



VIEWPOINT

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What are the major advances with the establishment of this trinational Eurodistrict?

After 8 December 1995, date on which the political leaders of the Basle trinational conurbation decided together to build "a future for three", 26 January 2007 will go down as another milestone. The establishment of the Basle Trinational Eurodistrict is effectively a very important advance which will strengthen our trinational living and economic space.

The objective is also to promote the identification of people with the cross-border territory and thus encourage the emergence of a common identity. The multiplication of cooperation organizations has generated a feeling of confusion in the population. Bringing them together and putting forward an overall and consistent vision for the territory will also give greater weight at political level to make the changes necessary for cooperation in each country, in Berne, Paris and Berlin. The objective is of course to facilitate cooperation, not to harmonize and eliminate the differences and particularities that are in fact our strength and our identity.

Another advance, which will also encourage this acceptance by the population, is to propose a stronger democratic basis, with the inclusion of an advisory board consisting of 15 German members, 20 Swiss members and 15 French members, all holders of elected public office. This board will be consulted on the major issues and will be able to put forward motions, policy statements and resolutions. It met for the first time on 23 March.

The last important point is the fact that the Eurodistrict will enable more effective and more comprehensive management of cross-border cooperation. This is based on solid foundations, since we have already achieved and invested a lot with the work done over the last few years by the Basle Trinational Conurbation, in areas such as spatial planning, urban planning and transport (the Regio-S-Bahn link, for example). Now, with the Eurodistrict, the range of topics dealt with will be much broader, extending to cover health and quality of life, training, the economy, the environment and culture, for example. The more cross-functional topic of sustainable development also has a strong presence. In fact, cross-border cooperation is in itself a factor of sustainable development. We are conducting projects developing renewable and hydroelectric energy (the largest site in Europe is located at Rheinfelden), or which help to control global warming, etc.

Establishment of the Basle Trinational Eurodistrict

The first French-German-Swiss trinational Eurodistrict was officially established on 26 January 2007 in Saint-Louis. It encompasses 830,000 inhabitants around the Basle conurbation.

Located at the heart of the French-German-Swiss upper Rhine region, at the point of convergence with north-west Switzerland and the Rhine-Rhone conurbation space, the Basle trinational conurbation (ATB) is characterized by a fragmentation of decision-making and political bodies and by a substantial cross-border socioeconomic network.

In 2006, the elected representatives of this territory decided to transform the association ATB (established in 2001) into a trinational Eurodistrict, with the aim of boosting cooperation and making it more effective and more transparent.

The Eurodistrict, which brings together all the cooperation organizations (ATB, the Conurbation Conference and the INFOBEST PALMRAIN training and consultancy body), is an association formed under the conditions of the local law on associations of Haut-Rhin, Bas-Rhin and Moselle. Its registered office is located in France, at the Maison Trirhena Palmrain in Village-Neuf. It comprises three political



bodies: an assembly of representatives of all the members of the association, a management committee with eight members per country, and an advisory board. The cooperation perimeter has been extended and now encompasses 62 municipalities and municipality communities.

The objective of the new entity is to develop cooperation between the local authorities and the inter-municipality associations of the whole cross-border conurbation and promote bi- and trinational projects of direct benefit to the population. It must also prepare a cross-border strategy, and will thus be an important step towards joint governance procedures at trinational level.

An EGTC for organizing transport in the France-Vaud-Geneva conurbation

On 23 February 2007, the French and Swiss local authorities signed a cooperation agreement introducing joint governance for cross-border public transport.

To meet the travel needs of the inhabitants of the cross-border area in a sustainable manner, the partners undertook to "plan, coordinate, develop and organize the provision of cross-border public transport" in the entire France-Vaud-Geneva conurbation.

Faced with the very strong economic and demographic growth of the Geneva urban area and the volume of border worker flows, the need for an official cross-border public transport organization is now recognised by everyone. Of the 500,000 persons who cross the border each day (45% with Haute-Savoie and 20% with Pays de Gex), only 2 to 5% use public transport, because of inadequate infrastructure. The repercussions in terms of pollution and nuisances related to increased road traffic can no longer be ignored. Since 1980 the road traffic crossing the border over the conurbation as a whole has doubled, for example, now amounting to almost 350,000 cars per day.

The agreement of 23 February was signed to respond to these issues. It is based on the establishment of a strategy committee and a cooperation structure: a local grouping for cross-border cooperation² (LGCC).

The committee is a forum for sharing and discussion on the coordination of transport networks and on the development and planning of an integrated cross-border network. It will also work on a uniform fare structure and joint promotion.

The LGCC will be tasked with organizing the cross-border transport routes and with their operation, administration, marketing and fare system. Other tasks may be assigned to it by the strategy committee. The establishment of an LGCC also solves one of the major difficulties in setting-up cross-border routes, since it allows the issuing of cross-border calls for tenders.

In addition, the 1951 Franco-Swiss agreement prohibiting cabotage was amended by the two states in January 2007 to allow unrestricted carriage of passengers throughout the cross-border territory.

¹ Rhône-Alpes region, Ain and Haute-Savoie departments, the municipality communities of the Annemasse conurbation, the Genevois and the Pays de Gex, and Geneva and Vaud cantons.

² The LGCC, establishment of which has been possible since the extension of the Karlsruhe agreement to the French-Swiss border in 2004, is a juristic person under public law with legal capacity and budgetary autonomy.

