

VIEWPOINT



Alex Obry
Special Assistant with
responsibility for
"Employment and business
creation" in the Dunkirk
metropolitan authority

One of the objectives of the platform is the creation of a cross-border employment market. What concrete actions have been conducted in this area?

In the spring of 2003, various working groups were created with a view to preparing themes for the future cross-border platform. One of these - dedicated to employment and training - brought together the Dunkirk metropolitan authority, the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region and the province of West Flanders, as well as a variety of French and Flemish bodies active in the areas of training and occupational integration.

This cross-border group soon began to focus on the integration of French jobseekers into Flemish companies.

Large numbers of French people work on the Belgian side of the border, often in jobs requiring few qualifications - notably in the agri-food sector - and offering wages which, although high by French standards, attract few Belgian candidates. The problem facing Belgian employers and temporary-work agencies is that the French workers have a very poor knowledge of Flemish and that such knowledge is a prerequisite to proper integration into a Flemish team and a clear understanding of safety rules.

This is the case despite the fact that GRETA - a training body financed by the Region - has, for several years, been providing jobseekers with Flemish classes. However, until 2004, this training was conducted without any direct link with recruiting companies. The cross-border group's task therefore involved establishing contact between the various players and setting up training courses designed to meet the specific needs of the jobseekers and companies concerned. These courses got under way in 2004 in the form of internships, which optimised jobseekers' chances of recruitment. Of the 16 jobseekers participating in the course in 2005, 11 obtained employment.

This action is expected to be conducted on a larger scale in future years. We are, for example, currently working on the development of a partnership with the EURES network. The creation of the Platform in June was a major step forward on the road to more widespread actions and to the mobilisation of partners on a larger scale.

Flanders -Dunkirk - Côte d'Opale cross-border Platform

Constituent Charter signed

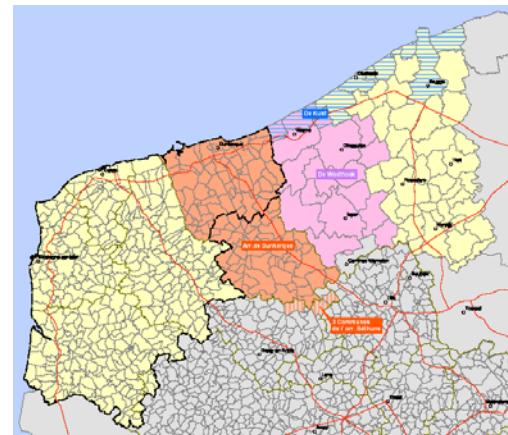
The West-Vlaanderen / Flanders-Dunkirk-Côte d'Opale cross-border Platform, which encompasses all of the stakeholders in the territory's cross-border cooperation*, was officially launched on 9 June with the signing of a Constituent Charter.

The first significant links between neighbouring territories in the province of West Flanders and the Flanders-Dunkirk-Côte d'Opale region were forged in the 1990s. Since that time, the inhabitants of these two zones have got to know each other much better, and there have been a significant number of cross-border projects. In this context, the need for a global approach enabling the optimal management and harmonisation of cross-border links has long been clear.

Globalisation and the European Union mean that the creation of the Platform represents a considerable challenge for the territory, and opens up opportunities that are no less considerable. Not only do a cross-border population zone and a network of towns and territories need to be integrated - they must also be positioned, at European level, among the key neighbouring metropolitan areas (Paris, London, Brussels-Ghent-Antwerp and Lille).

In this context, the Platform must coordinate cross-border actions and serve as a catalyst for initiatives and as a lever for local players. The numerous areas for cooperation include:

- the coordination of territorial development and planning policies,
- sustainable economic development,
- the creation of a cross-border employment market,



- the creation of a cross-border space for education, research and creativity,
- the development of cross-border mobility,
- sustainable management of resources and natural landscapes, and optimisation of rural spaces,
- the promotion of tourism tools and cultural links.

The scale of the structure will be adapted project-by-project. Participation will take place at a great number of different levels, and there will be a wide range of partners (local and regional authorities, key territorial partners, etc.).

The Platform takes the form of a "Permanent Conference" (political steering committee) with joint representation of partners (50% Belgian and 50% French).

Thematic cross-border working groups will be set up with a view to developing concrete projects. A study of the organisational and legal evolution of the cross-border Platform is also expected to be conducted.

* Cooperation covers the territory of the Syndicat Mixte de la Côte d'Opale et de l'arrondissement de Dunkerque, the three urban areas of the arrondissement of Béthune which are attached to the Pays Cœur de Flandre and, on the Belgian side, the entire province of West Flanders.

