



Press release
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BORDERS FORUM 2022

"Cross-border territories must become key players in the re-founding of Europe"

The 2nd Borders Forum was held on 21 and 22 June at the Cité internationale universitaire in Paris. From the outset, **Christian Dupessey¹**, President of the **Mission opérationnelle transfrontalière (MOT)**, set the tone: *"cross-border territories have been on the front line of the health crisis, the first to suffer the hasty closure of borders"*. After the financial, security and health crises, it is now the war in Ukraine... *"These crises lead to a risk of a return of the border in politics and in public opinion"*, recalling the imperative need for the states to recognise these "cross-border living areas".

But we must now go further: *"We will no longer be satisfied with a simple cooperation across the border that stops at the first crisis !"* he said in support of the European Cross-Border Citizens' Alliance, created jointly with AEBR and CESCO², and called to be strengthened today in support of [a new Political Declaration](#) presented at the opening, urging the Member States and Europe to put cross-border regions not on the margins but at the centre of the European challenge.

Representing 40% of the European territory, 150 million inhabitants, (including 2 million cross-border workers), cross-border territories demand to be heard, supported and taken into consideration in line with their immense potential as "laboratories of European experience" in the national and European recovery plans, in which they still figure too timidly.

"We refuse to give up. We must now build prosperous, ecological and solidarity-based cross-border living areas, resilient to crises, and develop cross-border public services. When will the states work together, on each border and at European level, to serve the cross-border territories?" asked the MOT President once again in front of 570 participants.





FROM AN EMPLOYMENT AREA TO A 'SOLIDARITY' AREA ACROSS THE BORDER

"We have never experienced our French-Belgian border being totally closed, even though there are no physical barriers between the two countries." François Decoster, member of the French Delegation of the European Committee of the Regions and Vice President of the Haut-de-France Region³, noted that the Brexit has had serious consequences. *"Our society is now questioning the issue of borders. We do not have the right to resignation."*

The living areas are not homogeneous places. They are places of inequalities, such as the city of Annemasse, recalls its mayor Christian Dupessey, which is one of the most unequal in France because of its border position with Switzerland. *"The development of a cross-border living area will only be of good quality if more or less comparable rules apply there."* Karl-Heinz Lambertz, President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium and of the Association of European Border Regions, pointed out that *"if each state maintains its national sovereignty in an exclusive manner, cross-border development is not possible."*

TOWARDS CROSS-BORDER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

In a context of climate change, the question of resource management in cross-border territories has become central. Concrete responses were provided, such as the 3Land urban planning project between Basel (Switzerland), Huningue (France) and Weil-am Rhein (Germany) reported by Thomas Zeller, President of the Trinational Eurodistrict of Basel, reconciling land resource management and biodiversity preservation. For Thomas Zeller *"we need administrative simplification. Setting up a project in a single country is sometimes complex, so imagine three countries !"* Another example: storm Alex, in 2021, caused damage in the Maritime Alps in France and on the Italian side: the cross-border communication routes on the French-Italian border in the Roya Valley were brutally cut off.

For Anna Karina Kolb, Director of the External and Federal Affairs Department of the State of Geneva, *"the ecological transition is an accelerator for cooperations; this transition can only be achieved collectively and across borders."*





For major infrastructures, such as the EEIG Grande Région Hydrogen for the regional and cross-border development of hydrogen or the MosaHYc (Moselle Saar HYdrogen Conversion) network project, **Jean Rottner, President of the Grand-Est region**, asked Europe and its Member States for a clear framework: *"The regions are now asserting their capacity to experiment with their European neighbours, without going through national diplomatic networks."*

"Border regions can play an important role in the production of renewable energy, if we allow them to access local and regional electricity grids across borders and if we encourage the strengthening of citizen energy communities" confirmed **Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms**.

"The connection of the Ukrainian network to the European network was completed in three weeks ! Starting with an industrial logic and with political impetus, we were able to go very far and very fast," continued **Damian Cortinas, Director of the European system coordination of RTE and member of the ENTSO-E board**. This is an example that shows that with political ambition, it is possible to go beyond political borders and engage in energy cooperation. And **Jean Rottner** concluded: *"Why can't we do this permanent short-cut on our own borders ? There are too many regulatory obstacles ! "*

THE EUROPE OF CRISES, WHAT TERRITORIAL RESPONSES TO MIGRATORY ISSUES

The hasty closure of borders to slow the spread of the coronavirus has disrupted the lives of cross-border workers and their families. *"Cross-border residents have suffered more than others from the effects of the pandemic. This situation has been prolonged by national security border controls, particularly targeting migrants in transit. It is now essential to strengthen collaboration between border territories to respond to migration crises in order to offer a dignified reception to people fleeing their respective countries."* explained **María Ángeles Elorza Zubiría, Secretary General for External Action of the Basque Government**.

Among the examples presented: in the Basque Country, an inter-institutional commission has been set up bringing together in a social pact public and private actors in order to improve the reception of migrants as well as unaccompanied minors, people passing





through or fragile individuals.

