

VIEWPOINT

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What does the establishment of a Eurodistrict bring to your area?



The establishment of a Eurodistrict has the advantage of providing an organizational framework for bringing the various institutional levels (municipalities, departments, region and state on the French side) together. Local authorities can pool their competencies and carry out French-German territorial cooperation projects on a larger scale. The municipalities, the initiators of the project, occupy a privileged position within the framework of the Freiburg region/Central and Southern Alsace Eurodistrict. Because of their closeness to the population, they want to implement actions creating effective added value for all the citizens. They are well placed to identify the institutional obstacles to mobility in the border area and are ready to propose practical solutions with a view to eliminating them.

The border effect and the related obstacles to mobility, despite the efforts made in recent years, still hamper full exploitation of the development potential of our French-German region. And this is far from negligible in the perspective of a possible increase of our competitiveness in an international context. We hope that the establishment of a Eurodistrict will provide a new stimulus to our territory and encourage the emergence of a genuine common territorial identity there.

What are the first projects backed by this Eurodistrict?

The priority projects identified by the Eurodistrict steering committee concern transport (Mulhouse-Freiburg rail link, Colmar-Breisach-Freiburg public transport link, Sélestat-Waldkirch shuttle bus), health (cross-border disability card, freedom of choice of in- and out-patient medical care), professional and between-schools training, exchanges between local public services, environmental education, mapping, provision of bilingual forms and the establishment of a collaborative platform.

New French-German Eurodistrict established

The cooperation agreement marking the establishment of a "Freiburg region/Central and Southern Alsace" Eurodistrict was signed on 5 July 2006 in Colmar. This second French-German Eurodistrict, following that of "Strasbourg-Ortenau", covers an area of 5197 sq. km with a population of 1,253,522. It comprises the Freiburg region (Landkreis Breisgau - Hochschwarzwald, Landkreis Emmendingen, Stadt Freiburg), the Pays de la Région Mulhousienne, the Pays Rhin-Vignoble-Grand Ballon, the Grand Pays de Colmar and the Pays de l'Alsace centrale.

This procedure was initiated in 2003 on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Élysée treaty governing French-German cooperation, when the French and German governments made a strong appeal for the establishment of Eurodistricts as a new form of cross-border cooperation.

In accordance with the Karlsruhe agreement, the signatories of the cooperation agreement* decided to establish a cross-border working community, the "Freiburg region/Central and Southern Alsace Eurodistrict". The missions of this community are "to intensify cross-border cooperation in new forms not covered by the Karlsruhe agreement". The objective is to "build a cross-border area that has a common territorial identity and work for coherent development of this area in the primary interest of its citizens, encouraging them to come together, while eliminating the border effect".

To accomplish this, the tasks of the new entity include:

- extending the missions of the Eurodistrict in consultation with the respective national authorities,
- establishing a legal personality for the Eurodistrict,
- developing, guiding, boosting and supporting specific projects with the aim of eliminating the



obstacles encountered by citizens in areas such as regional planning, sustainable development, transport, training, health and the economy.

The agreement has defined three working entities for the Eurodistrict: a steering committee, a technical working group and an advisory committee.

In the area covered, many cooperation organizations have already been established at intermunicipal and cross-border levels. The vocation of the new Eurodistrict is to complement this cooperation with practical projects, implemented at municipal level and close to the citizen. The objective is to generate genuine synergy between the existing levels and organizations.

At the signature, the partners emphasized the practical character of their mission. The work will involve both the political approach and the content.

** Colmar, Mulhouse, Sélestat and Guebwiller on the French side and Freiburg im Breisgau, Landkreis Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald and Landkreis Emmendingen on the German side.*

Closer cooperation between French and Italian nature protection areas

The five nature parks of Mont Viso* located between the Hautes-Alpes department and the Piedmont region are working to gain international recognition of their cross-border mountains. The topics of cooperation include the networking of their institutions, partnership in hiking trails and the development of a strategy of international recognition of the cross-border massif (proposal for UNESCO Man and Biosphere reserve status).

Within this framework, an Interreg project, "Visual identification system", is being conducted by the Piedmont region, the Mercantour national park and the Mont Viso parks. The principal objective is to create a common cross-border image.

The project comprises three strands:

- development of cross-border trails (upkeep, marking, information at passes),
- experimentation with visual identification systems (cross-border paths, common signing, publications, etc.)
- implementation of joint communication

(publication on cross-border trails and setting-up of an information point).

Another Interreg project, "Sittalp" (Alpine cross-border tourism system), is being conducted in the same field, with the Queyras park, the Queyras promotion office and the Comunità Montana Val Varaita working together. It aims to implement joint tourism upgrading and promotion strategies: restoration of cross-border trails, joint communication, instruments for evaluation of tourist numbers in the cross-border area, language training for tourism professionals, etc.

The first joint products of this project were introduced in summer 2006, including a cross-border tourist map available in four languages and "rando-liberté" packages (unguided hikes with baggage transfers).

** In France the Queyras regional nature park and in Italy the Po Trattò Cuneese, Orsiera Rocciavère, Val Tronca and Gran Bosco di Salbertrand nature parks.*



The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation

The regulation establishing the new European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) (no. 1082/2006) was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 31 July 2006. This new community instrument for trans-European cooperation will be used in the implementation of objective 3 "European territorial cooperation" in the new 2007-2013 European programming period.

Coming into force on 1 August, the regulation gives the member states one year to take the measures enabling its effective application.

