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## CRIMINAL GEOGRAPHICAL JOURNAL

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**TERRITORIAL REARRANGEMENT IN DRUG TRAFFICKING AFTER  
THE BORDER CLOSING**

**Keywords:** drug smuggling, Hungarian southern border, illegal migration

**Purpose**

On the Southern borderline of Hungary illegal immigration has been growing from 2011 and it reached its peak in 2015. However, after the actions of the Hungarian government from 2016 there is a decline in the number of illegal border crossings. At the same time we have experienced significant transformations in the numbers of drug discoveries at the official crossings on the Serbian-Hungarian border.

**Design/Methods/Approach**

To examine the connections I use the detection data of the National Tax and Customs Administration (NTCA) and the data of border police measures. Let us assume that the changes in the trends of drug smuggling are in connection with the official measures to address illegal migration. Secondly, let us assume that not even the increased official presence and the full green border closure are not able to stumble upon international drug trafficking.

**Findings**

The connection between the change in the field of drug discovery and the mass migration and strict official action against it – the technical barrier – is very complex. It seem proved that law enforcement and criminal measures aimed at illegal migration and its resolution have indeed had an impact directly on the trends in drug smuggling. However, these seem to have influenced only the selection of smuggling methods, guidelines and tools.

**Originality/Value**

These official data and trends are published for the first time. Use of these data by foreign researches – with particular attention to bordering countries – could help investigate the changes in the trends of drug smuggling in Europe.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays we have to accept the usage of forbidden psychoactive substances (illegal drugs) as a fact. Furthermore it is also a fact that in the worldwide spread of drug, smugglers and merchants have a dominant role. Smugglers and merchants are still holding a dominant role in the evolution of drug culture. Although, Edward Lorenz's "Butterfly Effect" theory (Lorenz, 1963) made it clear that a tiny change in the world's processes can lead to significant consequences. Our experience proves that this finding is also true in the context of drug trafficking and drug smuggling.

An outstanding domestic example of this is the interplay of the Southern Slav civil war that has exploded in the 1990s and the smuggling of heroin. Since 1986 almost all of the illicit European heroin trade has shifted on the so-called Balkan route. However, after the war situation in Yugoslavia emerged, the central branch of the Balkan route (Istanbul - Sofia - Belgrade - Zagreb - Ljubljana) soon moved to the north, making Hungary the most significant transit country in Europe (Erdős, 2017).

And just as history repeats itself, nowadays again we find that changes in international events that are fundamentally independent of drugs have a significant impact on the smuggling of illegal drugs.

In the southern border of Hungary, from the year 2015, the news were about the challenges of mass migration and in the last one/one and a half years news reports are about the discoveries of small amount of illegal drugs every week.

The question then is given whether there is any connection between mass migration, strict authority actions, the closure of the southern frontier, and drug smuggling. Directly and indirectly what impact the current migration has on drug consumption and spreading (Sivadó, 2016)?

The present study therefore seeks to find out whether there is, due to the illegal migration wave in 2015, the physical closure of the green border and the increased official presence, there is any reorganization in the drug smuggling routes and methods in Serbia and Hungary.

## 1.1 Hypothesis

**H.1.** It is assumed that the establishment of a technical barrier to prevent illegal migration has an impact on the trends in drug smuggling. The closure of the frontier makes the activity of drug smugglers more difficult, so more people are trying to bring drugs into the territory of Hungary via the official borders on the roads.

**H.2.** It is also assumed that not even strict controls and increased authority presence are enough to eliminate drug smuggling activity at the border crossing points and green borders as well.

## 1.2 Data and method

Although under the Hungarian operative law, investigating drug crimes is not a matter for the customs authorities, however, it is reasonable to examine the work and results of this organization when clarifying the issues mentioned above. One of the decisive part of the customs duties is the prevention of smuggling – since the establishment of the independent Hungarian Royal Finance Guard (Erdős, 2017, Szabó 2017). In Hungary, most of the illegal drug deliveries appearing at the borders are still detected by customs officials today. Therefore, I use the drug detection data of the National Tax and Customs Office to research the connection between the closure of the southern frontier and increased official presence, and the reorganization in the drug smuggling routes and methods.

