary acquired total 282 locomotives, 51 motor-driven machines and 5 thousand railway wagons.¹⁶

We should also mention the changes at railway transportation of goods and materials of various types. While January 1937 with 64 thousand loaded railway wagons was the weakest month on the Slovak and Ruthenia railway tracks from the beginning of 1937 till the end of September 1938, gradual decrease started after the cession of the territories and only 32 thousand railway wagons loaded with goods or raw materials were dispatched in December 1938. It corresponded to year-to-year minimum value drop by 50%.¹⁷

The Czechoslovak State Railways were making effort to immediately replace the impaired railway transportation with strengthened freight transportation and passenger bus transportation. So-called Toll Agreements¹⁸ represented an important tool of restoration of railway transportation of connection with factories and inhabitants in isolated regions. Such agreements were very hard to conclude and especially agreements with Hungary were of critical importance for Slovakia. For example, negotiations on the paid transportation (toll) via important railway hub Košice were successfully accomplished at the beginning of 1939 after some delays. Transportation through Košice started in February of the same year.¹⁹

Road transportation

Significant road transportation routes connecting Bratislava with Brno, Žilina with Ostrava and Trnava with Nitra were also impaired. Along with the roads, significant transportation

¹⁵ Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak national archive in Bratislava], fund Ministerstvo hospodárstva [Ministry of Economy], carton 230, without inventory No., doc No. 91, Dr. Blasberg a spol., Lučobný priemysel, kom. spol., Likier – predaj paliva [Blasberg et al., Radial Industry, limited partnership, Likier – sale of fuels], Oct 29, 1938 – Feb 12, 1939.

¹⁶ OLŠOVSKÝ, *Přehled hospodářského vývoje*, 491.

¹⁷ *Slovenský priemysel roku 1939*, 98. Nominal unit “railway wagon” is an equivalent of 10,000 kilograms.

¹⁸ SABOL, Miroslav (2004), “Dopad Viedenskej arbitráže na poľnohospodárstvo, priemysel a infraštruktúru na južnom Slovensku” [Impact of Vienna Arbitration on Agriculture, Industry and Infrastructure in Southern Slovakia], in MITÁČ, Ján (ed.), *Juh Slovenska po Viedenskej arbitráži 1938–1945* [South of Slovakia after Vienna Arbitration 1938 – 1945], Bratislava, Ústav pamäti národa [The Nation’s Memory Institute], 228. Toll transportation is “transportation between two points on the territory of one country where certain road section (railway track) is situated in the territory of another country.” See ŠALING, Samo et al. (2005), *Slovník cudzích slov* [Dictionary of adopted foreign words], Prešov, SAMO, 493.

¹⁹ SABOL, “Dopad Viedenskej arbitráže,” 228–229.

hubs appeared behind the state border line, for example Košice and Uzhhorod, which were of vital importance for the eastern region.²⁰

Concurrently, Czechoslovakia lost 30.9 % of all motor vehicles. As of August 31, 1938, total 223,673 motor vehicles were registered in the Republic and the loss referred to 69,222 vehicles after all annexation cases in 1938. Of total 23,768 motor vehicles, Slovakia lost 6,763 vehicles, corresponding to decrease by 28.4%.²¹

Efforts for implementation of road construction plans from before 1938 was a response of the representatives of the autonomous government and later also of the Slovak State government, which they managed to do only partly because of lack of finances. For example, total 280 km of new roads were constructed between years 1939 and 1943 at building cost of SK 0.805 bn. Despite of all problems, the territorial changes positively influenced the bus transportation development. In 1942, total 8.3 million of passengers were transported in Slovakia in this way, corresponding to the increase by almost 6 million of passengers compared to 1938.²²

River transportation

Also the river transportation experienced the new situation, especially at transloading of goods on the river Danube. Important transshipment docks at Komárno were ceded and the largest transshipment point in Bratislava reported temporary decrease of goods transloading in 1938 by total 109,000 tons in aggregate, i.e. by 12.3% less than in 1937 when total transloaded quantity reached 886,000 tons. Such decrease in the transloading goods quantity was caused by failed trade activities in the river port during the mobilization, and later also because of citizens' evacuation from the ceded territories. As soon as in 1939, record increase in the transloading goods quantity was reported in Bratislava compared to 1938 by approx. 30.2% to 1,012,000 tons, which resulted from relocation of large extent of capacities from Komárno, but mainly from increased intensity of the goods flow on the river Danube from the Balkan region to the Nazi Germany.²³

