



## VIEWPOINT



**Pascal Deleersnyder**  
Manager of the Tournai branch of "Cohesium"

"Cohesium" is one of the companies that received a prize for their cross-border actions during the B2B day. Can you tell us about your experience in this area?

Our company, which specialises in marketing, communication and commercial initiatives, has branches in Lille, Tournai and Courtrai. Over a year ago, we developed a product known as "Actrans", which provides support for companies wanting to penetrate cross-border markets. We provide companies with a structured support methodology, from the initial diagnostic to the operational phase. They are helped in their cross-border projects by two consultants working together (one on the French side and the other in Belgium), which helps them to define pertinent strategies for the markets (French, Walloon or Flemish) that interest them.

**Do you expect anything in particular as regards the creation of a Eurodistrict in the cross-border area?**

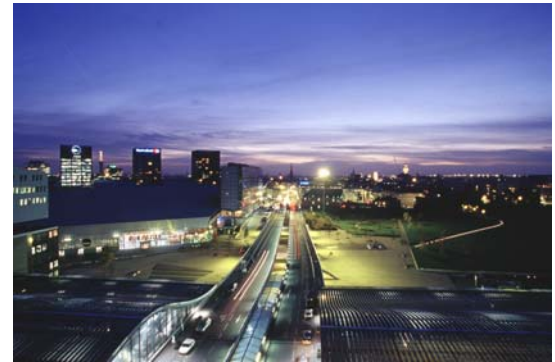
It is a promising project. For companies wishing to invest and grow in the Flemish, Walloon and French markets, it will certainly be an advantage to have a concrete "shape" that provides a clearer outline for our cross-border territory. However, this will take time, and it is, I believe, important to avoid slowing current effective cross-border initiatives by tying them to this project prematurely. I also feel that much progress is needed in terms of identity, because, if we want to really create a cross-border region, it is essential to work on the feeling of belonging and on "territorial marketing". People and companies cannot invest in a cross-border project if they cannot identify with it. The Eurodistrict must, therefore, ensure that, in all aspects of its project, full account is taken of the need for marketing - in terms both of territorial identity and of the commitment of the players on whom success will depend.

## The first "B2B Eurodistrict" day at Lille Grand-Palais

*"Shape the contours of the Lille Métropole economic area of tomorrow" - such was the ambitious plan focused upon during the "B2B Eurodistrict" day on 5 April 2005. The event was attended by 300 economical and political players from Europe's largest cross-border urban area. This day of exchanges, which was organised by APIM (Agence pour la Promotion Internationale de Lille Métropole) and two Flemish and Walloon municipal groupings - Unizo and Ideta - constituted the highpoint of their common project: the creation of a "European economic-integration laboratory" or LEIE (Laboratoire Européen d'Intégration Economique).*

The Franco-Belgian Eurodistrict represents one of the greatest concentrations of wealth in Europe (50 000 companies, 1.9 million inhabitants and 30,000 workers crossing the border each day). In economic terms, its strength resides in the fact that cooperation does not merely mean a cross-border offer of activities sites - it also involves an increasing number of common actions by Belgian and French companies.

The current institutional context is giving rise to much hope of more operational cross-border cooperation. Encouraging signs include the ratification of a Franco-Belgian agreement enabling the creation of local cross-border cooperation groupings, plans for a "Lille/Courtrai/Tournai Eurodistrict" and the creation of a special Franco-Belgian parliamentary group in November 2004. The economic players therefore have much to play for, and they used this day of exchanges to send out a strong message to the politicians in order



Franco-Belgian Lille Métropole economic area

to ensure that full account is taken of the economic aspect of these major developments. Personalities in attendance included Martine Aubry, Vice-President of Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine and Stefaan Declerck, Bourgmestre of Courtrai and member of the Franco-Belgian parliamentary group.

Questions raised during the proceedings notably concerned the fluidity of the labour market, fiscal harmonisation and the need to focus the attention of European players on the importance of centres of excellence. The many proposals put forward concerned, among other things, the creation of local cross-border job centres and of cross-border economic zones based on the free-zone approach, and, on a more pragmatic note, the introduction of a toll-free telephone number for economic players. It was noted that giving the territory a name was a key preliminary step towards the implementation of a "common marketing" initiative and the generation of a true feeling of belonging to the cross-border territory.