France / Germany

Greater numbers of trucks on Alsace's roads

On 1 January 2005, the German government introduced a tax - the LKW-Maut - on trucks in excess of 12 tonnes using the country's motorway network. Since then, the number of trucks using Alsace's roads each day has increased by more than 2,000 - and by as many as 3,500 on certain stretches.

The measure, which was introduced in order to balance competition between rail and road and enforce the "user-pays" principle, could net as much as 2.8 billion euros for the German State, which intends to use the monies collected to develop its infrastructure.

In practice, many trucks avoid the tax by switching en masse to Alsace's motorway network - which is, with some rare exceptions, toll-free - and to its secondary roads. The resultant traffic jams, noise and pollution - along with road-safety problems and damaged road surfaces - have exasperated Alsace's

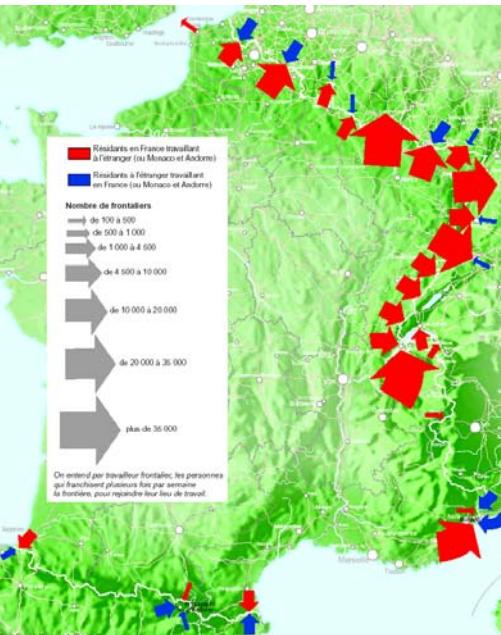
residents and motorists.

The solution, which could entail a gradual extension of the tax to the European road network as a whole, is in the gift of the relevant public authorities. The regional infrastructure authority is looking into possible restrictive measures such as speed limits, making it illegal for trucks to use the inside lane or simply forbidding them to use the roads concerned at certain times. Elected representatives in Alsace - who are, themselves, exasperated by the situation - have decided to commission a study in order to determine what measures need to be taken to control traffic flows and deal with the region's excess traffic. They hope to show that the introduction of a tax would not handicap Alsace's economy and that the monies collected could be used to finance alternative transport solutions, which are being called for by all concerned.



SPECIAL REPORT

NEWS IN BRIEF



The flow of cross-border workers in 2005

Flows of cross-border workers constitute the most tangible and most spectacular illustration of the reality of life in cross-border areas. A person is considered to be a cross-border worker when he spends the bulk of his working time on one side of a border engaged in activity from which the bulk of his earnings accrue, yet resides on the other side of the border. This definition covers both those who commute across a border on a daily basis and those who return to their homes only at weekends.

According to estimates, at least **272,000** persons residing in France work in a neighbouring country. It should be noted that this figure includes both French people and non-French citizens residing in France, and that a significant number of Germans and Swiss reside in France while continuing to work in their countries of origin (almost one third of cross-border workers in certain of Lorraine's and Alsace's employment zones are German). Some **11,000** people working in France reside in neighbouring European countries. There is, therefore a strong imbalance as regards the flow of cross-border workers, and this imbalance has been further

accentuated (+16%, on average) since 2000, when the MOT released its first map. Figures for individual countries vary considerably, with an additional flow of 49% towards Luxembourg, 24% towards Belgium and 8% towards Switzerland. Over the same period, the flow towards Germany has shrunk by 8%. These shifts reflect the economic situations in the respective countries, and trends provide a clear picture of the extent to which our border regions are economically dependent on those of our European partners and neighbours.