The river port in Bratislava should play an important role in the import of various commodities in the economic plans of the Nazi "empire." Especially the ships loaded with crop from Hungary and the Balkan region had passed through the port before the end of 1938, but afterwards the share of transported mineral oils by tankers from Romania has increased from total 84,000 tons in the stated year to 140,000 tons in 1939. Preferring the raw materials transport on the river Danube was a logical solution, taking in account insufficiently developed railway and road network in the Balkan region.²⁴

²⁰ FALTUS – PRŮCHA, *Prehľad hospodárskeho vývoja*, 314; OLŠOVŠKÝ, *Přehled hospodářského vývoje*, 491.

²¹ Decrease is described in detail according to vehicle types in the table named: "Stav motorových vozidiel k 31. VIII. 1938" [Status of Motor Vehicles as of Aug 31, 1938], *Statistický zpravodaj*, 1939, vol. II., No. 3, 59.

²² SABOL, Miroslav (2015), *Dejiny dopravy na Slovensku 1938–1948 (1950)* [History of Transportation in Slovakia 1938–1948 (1950)], Bratislava, VEDA, 229.

²³ *Slovenský priemysel roku 1939*, 98.

²⁴ SABOL, *Dejiny dopravy na Slovensku*, 185 and 210.

Air transportation

Aviation represented the “youngest” segment in the transportation system that was significantly affected by the events dated 1938. Following the changes at the state borders, international airports in Košice and Uzhhorod were ceded, as well as Czech airports in Karlovy Vary, Liberec and Mariánské Lázně. Building of airport stations at Slatinské Doly and Spišská Nová Ves represented an immediate response thereto.²⁵

March 15, 1939 represented another milestone when passenger air transportation was completely suspended and German representatives ordered closure of airspace above the territory of the Protectorate of Czechia and Moravia, and above Slovakia on April 26, 1939. As soon as the order was lifted, passenger transportation was allowed to perform at the airports of the former Republic only by aircrafts of the airlines Deutsche Lufthansa. Huge drop is apparent from total data in the passenger transportation. While total 9,091 passengers were dispatched at the Slovak airports in 1937 with aggregate mileage corresponding to 564,430 km, two years later it was only 204 passengers with mileage of 19,060 km. Following the Republic cessation, the new maximum was reached in 1943, referring to 911 passengers and total mileage of 42,797 km. Passenger air transportation was completely suspended again in 1944.²⁶

Conclusion

Finally, we should point out that the change at the state borders dated in 1938 significantly affected the economy of Slovakia and the whole Republic. As a result thereof, the state lost total 30% of its territory where approximately one-third of the population lived.

On the other hand, the total population decrease was probably lower since a part of the persons from the separated territory returned back to Slovakia. Especially the arbitration decision made in Vienna on November 02, 1938 was of the most significant importance for Slovakia. Resulting from cession of the territory to Hungary, the state lost mainly the fertile agricultural areas in the south and southeast of Slovakia, i.e. the territory where almost 880,000 citizens lived. In relation to transportation infrastructure, many main routes and roads crossed the new state borders. In this way the surrounding countries were able to restrict transfer through their territories and thus hold the Republic in.

²⁵ Ibid. 222–223. “*Slatinské Doly*” historical name of current settlement Solotvyno situated at the Ukrainian–Romanian state border. Total 10 airports of all kinds were ceded to the abroad. See MIČKO, Peter (2008), “Hospodárske problémy a podnikové špecifiká vybraných regiónov stredného Slovenska v rokoch 1918–1938 [Economic Problems and Corporate Specifics of Selected Central Slovakia Regions during 1918–1938], in MIČKO, Peter et al. (ed.), *Historické špecifiká stredného Slovenska v rokoch 1918–1939* [Historical Specifics of Central Slovakia During Years 1918–1939], Banská Bystrica, Ústav vedy a výskumu UMB v Banskej Bystrici [Institute of Science and Research UMB in Banská Bystrica], 161.

²⁶ SABOL, *Dejiny dopravy na Slovensku*, 224 and 230.