Béatrice Godefroy, Director Europe, Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC) asked the question of civil protection: how can it be better prepared in these territories? *"At the moment, we are focused on the police and military response, but not on civil protection with regard to the arrival of refugees. This needs to be considered at the level of the EU civil protection policy."*

For Damien Carême, Member of the European Parliament, Member of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) *"Cross-border territories are by definition territories of migration. The first problem is to consider that this in itself represents 'a problem'."*

TOWARDS NEW MODELS OF CROSS-BORDER GOVERNANCE

For Nathalie Sarrabezolles, President of the Commission for Territorial Cohesion (COTER) of the European Committee of the Regions, the pandemic has shown the limits of current governance: *"the time has come to reflect on more innovative models that make cooperation across borders more effective and simpler."*

According to Sandro Gozi, MEP, *"with the Franco-Italian Quirinal Treaty, signed in November 2021, it is the first time that Italy has made such a sustained commitment to cross-border issues with a neighbouring country."*

The Franco-German Aachen Treaty, signed in 2019, defines a method of cooperation on the border to remove obstacles to the implementation of projects. *"From the beginning of the crisis, the treaty facilitated technical and political coordination. The cross-border cooperation committee met daily to discuss border management and patient evacuation. This is a concrete application of the treaty."* explained Philippe Voiry, Ambassador for intergovernmental commissions, cross-border issues and cooperation (France).

The draft ECBM (European Cross-Border Mechanism) regulation, a mechanism under discussion whereby cross-border actors could benefit from a local adaptation of the legislation to establish a cross-border public service. *"The ECBM will remove 50% of the legal and administrative obstacles to cross-border cooperation. It is essential to move*





forward on this draft regulation at European level. It is a voluntary scheme. Each state is free to use it or not," said Sandro Gozi.

WHAT PLACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CROSS-BORDER TERRITORIES ?

The cross-border governance structures are created to support the dynamics on the ground by means of financial and human resources. Nevertheless, these structures remain poorly known to the public and are insufficiently used. This is why they are increasing their efforts to make themselves better known.

Civil society is called upon to express its views on cross-border environmental projects: *"Under French law, everyone, regardless of nationality, has the right to be informed and to participate in the preparation of projects that have an impact on the environment. The CNDP guarantees this right."* Chantal Jouanno, President of the French National Commission for Public Debate, explained.

Gaétane Ricard-Nihoul, Member of the Common Secretariat for the Conference on the Future of Europe, recalled this unprecedented approach to involving civil society at European level, with a platform and plenary sessions in 24 languages. *"We proved that it could work !"*

The new governments will have to be more oriented towards civil society, and in particular towards the young Europeans of tomorrow.

The Borders Forum gave the floor to three young people who have taken up the cross-border issue, such as Bektha Djilidjel, a former Interreg Volunteer Youth (IVY), for whom the health crisis and its consequences were the trigger: *"Before covid, I had never experienced or felt "the border" and this made me want to get involved in the matter of cross-border cooperation, in particular so that young people could have a voice in this process."*

Today she proposes the creation of meeting places for young people in cross-border areas. Although 2022 has been designated the European Year of Youth, she hopes that





"youth will not be considered only through the European Year of Youth. Youth cannot be just a fad for one year. Do not forget us after December. Other generations are coming ! "

But for this appeal to be heard, perhaps a "European Year of the Border" is needed, as **Charlotte Halpern** suggested at the opening of the forum, in order to draw attention and encourage decisions and actions in favour of these cross-border territories, whose representatives will have demonstrated throughout this 2nd edition of the Borders Forum that they are not "a world apart" but rather "a whole world" at the centre of European issues.

¹Christian Dupessey, President of the MOT, Mayor of Annemasse, President of the Pôle métropolitain du Genevois français.

²The MOT (Mission opérationnelle transfrontalière), AEBR (Association of European Border Regions) and CESC (Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives) launched, together with the European Committee of the Regions, the Cross-Border Citizens' Alliance at the 1er Borders Forum;

³As Mayor of Saint-Omer

ORGANISERS AND PARTNERS

Main organiser : Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT)

European partners : European Commission, European Committee of the Regions, ESPON programme

Media partners : France Média Monde and France 24

Other partners : Res publica, BIG Network (Borders in Globalization)

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Photos [here](#)

[Press kit Borders Forum 2022](#)

About the MOT

The Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) is an association that was set up in 1997 by the French government. Its role is to assist project developers, to promote the interests of cross-border territories and to create networks of players and experiences. It serves as an interface between the different stakeholders to help them find cross-border solutions at the right levels.

www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en





About the Borders Forum

The Borders Forum is the meeting place for cross-border players. The first edition of the Borders Forum took place entirely online, in November 2020. It brought together more than 1000 participants from over 40 countries and highlighted the specificities of cross-border territories as well as the equilibria to be found on either side of borders.

www.bordersforum.eu

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