



International Boundary Study

No. 77 – June 15, 1967

Czechoslovakia – U.S.S.R. Boundary

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CZECHOSLOVAKIA – U.S.S.R. BOUNDARY

I. BOUNDARY BRIEF

The Czechoslovakia–U.S.S.R. boundary extends for approximately 60 miles from Poland in the north to Hungary in the south. The border, created by a Czechoslovak–Soviet post-World War II agreement, is similar to, but not identical with, the pre-war boundary between Slovakia and Ruthenia. The boundary results from the cession of the trans-Carpathian Ruthenia to the U.S.S.R. No dispute is known to exist over the precise alignment of the boundary.

II. GEOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

A. Physical

The Carpathian Mountains extend eastward in a thousand mile arc from the Austrian Alps to the Iron Gates of the Danube in Rumania. Although similar to the Alps in age and in origin, the Carpathian Mountains are less complex in structure and considerably lower in elevation. The Carpathians lack the high, isolated peaks, the extensive and permanent snow fields as well as the extensive glaciers of their sister range. The central sector of the arc shows a marked decrease in width, from an average of almost 200 miles to 60 miles, and a reduction in absolute elevations. In this area, the Hungarian lowland extends further north as a result of faulting and subsidence on the southern margins of the mountains. This region, Ruthenia, forms a constricted zone of relatively easy access through the Carpathian chain. Farther north and to the south, fertile lowlands form the hearts of rich agricultural communities in the Ukraine and Hungary.

The Carpathian Mountains of Ruthenia are composed of a series of folded and heavily forested ranges, aligned roughly west–northwest by east–southeast, which have been cut into blocks by the south-flowing tributaries of the Danube. Ruthenia's prime agricultural land is in the southern lowlands and valleys of the Tisza River system. In the mountains, meadows occupy most of the slopes to the 2,000-foot line; forest to the 4,500-foot line; and alpine pastures above.

Climatically, the border region is transitional between the moderate, maritime climate of Western Europe and the extremes of the continental interior. Because of the increased elevations within the Carpathians, average temperatures are lower and precipitation higher than in the adjacent lowlands of Hungary and the Ukraine. Winters are cold and summers are relatively cool. As a consequence of the relief and the climate, Ruthenia has for centuries been an isolated area of little economic importance.

B. Historical

The Hungarian state had its origins about 1000 A.D., when the nomadic Magyars occupied the Pannonian Basin of the Middle Danube. The Magyars soon extended their sway over the mountainous rims of the Carpathians in Ruthenia, Slovakia, and Transylvania. In spite of repeated invasions by the Mongols and later by the Turks, a Hungarian state continued to exist into modern times. The repeated onslaughts from the east, however, greatly weakened the kingdom, and it soon fell under the influence and eventually the control of the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty. Hungary remained until 1918 a part of its dominions.

In the middle of the 19th century, the multi-national Hapsburg Empire was shaken by demands for autonomy by the various minority elements, including the Hungarians. They, in fact, led in placing their demands before the crown. Though in 1867 Hungary gained political equality within the newly-created dual monarchy, the aspirations of the other minorities, remained unsatisfied. The Hungarians, proud of their regained status, adopted a program of enforced Magyarization of the other minority peoples. Internal dissension increased, and when the monarchy collapsed in 1918, these peoples rejected the concept of a federal state. They fought for an obtained complete independence. In the peace treaty negotiations the Hungarians held that a state occupies a contiguous area within established boundaries and should not be partitioned, but the minorities claimed they had been and would continue to be discriminated against as long as they remained within Hungarian territory. Recent concessions were insufficient.

The Wilson-influenced peace conferences desired to reduce the problems of European national minorities by creating relatively homogeneous national states. Thus the conferences on Hungary and Austria confirmed the formation of a Czech–Slovak state. After much discussion, it was agreed that the Ruthenians would be joined to the new state. The purpose, while in part intended to reduce minorities in Hungary, primarily was strategic. To survive, the great powers felt that the new state had to have a common frontier with friendly Rumania and hence "needed" Ruthenia. However, the Ruthenians were promised a large measure of local autonomy. Being geographically associated with the lowlands to the north and to the south and isolated from the mainstream of Czech and Slovak development, Ruthenia continued to languish as a backward area of Europe.

In March 1939, Hungary annexed Ruthenia while Slovakia proclaimed its independence. Magyar claims, however, were abandoned when Russian forces occupied the province in the last months of the war. Czechoslovakia and the U.S.S.R. acquired a common boundary only after World War II when Ruthenia and parts of Poland were ceded to the Soviet Union. The current boundary was established by a treaty signed in June 1945, whereby the province of Ruthenia was transferred from Czechoslovakia to the U.S.S.R.; it now constitutes an oblast (Zakarpatskaya) of the Ukrainian S.S.R.

Soviet interest is attributable both to ethnic considerations and to political strategic grounds. The majority of the inhabitants of Ruthenia, an area of considerable ethnic diversity, have been closely related to the Ukrainians in religion, culture, and speech. From

the strategic point of view, Soviet control of Ruthenia gives the U.S.S.R. a position astride the Carpathian Mountains as well as direct land access to both Czechoslovakia and Hungary.