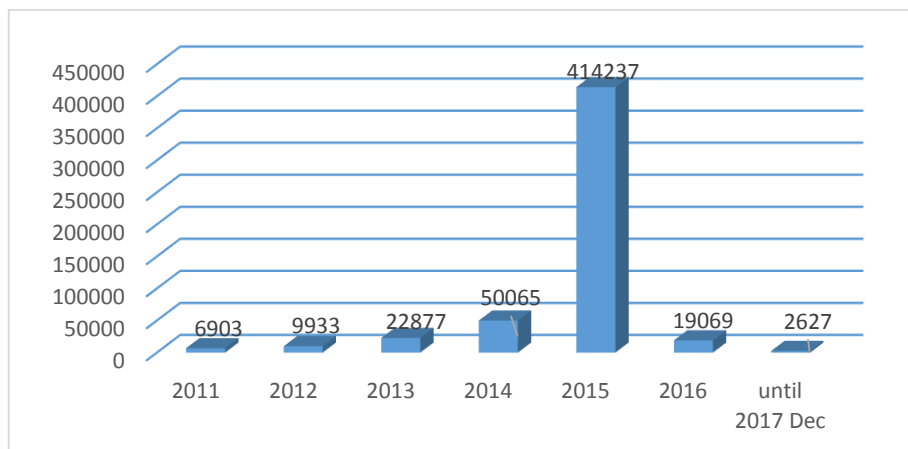
During the analysis the detection data of the Csongrád County Tax and Customs Administration and the Bács-Kiskun County Tax and Customs Administration are processed, since the official border crossing points at the southern border section are located in the jurisdiction of these two organizational units. We also used the database of Hungarian Police for study the number of investigated human smuggling crimes and other features of these offenses.

## 2. THE HANDLING OF MASS ILLEGAL MIGRATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF DRUG SMUGGLING

Illegal border crossing is not a new phenomenon. Since the founding of the state, one of the most important functions of the surveillance of the green borders was the capture of escaped slaves and smugglers who tried to get out of/ get in the country through the control points without paying customs (Négyesi, 2001). They also tried to get out of or get in the country elsewhere, avoided the control of authorities. More than a thousand years later, there has hardly been any change in this regard and illegal crossing of state borders are nowadays still not unprecedented.

According to Hungarian police data, between 2011 and 2014, the number of detainees captured on the Serbian-Hungarian border shows a steady increase (see Figure 1). However, from the beginning of 2015, irregular migration processes in this area began to increase, and from January to June, between 100 and 1750 per day were the number of people arrested for illegal border crossing (Balla & Kui, 2017). Due to migration pressure, the Hungarian Government decided to close that border section [resolution no. 1401/2015. (VI. 17.)]. As it was expected, migration shifted towards the Croatian border section, so the border closure was extended, and the entire southern border of the country was closed on 16 October 2015. From November 2016 to increase the efficiency of the barrier, the construction of the so-called smart fence – including the intelligent signaling system and cameras – began (Csobolyó, 2017). As regarding the barrier crossing, a significant reduction only occurred in March 2017, when the restrictions of the legislations related to the fence became a dead-end for people, who illegally crossed the border to reach the territory of Hungary in huge numbers (Kui, 2017).

