



## Andy Pollak

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**What are the issues at stake in cross-border cooperation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland?**

Cross-border cooperation with the Republic of Ireland is one of the real success stories of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Until the past decade, Northern Ireland's unionist majority had been deeply suspicious of cooperation with the Republic, fearing that it would be the first step in a process which would eventually lead them into a united Ireland.

However one consequence of the new era of greater cross-border cooperation brought about by peace has been a huge increase in trade and business cooperation between the North and South of the island, with beneficial effects for the Northern Ireland economy and employment. Even the most hard-line unionists have come to understand that their region can only gain from greater interaction with the so-called "Celtic Tiger" economy in the Republic of Ireland, one of the fastest-growing in the world over the past decade.

**What are the flagship cross-border projects?**

This cooperation has been marked by a number of flagship projects: the upgrading of the Dublin-Belfast rail line with smart new French trains; the opening of a new canal to link the Shannon river basin in the Republic with the Fermanagh lakes region in the North; the establishment of a single all-island wholesale electricity market; the allocation of over €500 million euro in Irish government money to improve road links inside Northern Ireland; and an agreement to treat the north-west of the island as a single cross-border region for some planning purposes.

The historic significance of this new high level of cooperation was underlined earlier this month by the sight of the hard-line unionist Northern Ireland First Minister, Rev Ian Paisley, joining with the outgoing Irish Prime Minister, Bertie Ahern, to launch a tourist centre near Dublin at the site of a famous battle between Protestant and Catholic armies over 300 years ago, a victory for the British Protestant monarchy which would become a symbol of the deep divisions in Ireland.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies on the Ireland/Northern Ireland border

## A Centre for Cooperation comes out of the Irish conflict

*The Centre for Cross Border Studies was founded in 1999, a year after the Belfast Agreement, which laid the foundations for the end of more than 30 years of civil conflict in Northern Ireland.*

One of the core elements of that agreement was that the Irish government and the new UK regional administration in Northern Ireland – an unprecedented coalition between pro-British Unionists and Sinn Fein, the political party of the IRA – would begin to cooperate closely through new cross-border bodies and inter-ministerial meetings in areas like the economy, tourism, agriculture, health, education, transport and the environment.

Following this agreement, a group of educationalists persuaded several universities and further education bodies in Dublin and Belfast to support the foundation of a new centre to be dedicated to researching and developing practical cooperation between the two parts of Ireland. This was set up in the small cathedral city of Armagh, close to the Irish border, largely with EU funding.

In the past nine years the Centre for Cross Border Studies has worked hard to support increased inter-governmental cross-border cooperation by providing complementary research, development, training and ICT services. It has carried out cross-border



Team of the Centre for Cross Border Studies

research projects in everything from health, education and local government services to telecom technologies, animal disease, and labour mobility. It has begun training the hundreds of government officials who for the first time must cooperate on a daily basis with their counterparts across the border.

It has provided the management support necessary to run new all-Ireland networks of university rectors, teacher training colleges and spatial planning institutes. And it has set up new websites to provide public access to comprehensive information about cross-border cooperation in Ireland ([www.borderireland.info](http://www.borderireland.info)) and practical information for people wishing to cross the Irish border to work, study or retire ([www.borderpeople.info](http://www.borderpeople.info)).

## A cross-border URBACT project

**The first URBACT projects for the 2007-2013 period were published on 18 April 2008, following their selection by the programme monitoring committee. They cover twenty-four topic-based networks and seven working groups. The MOT is leader of the EGTC project "Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations", one of the seven working groups.**

URBACT is a European programme which aims to encourage the sharing of experiences between European cities and to disseminate knowledge on sustainable urban development.

The EGTC project will last for twenty-four months. It comprises four partners at present (MOT, Lille metropolitan urban community and the cities of Görlitz in Germany and Slubice in Poland), but will expand to a total of six to eight partners at the end of the first phase (May to August 2008).

The project concerns cross-border conurbations. These require a specific approach enabling them to overcome the limits imposed by national borders.

The partners will work on the promotion of innovative governance instruments on a sample of cross-border conurbations in Europe. They will identify the relevant protagonists and analyse how the cross-border conurbations develop joint diagnostics, strategies and organisation plans. The objective is to identify best practices, define a methodology and analyse how the structural funds, other public funding and legal instruments (such as the EGTC) can be used to help them in their development. Recommendations will be drafted and submitted to the political levels concerned.



