

## Results of the Borders Forum 2024, held on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 2024

# A 'cross-border deal' for a stronger Europe with greater solidarity across borders

More than 300 participants met on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris for the Borders Forum, organised under the patronage of French President Emmanuel Macron by the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to present a “Cross-border deal” to national and European decision-makers that takes better account of cross-border living areas<sup>2</sup> in public policies, resolves the “blockages” at borders that affect the daily lives of almost 30% of the European population, and restores confidence in Europe.

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*To this end, on the morning of December 3<sup>d</sup>, participants from a wide range of countries split up into ten thematic workshops to discuss and build this ‘Cross-border deal’ together. It consists of concrete proposals which were presented in a closing session to representatives of national and European institutions. [Download the report here.](#)*

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In the opening keynote speech of the Forum, **Maria-Varinia Michalun, head of the OECD's Governance and Planning Unit**, stressed that “cross-border cooperation is essential to improving the competitiveness of the European Union”. The OECD estimates that “cross-border obstacles are equivalent to a 3% loss of GDP in Europe, or a cost of 458 billion euros”. It therefore stresses that it is imperative to “release the potential of cross-border regions, 3 million jobs could be created!”

The first round table looked at ways of restoring faith in Europe. How can we develop “European citizenship” and “cross-border citizenship” and move towards “a cross-border demos” in 2050? According to **Gabrielle Halpern, philosopher and specialist in the concept of hybridisation**, who took part in the discussions of the first two round tables, this is not a simple task, but one that is achievable if we think outside of the box, go beyond borders and accept a “reciprocal metamorphosis”.

For **Tibor Navracsics, Minister of Public Administration and Regional Development and former European Commissioner (Hungary)**: “Cross-border cooperation is of great value because it helps us overcome the painful experiences of the past and develop a prosperous future for the EU. If borders separate communities, then we lose trust, and that leads to war”. He went on to stress that “to achieve this objective by 2050, we need to start today”. **Elisa Berto, representing the Tyrol-South Tyrol-Trentino Euroregion**, gave the example of her territory on the Italian-Austrian border: “it is our EGTC that has enabled us to create real ‘bridges’ between citizens on both sides of the border”.

According to **Karl-Heinz Lambertz, former Minister-President of the German-speaking Community of Belgium and President of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)**, the challenge for Europe - which, he notes, has the highest density of borders in the world - goes even further: “if the EU wants to position itself in today's world,

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<sup>1</sup> In partnership with the European Commission, the ESPON Program, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, the Centre national de la fonction publique territoriale (CNFPT), Borders in Globalization (University of Victoria) and Trans-Missions.

<sup>2</sup> [See the MOT's Manifesto \(in French\) following the work on “Cross-border living areas”.](#)

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there is no alternative but to pursue European integration". "But each region on its own is marginalised, and it is only by working together that they will be able to spearhead a strong territorial cohesion policy".

**The second debate addressed the issue of "sovereignty" to be shared across borders. What solidarity is needed between cross-border territories, and how can public policies be reimagined?**

According to **Gabrielle Halpern**: "Cross-border relations are a prerequisite for Europe: cross-border territories are ecosystems of bilateral relations on which the relaunch of European construction is based. But I would add to the term 'solidarity' that of 'reciprocity'; reciprocity contracts could provide the 'trust' we need".

And for reciprocity to work, adds **Martie-Antoinette Maupertuis, President of the Corsican Assembly**, "both territories must also be winners". "In the context of cooperation between Corsica, Italy, and Sardinia, we have an obligation to guarantee territorial continuity with mainland Europe, otherwise we'll be in autarky". "How can we ensure territorial continuity if there is no ferry service between the two islands? The question of mobility is at the heart of cooperation", she stresses.

**MOT president Christian Dupessey, mayor of Annemasse and president of the Pôle métropolitain du Genevois français**, gives the example of Greater Geneva: "When Geneva's dynamism absorbs the border workforce and increases the price of housing in France, how can we ensure fair conditions for residents on both sides of the border and propose social cohesion in the living area?"

For **Paco Boya, Secretary General for Demographic Challenge at the Ministry of Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge (Spain)**, "States have been built on borders", but to "break down" these physical and mental borders, we need to go beyond the "sovereignty of States", and give priority to cultural projects, involving citizens on both sides from an early age: they are essential!

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*On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, in a concluding sequence, each workshop spokesperson presented the key messages of their workshop. Divided into three groups - Citizenship and belonging; Public services that connect us; Sharing our resources – [the compilation of these results is available here.](#)*

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At the final round table, **Slawomir Tokarski, Director of European Territorial Cooperation at the European Commission**, pointed out that an initial reaction by the European Commission was provided through the launch of the "data hub for EU border regions", presented the day before, in response to the need to collect harmonised data - on all themes and on all borders. He also spoke of the power of emotions to build trust and solidarity, and called for citizen participation in defining Interreg after 2027.

**Philippe Voiry, ambassador for cross-border issues at the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs**, highlighted the important work carried out by **MEP Sandro Gozi** to relaunch the draft European regulation aimed at resolving cross-border obstacles, renamed 'BridgeEU'. which should be completed in the next few months. He called for the reactivation of cross-border cultural exchanges, which pre-existed the States; and for the establishment of local cross-border governance, so as to be able to plan territorial development and move towards financial solidarity across the border.

**For the MEP**, "We have the Cerdagne hospital on the French-Spanish border as an 'exemplary' project, but at the same time it is still facing 'unacceptable' obstacles such as the lack of recognition of diplomas between French and Spanish staff. And there are others!"

With the new European regulation, he continued, "mayors who want to develop a joint transport line or common public services will be able to do so, with the establishment of a "national coordination point on each side" which will be there to study the resolution of the obstacle and provide a concrete solution.'

He also proposed that citizens' agoras be held in the first half of each year to feed the debate on the state of the European Union, which takes place in September each year.

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But this is not enough. In Germany, “we have interministerial coordination at federal level to deal with cross-border issues”, points out **Minister Juliane Seifert, State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (Germany)**. To go further, “the EU should oblige the Member States to focus on these issues.”

**The MOT's president, Christian Dupessey**, concluded the two days. He proposed democratically electing the EGTC chairpersons (by electing the candidates delegated by the local authorities during the local elections). He called for European legislation to be drawn up for cross-border mobility, along the lines of that regulating digital roaming; for a universal public service at each border; and for ecological planning to be coordinated. Finally, he called for support for Ukraine and the EU's eastern border regions. “It is therefore in response to all these challenges that we are today launching this call for a ‘cross-border deal’, echoing the European ‘green deal’. We are addressing it to European and national decision-makers, as well as to local and regional elected representatives in border areas, and hope to be heard at all three levels. We need to experiment, decentralise and differentiate public policies to build a stronger Europe, a Europe of solidarity at its borders and beyond!

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### More information:

- ▶ Event website:  
<https://bordersforum.eu/>

### Annex:

- ▶ [Program](#)
- ▶ [Cross-border deal](#)
- ▶ ["Bassins de vie transfrontaliers" Manifesto \[FR\]](#)

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