**Figure 5: Illegal Border Crossing on the Hungarian-Serbian border between 2011-2017.(number of cases)**



*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of Hungarian Police*

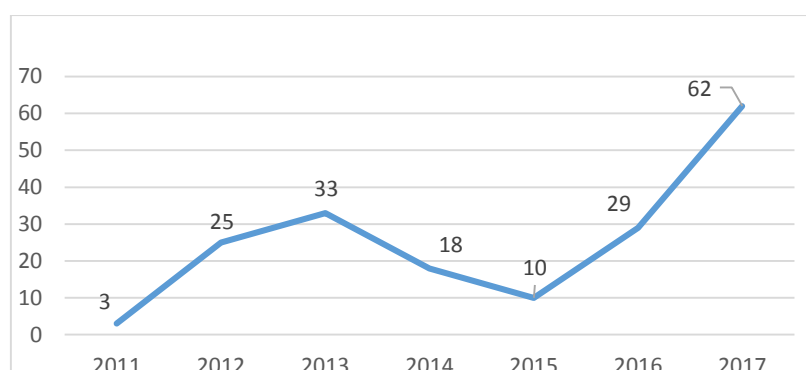
## **2.1 Changes in drug smuggling trends in the southern border region of Hungary (2011-2017)**

Until the migration crisis unfolded at the crossing points of the southern border there had been a steady increase in the number of drug discoveries executed by the excise officers. In 2011 there were 3 cases of drug discoveries on the Serbian-Hungarian border, in 2012, 25 cases, and in 2013, 33 cases. At the same time as the ever increasing migration pressure on the green

border, the number of detection at border crossing points started to reduce: in 2014 18 cases, and in 2015 there very only 10 cases, when the excise officers found drugs.

The downturn in the number of detected drug smuggling has been followed by a steep growth since 2016, and by 2017 the number of smuggled drug traffickers arrested by officers has multiplied six times (see Figure 2).

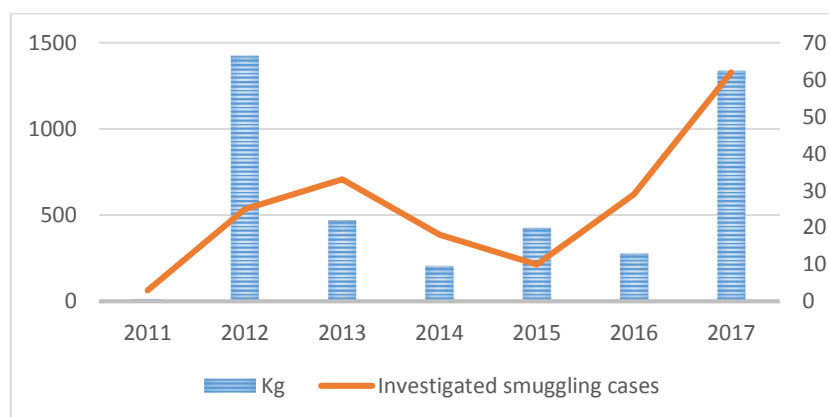
**Figure 6: Detected drug smuggling cases on the Hungarian-Serbian border crossing points between 2011-2017 (number of cases).**



*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of National Tax and Customs Administration*

Between 2011 and 2017, the total of 4150 kg of drugs were found by the officers at the crossing points of the Serbian-Hungarian border. More than half of this amount was captured by NTCA officers in only two years: 1422 kg in 2012 and 1335 kg in 2017. In 2015, the amount of drug seized was 427 kg, most of which (417 kg) is connected to a single discovery. The remaining 10 kg of drugs are connected to nine more different discoveries (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Detected drug smuggling cases (number of cases) and investigated quantity of drugs (kg) on the Hungarian-Serbian border between 2011-2017**



*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of National Tax and Customs Administration*



During the period under review, the most commonly used and largest drug seized was cannabis, of which more than three and a half tons were found by the officers. The quantities seized are followed by hashish, heroin, opium and other opiates, amphetamine and then cocaine (see Table 1)

**Table 1: Investigated quantity of drugs on the Hungarian-Serbian border between 2011-2017**

(gr)

<i>Type of drugs</i>	Cannabis	Hashish	Heroin	Opium	Other Opiates	Amphetamine	Cocaine
<i>Quantity (gramm)</i>	3361900,74	170353,68	78218	5145	7322	2934	472,9 (and 3 liters liquid cocaine)