A major step forward was the creation of an economic committee for the Eurodistrict, and the body held its first meeting on the day. The aim of this committee, which is an informal body, is to ensure that economic and parliamentary players speak with one voice.

Fessenheim (France) - Hartheim (Germany)

## A 12th bridge across the Rhine

*Around 30 kilometres north of Mulhouse, the villages of Fessenheim (2,127 inhabitants) and Hartheim (4,708 inhabitants), which are located on opposite sides of the Rhine, are to be linked by a 217-metre bridge. The first stone was laid on the German side on 22 April, and work is expected to last one year.*

The bridge, which will be 7 metres wide, will have two lanes - one for pedestrians and cyclists and the other for vehicles not exceeding 3.5 tonnes in weight. It will be used by an estimated 500 cars per day, and traffic will flow alternately in either direction. The metal-and-concrete structure has been designed to blend in with the so-called "île du Rhin" site, which is a protected area with certain environmental constraints.

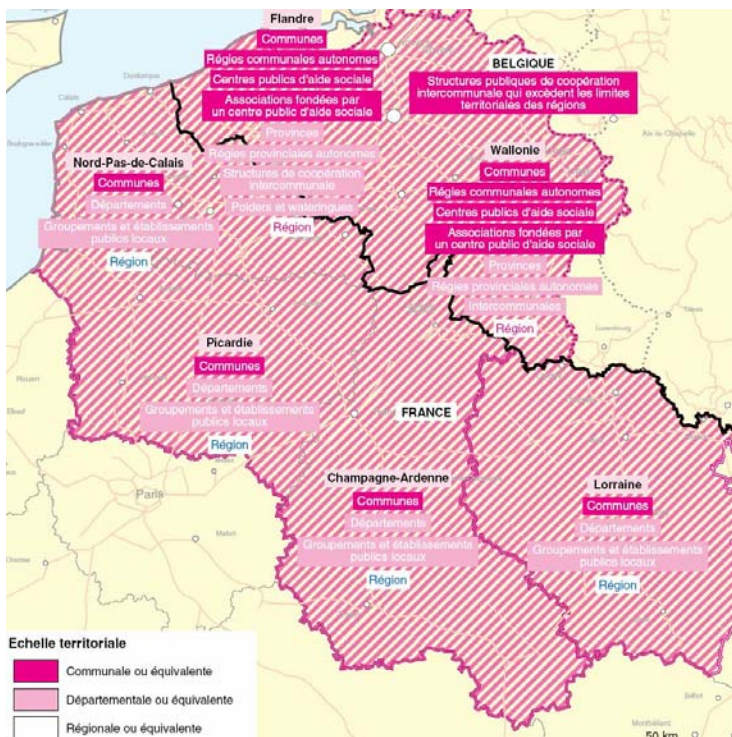
The project, which was validated in 2001 by the French and German governments, is the result of many years of discussion and reflection. In 1998, the towns of Fessenheim and Hartheim created the first local cross-border cooperation grouping or

GLCT (*Groupement Local de Coopération Transfrontalière*). The grouping, which is known in French as "GLCT Centre Hardt - Rhin Supérieur", was set up specially to manage the bridge project. It is run by a number of French and German towns, and currently acts as project owner.

The aim is to give priority to serving local needs. According to Fessenheim's mayor, Alain Foechterlé, the bridge - which will cut the journey between the neighbouring villages from 20 to 4 kilometres - is "not so much a new route as simply a way of bringing communities closer together".

The two towns, which have been twinned since 9 May 1993, will be able to implement common projects with greater ease. These mainly concern economic, school, cultural and tourist objectives, and initiatives will include the promotion of bilingualism, school exchanges, the creation of a common network of leisure and tourism facilities and cooperation in respect of rescue and assistance missions.





