

Synthesis

MOT Conference - debate
Wednesday 15 June 2011 in Reims
“Cross-border cooperation: from national strategies to territorial projects”



Michel Delebarre, Former Minister of State, Member of Parliament and Mayor of Dunkerque, President of MOT, opened the MOT conference restating the necessity of establishing multi-level governance of cross-border issues, particularly in the context of the negotiation and implementation of the next Community programming period.

Jacques Cohen, Deputy mayor in charge of tourism, international relations and heritage of Reims, noted that Reims city council supported cross-border exchanges and recognized the importance of international cooperation and development of European exchanges both for border areas and for a city such as Reims.

Jean-Paul Bachy, President of the Regional Council of Champagne-Ardenne, described the experience of the Champagne-Ardenne region in its collaboration with the Walloon region: although the financial and administrative mechanisms of cooperation may appear complex, they undeniably provide answers to the day-to-day problems of the citizens of cross-border territories in terms of access to healthcare, transport, training, employment or economic development, as illustrated by the policy of economic and research clusters developed in complementarity with the Walloon and Picardie regions.

FIRST SESSION

Patrick Crézé, Director, Deputy Interministerial Delegate for Territorial Development and Regional Attractiveness (DATAR), gave the DATAR's point of view on the Blanc/Keller/Sanchez-Schmid parliamentary report. Regarding the economic aspects, the report's conclusions call for definition of economic development strategies tailored to each border territory according to its strengths and weaknesses, in order to introduce appropriate tools.

For the DATAR, a strong political commitment on cross-border issues is important, supplemented by territorial monitoring, to be coordinated with the existing regional strategies in the cross-border areas, following the example of that of the Upper Rhine. In this context, the DATAR supports the proposal for a reference prefect on each border able to define, in liaison with the local stakeholders, the priorities and goals of these strategies specific to the border territories, as well as the holding of regular interministerial committee meetings on cross-border matters, with support from the MOT.

Auke Van der Goot, Senior advisor to the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations (Netherlands), threw some light on the organization of the governance of cross-border issues in the Netherlands, which is both multi-level and interministerial. Two institutions reporting to the ministry of the

interior and the ministry of foreign affairs (respectively the *Grensmakelaar* (GM) and the embassies) act as mediators on internal issues (GM) and on the strategy (embassy) of the Netherlands with regard to cross-border cooperation with Belgium and Germany. Involvement of the states is necessary to implement integration strategies beyond the borders.

The Budapest Platform participants reminded the conference of the originality of their approach which, alongside the MOT and the Netherlands, brings together a Euroregion (Galicia-Norte Portugal) and the CESCO (Central European Service for Cross-border Initiatives), a cooperation body formed by Hungary that is both an instrument for cooperation between cross-border territories and a support structure in the implementation of the Hungarian government's strategy on funding and development of cross-border cooperation. The government of the Netherlands is also partner of a structure for exchanges and consultation that intends to make its proposals on the development of cross-border strategies heard in 2011.

Marie-Thérèse Sanchez-Schmid, Member of European Parliament, Councilor of the City of Perpignan and rapporteur of a report on Objective 3 territorial cooperation to the European Parliament, notes that European territorial cooperation, despite its small financial allocation in terms of the European Union budget, is Europe in a concentrated form and a source of competitiveness. In view of the new programming period, its implementation would necessitate not just an increase in its budget but also better synergy with the other cohesion policy programmes and the introduction of strategic planning mechanisms from local level to European level. She stressed the importance of the territorial approach in the strategies of Community funds, so that the latter can be directed towards the funding of joint cross-border projects.

SECOND SESSION

Stéphanie Fuchs, Head of Service International and Cross-border Action, General Council Haut-Rhin, described the approach undertaken by the Upper Rhine partners (France, Germany, Switzerland) since 2009 in order to develop a joint strategy at the level of the cross-border region, particularly in the context of the new Community programming period. This approach, which aims to make the Upper Rhine a "laboratory of integration", is based on four pillars: political, economic, science and university cooperation, and civil society. This strategy has been the subject of broad local consultation and will be submitted to Commissioner J. Hahn.

Philippe Suinen, Director General of Wallonia-Brussels International, stated that cross-border cooperation eliminates ignorance about the neighbour and emphasizes common assets. The celebration of twenty years of cross-border cooperation, organized as part of the Belgian Presidency of the European Union in autumn 2010, showed the substantial leverage effect of Interreg funding on the development of cross-border projects. It is important not to oppose the Europe 2020 Strategy and cohesion policy; cooperation programmes must provide greater funding for projects leading to innovation.

Even though cross-border cooperation has reached the age of maturity, in the next programming period it will be necessary to think about the connections with the other European programmes; the regions must also facilitate contacts between the various cooperation participants on either side of the borders.

The following points were also raised during the discussions:

1. a conference of the German cross-border metropolitan regions (IMeG) which, through their urban and economic potential, rival the other German metropolitan regions;
2. the case of Benelux, a tripartite international organization which gives priority to a pragmatic approach based on flexibility and discussion case by case on the issues raised by cross-border cooperation initiatives;
3. the necessity of providing funding for spatial planning and territorial governance in Community programmes dedicated to the European territorial cooperation objective, particularly in rural and natural border regions which have access to fewer endogenous resources;
4. the necessity of demonstrating the added value and the measurable results of cross-border cooperation strategies and to make real choices in the preparation of these strategies, which entails the introduction of long-term monitoring procedures for cross-border territories;
5. the need to inform and train citizens and elected representatives on practical cross-border cooperation projects.

Further information:

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In conclusion, Michel Delebarre emphasized the progress made by many territories in reinforcing their cross-border cooperation procedures. He noted that cross-border cooperation cuts across all EU policies.

The success of the European Union will be confirmed first of all in the cross-border territories. It is necessary to develop a multi-level approach to cross-border cooperation strategies. The cross-border territories and the European level are already mobilized; the priority now is to achieve greater involvement by the States either side of the borders.