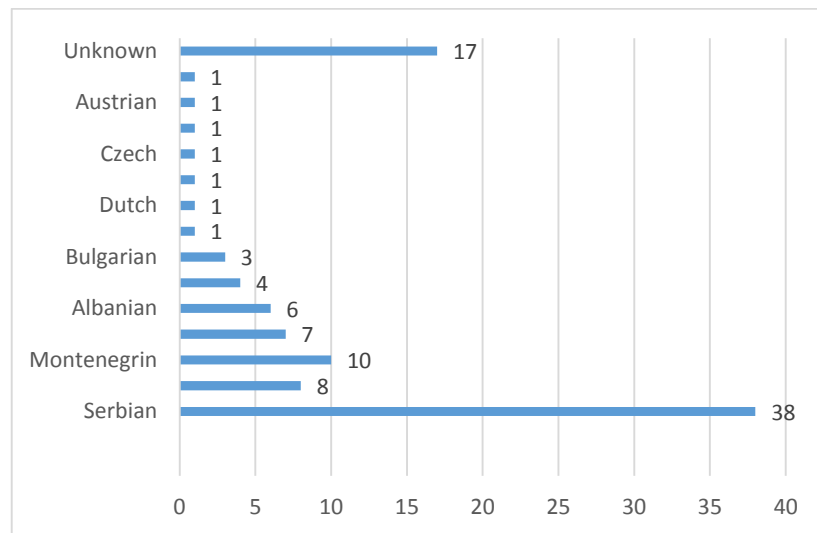
*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of National Tax and Customs Administration*

The reason for the quantitative dominance of these drugs is that high-quality "skunk" cannabis for domestic and Western European markets arrives from Albania to the southern borders of EU, in larger batches (250-400 kg) they are trying to sneak into the country mostly by trucks. Heroin mainly destined for Western Europe is still transported from Afghanistan through the Romanian and Serbian border sections (Csesztregi et al., 2016).

NTCA data reveals that perpetrators try to smuggle large quantities of drugs by hiding it into factory and transformed cavities of different vehicles (cars, trucks, trains) on the border, while the smaller amounts, mostly intended for consumption, are found in the clothing and in the trunks by the customs officers.

Between 2015 and 2017, the known perpetrators were predominantly Serbians. The other perpetrators are typically Montenegrin, Hungarian and were from one of the Balkan countries - mainly Macedonia, Albania, or Kosovo (see Figure 4). Drug-smuggling among other nationalities is negligible on this border.

**Figure 4: Investigated drug smugglers on the Hungarian-Serbian border broken down by nationalities between 2015-2017 (number of head).**

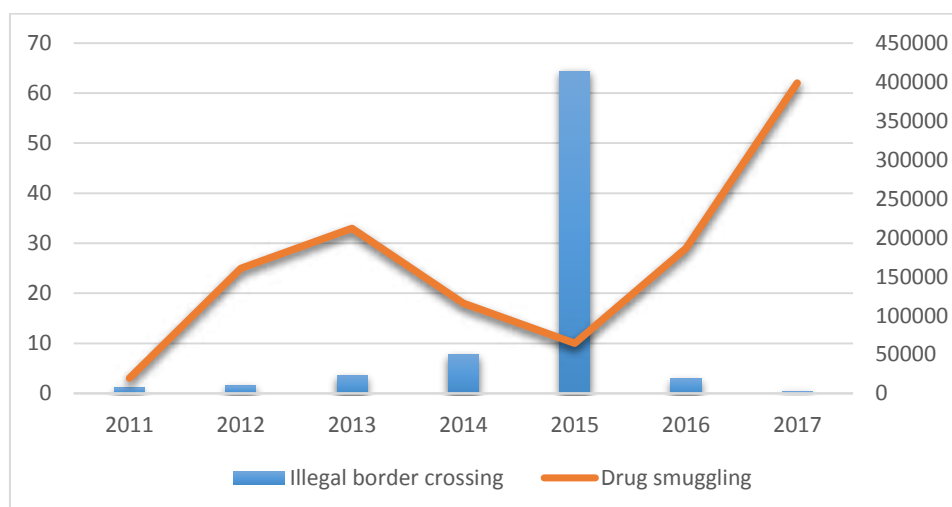


*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of National Tax and Customs Administration*

Based on the police and NTCA data, it is well-established, while migration pressure increased, during the same period the number of crimes related to smuggling detected at border crossing points has decreased considerably (see Figure 5).