The 1945 treaty provided for the creation of a mixed commission to demarcate the boundary between the two countries and gave the inhabitants of the transferred area the choice of Czechoslovak or Soviet citizenship. The commission completed its work in early 1946. For most of the frontier, the demarcated boundary follows the former provincial boundary between Ruthenia and Slovakia. Across the plains sector in the south, however, the boundary departs from the former internal boundary to include in the U.S.S.R. a small area formerly part of Slovakia controlling the vital rail junction at Chop.

In 1957, Czechoslovakia and the U.S.S.R. concluded an agreement concerning the administration of frontier traffic and methods for settling border incidents. Through conferences in recent years, the two countries have also cooperated in the joint regulation of common rivers in the frontier area.

III. ANALYSIS OF BOUNDARY ALIGNMENT

Beginning in the north at the Polish tripoint at (Mount) Kremenec on the main water divide of the Carpathians, the Czechoslovak–U.S.S.R. boundary runs southwestward across the Stuzica (river) and then southward across the Stuznitsa to join the main ridge line (1000+ meters) of the Slinka (range). Turning again southward, the boundary crosses the Ulicka (stream) southeast of Ulic. The boundary then continues generally southward joining the major peaks of Kosmatec (583 m.), Golitsa (986), and Popricny (1,000 m.) and then extending along the ridges, coinciding in the main with the former province boundary, to a point about 3.75 miles north of Uzhgorod. At this point, the boundary enters the plain. Continuing west of the city, the boundary coincides for the most part with provincial boundary until the Uh (river) is reached east of Lekart. This town and its surrounding territory (Ruthenian) produced considerable discussion until a decision of April 2, 1946, which allotted the area to Czechoslovakia. South of the Lekart salient, the boundary follows a series of straight lines, generally southward, to the Hungarian tripoint on an abandoned channel of the Danube southwest of Chop.

IV. TREATIES AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL ACTS

After the Hungarian Armistice of January 20, 1945, and the restoration of the Czechoslovak state in Kosice on May 5, 1945, the Soviets negotiated for the transfer of Ruthenia to the U.S.S.R. The cession of this 5,500 square mile province created the present Czechoslovak–U.S.S.R. boundary.

- A. **Moscow Agreement** signed on June 29, 1945, by Czechoslovakia and the U.S.S.R. (Great Britain, Foreign Office, British and Foreign State Papers, vol. 145, pp. 1096 ff.)

The general boundary agreement transferred Ruthenia from Czechoslovak to Soviet sovereignty. However, the former provincial boundary of Ruthenia does not form the entire international boundary. North of Lekart, for example, six minor deviations from the provincial boundary were sanctioned:

- a) Ulicka river crossing: The new boundary is situated about 1.5 kilometers west of the provincial boundary. The river is crossed in a straight line ignoring the former ridge–line provincial boundary.
- b) Uh river crossing: Again a straight line boundary was drawn to the west of the sinuous province border.
- c) Zavosina: The international boundary is approximately 500 meters to the east of the provincial boundary for a distance of approximately 1.9 kilometers.
- d) Petrovce: A small triangular area was ceded to the Soviet Union to remove a boundary salient.
- e) Uzhgorod: Northwest of the city, the new boundary was created about 600 meters to the west of the provincial limit for a distance of about 3.6 kilometers. This change was presumably to allow for the development of Uzhgorod.
- f) Uh River salient: The former provincial line crossed the Uh river to create a salient about 1 kilometer wide and two kilometers deep. The river now forms the international boundary, and the two square kilometers passed to the U.S.S.R.

From the Uh River south, the boundary departs completely from the provincial line to include approximately 150 square kilometers of former Slovakia in the cession. The alignment of the frontier in this sector is known only from a set of 1:200,000 Czechoslovak maps.

The treaty boundary was approved by the Czechoslovak–Soviet Boundary Commission on November 25, 1945, with the exception of the Lekart area. On April 2, 1946, agreement was reached that Lekart would continue under Czechoslovak administration.

V. SUMMARY

The transfer of Ruthenia to the U.S.S.R. gave the Soviets an area of strategic value. They now control the three main rail lines between Hungary and the Ukraine: a) Chop–Uzhgorod–L'vov; b) Chop–Mukachevo–L'vov; and c) Chop–Beregovo–Khust–Sighet–Kolomyia.

The Czechoslovakia–U.S.S.R. boundary is an accepted international boundary and should be so shown on U.S. official maps. The alignment of the frontier is known from a map furnished to the Embassy by the Czechoslovak Government in 1945. This map is a composite of two 1:200,000 topographic sheets with the new boundary added in manuscript. This line was transferred to a State Department map (No. 10300 of December 1946). Both are relatively accurate and may be utilized for medium and small scale compilation. No large scale maps with official depictions of the boundary are generally available.

This International Boundary Study is one of a series of specific boundary papers prepared by the Geographer, Office of Strategic and Functional Research, Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, in accordance with provisions of Bureau of the Budget Circular No. A-16.

Government agencies may obtain additional information and copies of the study by calling the Geographer, Room 8744, Department of State, Washington, D.C. (Telephone: Code 182, Extension 4508).