In 2005, the total flow of cross-border workers towards **Switzerland** stands at 105,661. Those concerned reside essentially in Haute-Savoie and Ain, in southern Alsace and in Franche-Comté, with workers from those zones typically taking up employment in Geneva (45,000), north-western Switzerland (34,500), and the Swiss Jura and Berne (12,000), respectively. A mere hundred or so Swiss work in Alsace. **Germany** is currently host to 56,000 workers resident in France, a figure which is dropping as a result of the country's recent economic difficulties. The main flows are from Lorraine towards Sarre (21,000) and Rhineland-Palatinate (5,000), and from Alsace towards Baden-Württemberg (25,000). Only 300 people travel to work in the opposite direction. More than 55,000 French residents work in **Luxembourg**, most of them coming from Meurthe-et-Moselle (30% of Longwy's workers are employed outside of France) and Moselle. This figure is rising constantly. Of the 24,000 cross-border workers travelling to **Belgium**, 4,800 work in Flanders, 14,000 in Hainaut, 800 in the Ardennes, and 4,900 in the provinces of Liège and Luxembourg. Belgian residents working in France number 5,400. The main centre of cross-border work in the south is **Monaco**, with a workforce of 28,000 French residents (living in Côte-d'Azur), while there are still fewer Italian residents working in France than French residents working in **Italy** (450 and 1,500, respectively). Since recently, the number of French residents working in **Spain** (3,000) has outnumbered the number of Spanish residents travelling to work in France (2,000), while some one hundred French residents work in **Andorra**. A total of 240 residents of the Nord-Pas-de-Calais region work in the **United Kingdom**, a flow rendered possible by the channel tunnel.

Most of these flows (Luxembourg, Switzerland and Monaco) are generated by the relative availability of jobs, since unemployment levels are much higher on the French sides of these cross-border employment zones. While salary levels are also much higher outside of France (2 to 3 times higher in the countries mentioned), the jobs obtained generally require few qualifications, except in Geneva.

■ Complaint concerning a Franco-Spanish rail link transferred to the European Commission

The European Ombudsman has lodged a complaint with the European Commission on behalf of a Spanish association. The complaint concerns the French authorities' reluctance to reopen a rail link between the towns of Canfranc (Aragon) and Oloron (Aquitaine). The complainant has underlined the importance of this cross-border link in enabling the free movement of goods and persons between the two countries.

■ New publication

A brochure has been published to mark the 15th anniversary of the launch of the INTERREG initiative in the Upper Rhine area: *Interreg dans le Rhin supérieur : Dépasser les frontières projet après projet*.

For further details:

<http://sites.region-alsace.fr/Interreg>

SPOTLIGHT ON A SITE

Conférence TransJurassienne
<http://www.arcjurassien-ctj.org>

The Conférence TransJurassienne (CTJ) is an institutional cross-border consultative and collaborative body whose brief entails promoting homogeneous development in the Franco-Swiss "Arc Jurassien" area.

The www.arcjurassien-ctj.org site presents, among other things, details of the work conducted by the CTJ's thematic working groups and of the differences in institutional and administrative organisation in France and Switzerland.

In the press in June

■ From cross-border cooperation to employment - *La Voix du Nord*, 25 June

Franco-Belgian collaboration in the area of occupational training: AFPA and VDAB have decided to provide two training programmes for Belgian and French jobseekers [...]. For the tertiary sector, a course to train remote customer-service advisors...

■ The Belval reconversion is of national importance - *Le Quotidien*, 3 June

The exploratory debate in the Chamber of Deputies (Lux) on obsolete industrial zones shows the national and cross-border importance of the project...

■ Metz Métropole - Playing the cross-border card - *Le Nouvel Economiste*, 10 June

With its 213,000 inhabitants and 38 towns, Metz Métropole is keen to enhance its importance as a cross-border area. Two projects are set to further develop this already-open territory - the eastern TGV line (*TGV Est*) and the Pompidou Centre...

■ A cross-border flood-prevention tool - *Le Républicain Lorrain*, 20 June

A cross-border flood-prevention project is to be launched. By 2008, the project, which has been presented in Luxembourg, should allow enhanced management of flooding caused by the rivers Moselle, Sarre and Nahe...

■ The Ceva project "must go underground" - *Le Dauphiné Libéré*, 16 June

"All local and regional elected representatives are of the opinion that the project must go underground [*tunnels must be used - ed.*], in line with what our Swiss friends have done on their side", says Alain Coulombe. "Studies are being conducted to analyse various solutions..."

■ Biarritz airport platform to be managed by a European district - *Le Journal du Pays Basque*, 3 June

Boucau and Bidart are to join the community of municipalities, provided that the three BAB municipal councils agree. The Basque government is to be integrated into the European District for the purpose of managing Biarritz airport...

■ A boost for cross-border initiatives: the MOT calls for the faster action on projects - *Le Journal du Pays Basque*, 17 June

Transport and services need priority treatment - Jean-Jacques Lasserre has raised the question of trans-European transport networks, which has become a prickly subject in the Basque country, given that half of the transport flows between the peninsula and Northern Europe cross our territory...



Please do not hesitate to suggest subjects for articles in forthcoming issues.

Contact: +33 (0)1-55-80-56-86 - Subscriptions: domitille.ayral@mot.asso.fr

Photos: MOT and AEBK