Nestos River Project: Platanovrisi dam between Greece and Bulgaria - Interreg project

## Developing cross-border cooperation in the Balkans

*The first regional conference on cross-border cooperation, sustainable development, territories and decentralised cooperation in the Balkans will take place on 3 and 4 July 2008 in Sofia, Bulgaria. This first event of the French Presidency of the European Union will be attended by local elected representatives from fifteen countries as well as a wide range of protagonists on European and international levels and from the non-profit and non-governmental sectors. Nearly 250 participants are expected.*

The conference is organised by a committee with members from all the French territorial authorities undertaking actions in the Balkans, with support from the French Embassy in Sofia, the Délégation pour l'action extérieure des collectivités locales (French Ministry of

foreign and European affairs) and Sofia city council, in partnership with several associations including the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière.

This conference will give French territorial authorities the opportunity to meet their counterparts from South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Montenegro, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia) and from Turkey. Austria, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Slovenia and Rumania are also attending the event as observers.

The event also aims to encourage the emergence of bilateral and regional cooperation projects on relevant topics for the territorial authorities: protection of the environment, cross-border cooperation, training of local elected representatives, sustainable development, European funding, heritage preservation, social action.

The two-day programme includes plenary sessions, workshops and forums.

### Workshop: "Cross-border cooperation: neighbourhood relations in cross-border living areas"

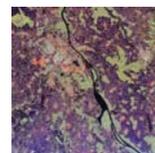
The second workshop of the conference is organised by MOT. Its aim will be to show how cross-border cooperation contributes to developing the key role of these border territories, which are peaceful links between the states and occupy the forward positions in European integration.

The workshop will present a few concrete experiences of cooperation on French borders and between the Balkan countries. It will cover the financial, legal and methodological contexts for the development of cross-border projects. The concluding discussion will enable a sharing of views on "aid for the emergence of local cross-border projects".

**Further information:** [www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/cncd](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/cncd)

### Michel Delebarre succeeds Pierre Mauroy as MOT president

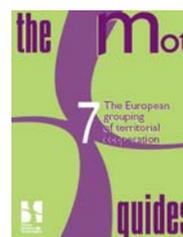
Michel Delebarre, MP and mayor of Dunkerque, president of the Dunkerque Urban Community and the Syndicat Mixte de la Côte d'Opale, and first vice-president of the Committee of the Regions, was elected president of the MOT at the General Assembly on 29 May 2008. He succeeds Pierre Mauroy, former French prime minister, who was MOT president from 2001 to 2008. [www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu](http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu)



### "Cross-border territories: day-to-day Europe"

The **Proceedings** of the European conference in Lille organised by MOT on 8 and 9 November 2007 have just been published, in French and in English.

The **Manifesto for cross-border cooperation in Europe** has also been published, in French, English and German. It is a document of policy recommendations produced by the twelve workshops of the Lille conference.



The new issue of the MOT Guides, on the **European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC)**, is now available, in French and in English.

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## Press review

- **Hospitals without borders between the Ardennes and Wallonia**, Les Échos, 9 May  
*"Choose the nearest hospital while ignoring the borders. That is now possible for persons with state health insurance residing in the 18 cantons of the northern French Ardennes, along the border with Belgium, and those living in the Walloon provinces of Namur and Luxembourg..."*
- **The Region commits to Esh-Belval**, Le Républicain lorrain, 29 April  
*"The regional council is prepared to co-finance the Audun-le-Tiche and Villerupt bypasses, in a scheme involving the French State, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, the European Union and the Meurthe-et-Moselle and Moselle departments..."*
- **Projects for a cross-border metropolis**, Le Moniteur, 25 April  
*"The international event IBA Basel 2010-2020 will mark the opening of the Swiss city of Basle to its French and German neighbours by means of broad-based discussions between clients, architects and private-sector protagonists..."*
- **A cross-border research centre on sustainable development**, Nice Matin, 23 April  
*"Unity is strength. The University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis (UNSA) is convinced of it. Moreover, it has recently applied the saying by joining forces with the universities of Turin, Genoa, Corte in Corsica, Sud-Toulon and the University Pierre-et-Marie-Curie to establish a research and higher education centre (PRES) on the environment and sustainable development..."*
- **Italy-France trains: J-C Guibal complains to the SNCF**, Nice Matin, 29 April  
*"Jean-Claude Guibal, MP for Alpes-Maritimes and mayor of Menton, has contacted the regional management of the SNCF and Trenitalia to complain about the problems of connections between French and Italian services encountered by the users in the Roya valley..."*
- **The Pyrenees Working Community launched**, L'Indépendant, 23 April  
*"168 million euros from Europe: that is the envelope to be spent by 2013. More than 900 delegates - the organisers were expecting 500 - met at the end of last week in Montpellier for the seminar launching the Spain-France-Andorra territorial cooperation programme..."*
- **Regional nature park ready to hatch**, La Dépêche du Midi, 24 April  
*"After a dozen long years of preparation, the project for a regional nature park in the Ariège Pyrenees is entering its final phase..."*

