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## **SIBSU – SAFE AND INCLUSIVE BORDER BETWEEN SLOVAKIA AND UKRAINE**

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In order to continue positive relations between Slovakia and Ukraine, the creation of contact points for joint training and cooperation was essential, involving competent authorities, local communities and experts from both sides of the border. The issue was not only be relevant to the project itself, but the aim was to create new partnerships and continue cooperation efforts.

Good border cooperation and governance is essential in the event of Ukraine's possible future accession to the EU. Therefore, this project would have been and will be supporting Ukraine's continuous efforts for its future entry into the EU.

The overall goal of the SIBSU project is primarily to ensure the exchange of best practices between the border police and the customs administration of the Slovak Republic and Ukraine and also to identify opportunities to improve integrated border management. Further increase public awareness and understanding of the work of border forces in border regions and municipalities in Slovakia and Ukraine. Thirdly, to transfer knowledge on the impact of borders on the socio-economic development of border regions, as well as on opportunities for cross-border cooperation between local and regional policymakers and decisions on both sides of the border. We broke the aims into 8 different activities.

1) Thematic seminars and manuals for representatives of the border and customs administrations on both sides of the border. The

SIBSU project will include 12 one-day thematic seminars for representatives of the Slovak and Ukrainian border police and representatives of the customs administration. Seminars are planned for the duration of the whole project in four blocks. We delivered so far 6 of the thematic seminars.

2) Scholarship stays for Slovak (in Ukraine) and Ukrainian (in Slovakia) representatives and educational stays (mixed groups) in Norway. A total of eight study stays for Ukrainian representatives in Slovakia and for Slovak representatives in Ukraine. The aim of the study visits is to gain the first-hand experience that can be used later, to build cross-border contact points and to share a common understanding of current challenges. Stays can also provide skills development for participating institutions during activities in their field of expertise.

3) "Short-talks" – crisis communication courses for representatives of the border and customs administration on both sides of the border. Intensive "Short talk" courses will be an activity led by experts in PR and crisis communication. Due to the specific needs on both sides of the border, courses will be conducted separately, with the aim of achieving a common goal of improving communication and crisis management skills for all participants.

4) Quick language courses, Ukrainian language course for Slovaks and vice versa. The aim of the language courses will be to improve

the language skills (mainly communication) of the course participants in their mutual communications and also in communication with persons crossing the border, as the vast majority of passengers across the Slovak-Ukrainian border are citizens of these countries. We delivered one of four courses.

5) Project conferences, websites / social accounts, public lectures, interviews for regional and local media, study trips to the borders for journalists. This activity was and still is active, however, the nature of the interviews have been changed.

6) Joint seminars on border and customs administration on both sides of the border with local and regional representatives in border areas. This activity intended to educate citizens in close proximity of borders about the importance of the integrated border.

7) Transfer of knowledge to improve cross-border cooperation, provision of expert materials to assist decision-making at the local, regional and national level, a conference to share the results of findings. The activity is in its final stage, there was extensive research carried out throughout the duration of the project.

8) Creating human resources by training experts in Slovakia and Ukraine in the field of cross-border cooperation, providing publications and training.

Since February 2022, most of the activities on SIBSU project have been stopped and the resources have been transferred to the humani-

tarian aid, cooperating with our Ukrainian partners and considering their immediate needs, we successfully delivered aid in form of canned foods, tents, clothing, shoes, mattress, medical aid and more. We keep moving the financial resources from some of the activities to purchase more aid and deliver it to our partners in Ukraine. We will support our Ukrainian partners for as long as they will need our help.

"As often the case, there are disagreements, conflicts and fears among neighbours, especially regarding smuggling of goods and persons, relations with Russia and corruption. At the same time, Slovakia and Ukraine enjoy bilateral relations without scandals and mistrust. These relationships are very close to the state of strategic partnership. Despite the 97 km long common border, Slovakia and Ukraine are good neighbours and trusted friends (International Center for Political Studies, Kiev)." These were the words before the conflict on February 24<sup>th</sup> commenced.

When creating the SIBSU project, none of us could have predicted what would happen in February of 2022. Late night on February 23, we confirmed with all partners the next batch of what would have been the continuation of Activity 1 and 3, little did we know that a few hours later we will be cancelling the whole event. But for the purpose of this piece, we will be using both – the pre-war and the war references to activities that SIBSU was about to deliver and is delivering.

*Working together for a green, competitive and inclusive Europe*

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