Between 2015 and 2016, at the same time with the strict border controls, and the closure of the entire southern border there was an increase in the number of drug discoveries.

**Figure 5: Illegal border crossing and drug smuggling on the Hungarian-Serbian border between 2011-2017 (number of cases).**



*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of National Tax and Customs Administration and Hungarian Police*

### 3. RESULTS

Concluding from the data the connection between the change in the field of drug discovery and the mass migration and strict official action against it – the technical barrier – is very complex. The relationship between the two phenomena is important in the context of two questions, namely:

Why was there a decrease in the number of detected drug smuggling at border crossing points in 2015?

Why did this tendency begin to grow again by 2016?

Based on the conclusions drawn from the criminal and intelligence data, the following answers can be given to the above question.

**First Point.** It is almost certain that the migration pressure at the southern edge of the country and then the closure of the green border had a direct impact on drug smuggling.

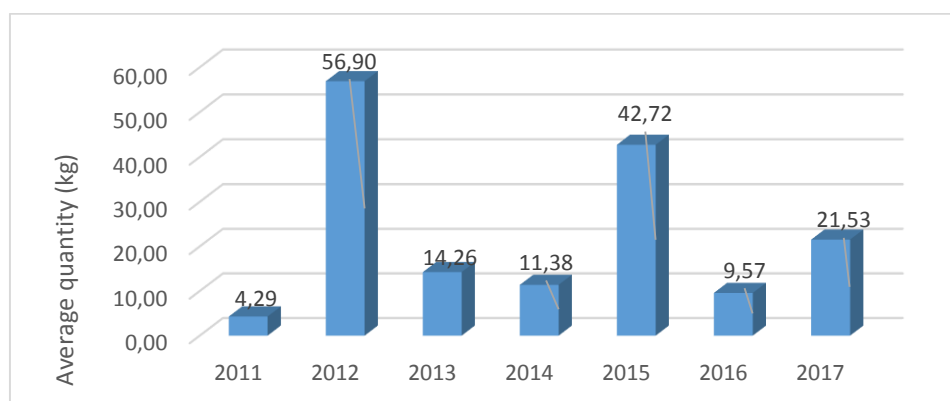
It is believed that in 2015 during the illegal border crossings in the Serbian-Hungarian border – taking advantage of the uncontrolled nature of its mass – a part of the drug smuggling routes were transferred to this area. It has long been known that smuggling at the border crossing is threatened by official controls and they often threaten to fail. For this reason, in many cases smugglers are trying to bring strictly controlled products such as drugs or cigarettes at the green border into the country (Nagy, 2012). Consequently, reducing the smuggling revealed at official border crossing points.

From 2016, however, at the border and near its depth enhancing controls has already increased the risk of drug smuggling. The physical closure of the green border made the smuggling difficult and costly in this area.

The criminal intelligence data collected by the Budapest Police Chief Department indicates that it has been far more difficult and costly to import drugs into the country to the smugglers since the border checkpoint was set up, so in many cases they are trying to use the border crossings (Lécszó & Sivadó, 2018). This is why the number of cases of drug discoveries are increasing significantly from 2016 at border crossing points. The physical closure of the green border crossed some of the smuggling activity at the border crossing points.

However, with regard to the total amount of seizures on border crossings and the average quantity of seizures, there was a recession in 2016 compared to 2015 (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6.: The average amount of drugs per exploration on the Hungarian-Serbian border between 2011-2017 (kg)**



*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of National Tax and Customs Administration*

Between 2011 and 2017 there were three major cases of detection in which the amount of drug seized in a procedure exceeded 400 kg: 492 kg in 2012, 417 kg in 2015, and 500kg in 2017. Consequently, the smuggling of larger quantities of drugs, regardless of the migration situation, occurred both before and after 2015.