Many amendments were made to the initial draft of 2004¹. They tend to align the EGTC with the common law on cross-border cooperation organizations resulting from inter-state agreements (local cross-border cooperation grouping on the France-Belgium, France-Luxembourg, France-Germany and France-Switzerland borders, Consorcio on the France-Spain border) or from French domestic law (European district).

The EGTC nevertheless differs on certain points that open up new prospects:

- The EGTC can be used over all European territory as a vehicle for cross-border, transnational or inter-regional cooperation measures. It covers all areas of cooperation between territories and public-sector players of different states within the European Union. Even participation by members from third countries is considered favourably by the regulation.
- Like all cooperation instruments, it has a broad purpose: "to act on behalf of its members". The European Commission wanted to give it a dual purpose: to implement a community programme (an area where there was not yet any "dedicated" entity) and to carry out a territorial cooperation project.
- The regulation gives preference to a broad partnership that extends beyond local authorities and their groupings. The ETGC is open to all "contracting authorities"², i.e. any legal entity under public law not carrying on an industrial or commercial activity, including the states and public-sector administrative establishments (universities, national nature parks, etc.). This broad partnership will enable new forms of cooperation in areas such as transport, health, education and the management of nature protection areas.
- The regulation specifies that the ETGC has legal personality. Given the extent of the topics and the scales of territory covered, the regulation lets the future members define its legal form and its administrative, operational and financial procedures in a convention and statutes.
- The ETGC is thus governed by the community regulation, its convention and its statutes and, for matters not covered by these texts, by the laws of the member state where the ETGC has its registered office (state to which at least one of the members belongs).

The participation of each member must be approved by the state under whose law it has been formed, which has three months to reach its decision based on the convention and the statutes adopted by the members. The possible reasons for withholding approval are specified by the regulation (provisions not in conformity with national law or with the regulation, or against the public interest) and the state must give its reasons for withholding approval.

To discuss the content of the regulation, the prospects opened up by this new instrument and its potential application to cross-border matters, the MOT is organizing a seminar on Thursday 16 November 2006 in Metz, with the participation of the Prefecture of the Lorraine region. For further information, go to www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu.

¹ Refer to "Cross-Border News" no. 10, December 2004, available at www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu.

² Within the meaning of directive 2004/18 on public contracts.

■ Interform - Seminar on "Methodology for setting up cross-border projects in public health"

This "test" seminar, organized by the MOT and the Kehl Euro-Institut on 25 and 26 October in Kehl as part of the Interform project, a European network of training and research on cross-border practices (funded by the INTERACT programme), is on the management of cross-border projects in health cooperation.

It will be of interest to public health professionals, health cooperation entities, cross-border cooperation managers and researchers. It will produce a teaching pack enabling the transfer of know-how to other borders.

For further information, contact Concetta Mundo-Atif, Interform project leader, on +33 (0)1 55 80 56 87.

■ 9th European Conference of local enterprises

This conference is organized by the CEEP in liaison with the Fédération des Sem on 31 October in Brussels on the topic "European legislations on local public-sector enterprises: threats or opportunities?"

For further information: www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu

■ Sambre-Avesnois - Publication of a practical guide for cross-border workers

The Sambre-Avesnois ANPE (French national employment service) and the FOREM (Walloon public employment and professional training service) in Mons are publishing a brochure entitled "Une approche transfrontalière". It is a practical aid for border workers (job opportunities, procedures, contacts, etc.).

For further information, contact the Sambre-Avesnois ANPE or the FOREM (www.forem.be).

Press review

■ Saarbrücken conference: Danuta Hübner emphasizes "the key role of border regions in the community strategy for employment and growth", Inforegio press release, 5 July

"Danuta Hübner, commissioner for regional policy, spoke in Saarbrücken, Germany, on how cross-border cooperation can help border regions to take up the challenges with which they can be confronted and achieve higher growth and a larger number of quality jobs..."

■ Longwy joins up with the towns of Luxembourg, Esch and Arlon, *Le Républicain lorrain*, 12 July

"The mayors and burgomasters of Longwy, Arlon, Esch-sur-Alzette and the city of Luxembourg have launched a new network of towns, "Lela". [...] This launch strengthens the west of the existing "QuattroPole" in the greater region between Luxembourg, Trier, Saarbrücken and Metz..."

■ Menton - Employment: the first Italian curriculum vitae is born!, *Nice-Matin*, 17 July

"Encourage the mobility of young people between France and Italy: that is the objective of the Riviera project set up by various partners, the Provincia d'Imperia and the French Ministry of Education via the FIPAN PIG. Flagship measure of this plan: the creation of a CV understandable on both sides of the border..."

■ Coustouges - Forest fires: cross-border prevention, *L'Indépendant*, 1 July

"An important meeting [...] was held in the hall of honour in the town hall. Jean-Marie Malignon, mayor of the municipality, hosted [...] on the topic of the drafting of a "forest fire risk prevention plan" for the Vallespir-Alta Garrotxa cross-border territory..."

■ Motorways of the sea, press release from the Ministry of Infrastructure, 27 July

"On 26 July Dominique Perben, minister of Transport, Infrastructure, Tourism and the Sea, and Magdalena Álvarez Arza, Spanish minister of infrastructure, inaugurated the French-Spanish intergovernmental commission tasked with submitting to them a selection of projects for motorways of the sea on the Atlantic-Channel-North Sea seaboard."