Legislative changes in the pipeline to facilitate cooperation on French borders



On 24 January in France, on the occasion of its first reading of the bill on experimental transfer of the management of structural funds, the Senate voted for a more ambitious scheme reorganizing the instruments for cross-border and inter-regional cooperation through a series of major amendments.*

Abolition of the public interest grouping

The 1992 act provided for the introduction of this legal structure, dedicated to the management of European community funding within the Interreg programme framework. As this entity has been of rather modest success, the Senate decided to abolish it, while maintaining the

existing such groupings (PIGs) until the ends of their terms. Only two PIGs have been established: the Transalpes PIG (Interreg IIC South-West) in January 1996 for a period of 4 years, and the Saarland-Moselle-Westpfalz PIG (Interreg IIIA) in November 2004 for 5 years.

Membership or participation of a French local authority or grouping in an entity governed by foreign law

Such membership was rendered possible by the outline act of 4 February 1995 for spatial planning and development, on condition that a local authority or grouping of a European border state or a European Union member state also participated in the entity. Participation was also subject to an authorization granted by a decree of the Conseil d'État. The act of 13 August 2004 on local freedoms and responsibilities replaced the decree procedure by a scheme of authorization delivered by order of the prefect of the region.

The amendment voted by the Senate on 24 January 2007 goes further and extends to all French local authorities and their groupings the possibility, "in compliance with the international undertakings of France and within the scope of their competencies", to join or contribute to the capital of a juristic person under foreign law in which at least one authority or grouping of a European state participates.

Implementation in French law of the European grouping for territorial cooperation (EGTC)

This implementation follows the European Community regulation of 5 July 2006. The Senate has voted the measures to transpose this new legal instrument into French law in article L. 1115-4-2 of the CGCT (general code for local authorities), which stipulates:

- for groupings (EGTC) which have their registered office in France, prior authorization from the prefect of the region for their establishment and application of the rules for open joint associations, along with the possibility for a public establishment, as for a member state, to join such groupings, the government nevertheless having the power to dissolve them by documented decree of the Conseil des ministres (cabinet);
- For EGTCs which have their registered office in another member state, the possibility for French local authorities and their groupings to join or contribute to the capital, subject only to obtaining prior authorization from the prefect of the region.

Consequently, the Senate redrafted article L. 1115-5 in order to waive the prohibition on French local authorities making agreements with foreign states, but only in the case of the establishment of an EGTC. These provisions have not come into effect since the bill has yet to be voted by the new national assembly which will meet after the legislative election in June 2007.

* Extracts from the 2004-2006 activity report of the Senate Delegation of the decentralized cooperation office.

■ Establishment of a Euro-regional conference on the French-Spanish Basque coast

With members including the French state, the Aquitaine region, the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department, the Conseil des Élus du Pays basque, the Diputació de Gipuzkoa and the Euskadi autonomous community, this "standing committee", established on 1 March, brings together all the competencies concerning the daily life of the inhabitants of the cross-border region.

It does not replace the existing cooperation frameworks but rather strengthens them. The aim is to "give concrete answers to questions of joint interest for the territory" and "facilitate the implementation of agreed public policies in the areas of immediate local interest".

It has a plenary conference (political level), a managing committee and a technical unit.

The priority topics concern mobility (transport, language learning and telephony), the environment (water, waste, coast and mountain), training, technology transfer and industrial development, and finally the improvement of public services (including in the area of health).

■ First cross-border geographical information system for the upper Rhine

This information system, available on line at www.sigrs-gisor.org, gives access to maps and information on the environment, transport, land use, statistics and health.

Press review

■ Delayed start for the Franco-British cooperation space, *Localtis*, 15 March

"The Franco-British cross-border cooperation space (formerly space Interreg IIIA) has been extensively reworked. Its management is split into two operational programmes. An update on the new features and the predicted delays..."

■ French and Belgians sign an agreement on tax arrangements for cross-border workers, *La Voix du Nord*, 15 March

"An end to uncertainty for tens of thousands of cross-border workers: the French and Belgian governments have reached agreement on the amendment of their tax arrangements..."

■ Railway bridge over the Rhine, *Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace*, 23 February

"The Senate, following the National Assembly, has ratified the French-German agreement on the construction of a railway bridge over the Rhine between Strasbourg and Kehl, intended to interconnect the high-speed networks of the two countries..."

■ The French should be able to finance the CEVA, *Le Temps*, 7 February

"The French government has accepted the principle of a supplementary budget contribution to finance the CEVA (rail link connecting the stations of Cornavin-Eaux-Vives-Annemasse). This supplement of about 5 million euros, in addition to the 15 million already accepted, will enable the construction of the Annemasse cut and cover section..."

■ Free online training courses with the Ticaderu project, *La nouvelle République des Pyrénées*, 10 March

"The joint association of the Lannemezan plateau and the Neste, Barousse and Baronnies valleys, chaired by Maurice Loudet, in partnership with the Comarca des Monegros (Aragon-Spain), is implementing the Ticaderu (information and communication technologies applied to rural development) cross-border project... www.ticaderu.com"

■ The Sègre: a river without borders, *L'Indépendant*, 24 February

"The protagonists of the Sègre project met recently in Puigcerda at the Consell Comarca de la Cerdanya to present their project..."