While we can see strong indications that the closing of green borders had an impact on drug trafficking, we have to be cautious using our data. In fact, there was the least amount of detected drug smuggling in 2015. On the other hand, during this period, the number of passengers has also decreased (see Figure 8). For better understanding of the connection between drug smuggling and the closing of the green border, we should also know the number of the authorities exactly each year. However these data are not public.

**Second Point.** The reversal of the number of cases of detected drug trafficking in 2015 can be partly explained by the fact that in a chaotic situation, some of the drug smugglers were temporarily moving toward human smuggling. In 2015 with the illegal migratory masses, as expected, smugglers tried to profit from the emerging situation. Domestic and international sources both prove that, helping the illegal border crossing of people is the second most profitable smuggling activity after drug smuggling (Aziz, Monzini & Pastore, 2015; Vas, 2000). Police data clearly shows that the number of human smuggling has also steadily increased at the same time as migration pressure, since smugglers helped people to illegally cross the border in exchange for a lot of money (see Table 2).

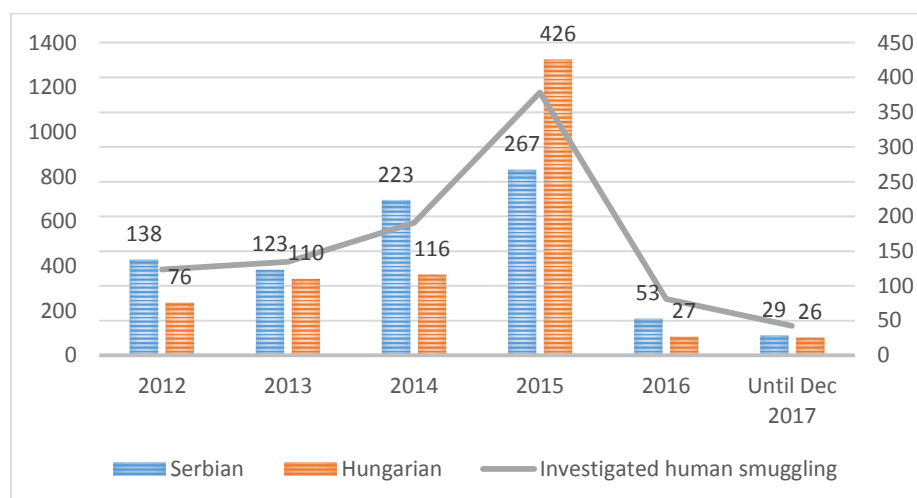
**Table 2: Detected human smugglers on the Hungarian-Serbian border broken down by years between 2012-2017 (number of head).**

Investigated Human Smugglers						
Year	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Investigated cases	384	418	593	1177	253	132

*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of Hungarian Police*

In the area of Csongrád County, for example, between 2008 and 2015, it increased by 1100% (6 <67) the number of criminal proceedings against human smuggling (Lukács, 2015). Most of the smugglers, like those mentioned in connection with the drugs, were Serbian and Hungarian citizens (see Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Number of apprehended human smugglers broken down by main nationalities between 2012-2017 (number of head).**