## The Franco-Belgian agreement on cross-border cooperation

*In accordance with the Madrid Framework Agreement, the French and Belgian governments, along with those of Wallonia, Flanders and the French Community of Belgium, have negotiated and ratified an agreement setting out the terms of cross-border cooperation between territorial authorities and local public bodies. The agreement, which was signed in Brussels on 16 September 2002, is due to come into effect on 1 July 2005.*

The agreement concerns the whole of the Franco-Belgian border (Champagne-Ardenne,

Lorraine, Nord-Pas-de-Calais & Picardy, Flanders and Wallonia), and provides a legal framework for cross-border cooperation. On the French side, it applies to regions, *départements* and towns, as well as to their groupings and their public establishments. On the Belgian side, it applies to provinces, towns, Flemish and Walloon intercommunal cooperation bodies and certain public establishments. The agreement also enables its signatories, and notably the Belgian communities and regions, to be parties to the cooperation agreements signed by French and Belgian local authorities.

The agreement makes provision for the authorities concerned to sign cooperation agreements. Such agreements enable cooperation bodies - which may be legal entities - to be set up. In this respect, two procedures are envisaged:

- Article 10: participation in an existing entity or creation *ex nihilo* of an entity based on internal law - e.g., in Belgium, Flemish and Walloon intercommunal cooperation bodies, certain associations and GEIEs; and, in France, GIPs, SEMs and European districts.
- Article 11: creation of a local cross-border cooperation grouping - a local public establishment governed by articles 11 to 15 of the treaty and subsidiarily by the law which applies in the head-office location.

It should be noted that, while the agreement does not make provision for an intergovernmental commission, it empowers the prefects of the border regions and *départements* to examine, in collaboration with the relevant Belgian authorities, all questions relating to cross-border cooperation (article 2). With respect to the monitoring of cooperation bodies, the prefects and the relevant Belgian authorities shall provide each other with pertinent information and take decisions after due consultation (article 8).

*The text of the Treaty and the full French parliamentary proceedings may be consulted at: [www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org](http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org) (Legal resources section).*

### Seminar on cross-border cooperation and economic development

In collaboration with MOT, the French national council for regional economies or CNER (*Conseil National des Economies Régionales*) held a seminar on cross-border cooperation and economic development in Paris on 20 April 2005.

For further details, and to see the various projects presented:

[www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org](http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org) (Training section)

### SPOTLIGHT ON A SITE



<http://www.territoires.gouv.fr>

The "Observatoire des territoires", which came into being in March 2005, is a network managed by DATAR. Its is responsible for gathering, analysing and transmitting information relating to territorial dynamics and inequalities and to territorial planning and development policies. Its brief also covers the exchange of experiences between the State and territorial authorities and the management of a study and research programme. The observatory's portal serves to provide information relating to specific themes and territories, in the form of maps, numbers and qualitative information concerning the situation at the European and infra-regional levels.

### In the press in April

- **Belgium attracts French workers** - *La Libre Belgique*, 22 April  
The number of French people working in Belgium has jumped by 50% in 5 years...
- **CEVA project: at last, Berne knows where to look for the promised funds** - *Tribune de Genève*, 13 April  
Transport - the ball is in the Federal Chambers' court. Unless there is a last-minute hitch, the funds would appear to be secured...
- **Four years from now, Annecy will be 15 minutes from Geneva** - *Tribune de Genève*, 22 April  
The motorway between Geneva and Annecy is finally on the way. The last 19 km stretch is eagerly awaited...
- **France and Italy review trans-Alp transport projects** - *Le Monde*, 19 April  
French transport minister Gilles de Robien and his Italian opposite number, Pietro Lunardi, met on Monday 18 April to review progress on a number of Franco-Italian trans-Alp transport projects, including the Lyon-Turin TGV...
- **The road to Europe** - *Sud Ouest*, 14 April  
The Pyrénées-Atlantiques *département* and the Diputacion Foral de Gipuzkoa have signed a partnership agreement...
- **Basque Eurocity moves quality up a notch on Bidassoa crossing** - *Le Journal du Pays Basque*, 21 April  
The Diputacion and the CABAB are to give the Baiona-Donostia Eurocity a boost...
- **Franco-Spanish "consorcio" signed yesterday** - *L'Indépendant*, 22 April  
The neighbouring Cerdagne-plateau towns of Bourg-Madame and Puigcerda (located in France and Spain respectively) are to collaborate under the terms of a new cross-border "consorcio" ("agreement", in Spanish)...