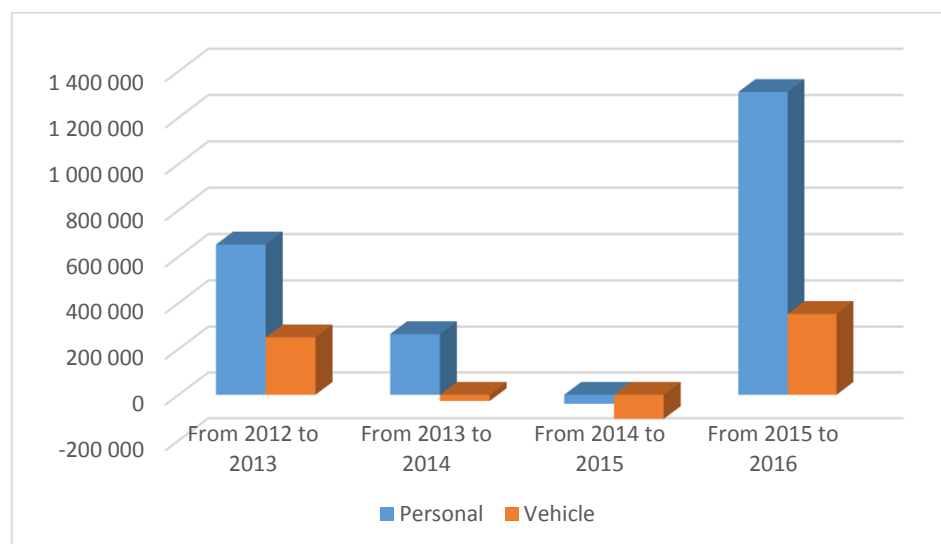
*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of Hungarian Police*

**Third Point.** At the same time, we know that cross-border traffic is influenced by several factors that are independent of subjective human factors (Balla, 2017). Just as the various trends in cross-border crimes are also related to changes in border traffic. The changes in the trends of drug discovery from 2015 could of course be influenced by the fact that the total number of border crossing (persons and vehicles) has changed significantly on the Serbian-Hungarian border (see Figure 8).

Police figures show that, as illegal migration increases, passenger traffic declined by 39,212 in 2015 compared to 2014, and 105,382 fewer vehicles arrived in the country through the borders. In 2016, however, there is a re-growth in the traffic. Over the previous year, passenger traffic grew by 1,310,431 passengers and the vehicle traffic with 352,425 vehicles at this border section.

There is reason to believe that the radical decrease in border traffic in 2015 is also associated with a decline in the number of drug offenses.

**Figure 8: Tendencies on personal and vehicle traffic on the Hungarian-Serbian border between 2012-2016.**



*Source: Data obtained directly from the data base of Hungarian Police*

**Fourth Point.** The decreasing number of detected drug traffickers could also have been affected by the fact that in 2015 not only the perpetrators, but also the authorities themselves, focused primarily on the detection of trafficking in human smuggling. In addition, the radical increase in the number of crimes related to human smuggling has placed significant additional work on the authorities.

Just as we can not rule out that during this period, the temporary rearrangement of drug smuggling routes (eg. Croatia, Romania) or the methods (eg. the use of rail and aircraft) caused the change in the detection numbers.

#### 4. Discussion

With regard to the hypotheses raised, law enforcement and criminal measures aimed at illegal migration and its resolution have indeed had an impact on the trends in drug smuggling. However, these seem to have influenced only the selection of smuggling methods, guidelines and tools.

Drug reports from 2015 (Csesztregi et al., 2016) and 2016 (Czér et al., 2017) do not report any perceptible changes in smuggling activities. Just as we do not have information from the narcotic drug market, which would suggest that it had been difficult at any time to get drugs.

The data analyzed show that the building of the technical barrier has indeed had an increasing impact on drug smuggling at border crossing points. This therefore places the highest responsibility on national border control authorities. However – as I mentioned above – we can not state clearly that the reason for the changes is only the building of the technical barrier and the closing of the green border. Other circumstances (eg. number of customs officers in this period) would be considered as well. Nevertheless, the presented data based calculation – taking into account the number of passengers and the number of detected smuggling crimes – confirms that the probability of detection of drug smuggling at official border points increased after the closing of the green border. In 2014 probability of detection of drug smuggling was 1,97<sup>-4</sup> %. After closing the green border this probability number increased to 2,79<sup>-4</sup> % in 2016 and 5,34<sup>-4</sup> % in 2017.

It would be also useful to study detection data of the Slovenian, Croatian and Romanian customs authorities during the same period. It can provide further explanations. All in all, however, we can doubtless state, analysis of the events of 2015-2017, provides further evidence that the international spread of drugs cannot be prevented by law enforcement only (Erdős, 2015), and the implementation of a "drug-free society" is still mere fiction (Bayer, 2005).

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