Wim Weijnen

Director General of the Province of Limburg (Netherlands)

Meuse-Rhine Euregio (EMR) was one of the first Euregions formed in Europe. What do you make of these past thirty years of activity?

First of all I would like to point out the specificity of EMR in relation to other Euroregions: it incorporates not only three countries but also five different cultures. Cross-border cooperation is therefore more delicate and the projects which have been implemented over these thirty years have been mostly of an irregular and temporary nature, notably in the areas of culture and tourism, although nowadays things are tending to change.

Among the most striking projects we can highlight a project from ten years ago, the object of which was to set up trails and cross-border infrastructures for cyclists. There was also a trail established in 2005 in three different languages , "The Meuse Castles", covering a route which went from Givet in France to Venlo in the Netherlands.

What are the prospects for the Meuse-Rhine Euregio, what projects are being envisaged for the medium/long term ?

As I mentioned, cooperation in the Euregio is making progress, now moving from occasional and relatively limited projects to more structural projects within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy. These high added value projects concern several areas: firstly, education with close cooperation between the Sart-Tilman university of Liège, the Rhineland-Westphalia Technical University (RWTH) in Aachen and the University of Maastricht. These three universities wish in the years ahead to establish official and mutual recognition of diplomas. Another significant project is the formation of a cardio-vascular centre, fruit of the close cooperation that exists between Aachen and Maastricht.

As far as culture is concerned the step towards a higher level is symbolised by the fact that one of the objectives for the years to come is to obtain the nomination of one of the Euregio's towns to be the European capital of culture.

Another major project concerns mobility: an agreement has been concluded between the three States of Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany to devise an infrastructural plan concerning the road networks, public transport, etc., beyond national borders. With regard to this topic and other topics the expertise of the MOT which we have just joined, will no doubt be extremely useful.

The Meuse-Rhine Euregio wishes to improve its competitiveness while remaining close to its citizens

"Togetherness in diversity", a challenge for the Euregio

The Meuse-Rhine Euregio (EMR), formed in 1976, represents one of the oldest partnerships in Europe. With its 3.9 million inhabitants and shared by three countries and five cultures, it is now and more than ever before looking to the future.

The Meuse-Rhine Euregio, with a surface area of 10,700km², consists of five partner regions: the south of the Province of Limburg (Netherlands), the Province of Limburg (Belgium), the Province of Liège (Belgium), the Regio Aachen (Germany) and the German-speaking community of Belgium.

The objective of the Euregio at its formation in 1976 was to re-establish the relations within its territory unified by Charlemagne, only to be somewhat randomly separated in the 19th century by national borders.

In 1991 the EMR was provided with a legal status by way of the establishment of a "Stichting", a foundation under Dutch law, the objective of which is to facilitate and structure the steps of cooperation. At the head of this foundation is a steering Committee composed of representatives from the five regions responsible for the allocation of budgets, assessment of ongoing programmes and the impulse required for the drawing up of projects. This Committee supervises a permanent Bureau. Since 1995, an advisory body, the Euroregional Council (81 members from five regions) assists the foundation by issuing official opinions and reports.

The steering Committee and the Euroregional Council meet three or four times a year in four commissions: an "economy, middle classes,

Maastricht in the Netherlands - Headquarters of the EMR Stichting

technology, training, qualification and labour market" commission, a second "nature, environment and transport" commission, a third "youth, culture, teaching and regional identity" commission and a final "health, social affairs and safety and security" commission.

In November 2007, the steering Committee approved a "vision document" entitled "*The Meuse-Rhine Euregio: a look beyond the horizon".* This document presents EMR's strategic vision and operational policy, which is endeavouring to place itself in Europe as a region specialised in creative and technological know-how. In addition to this, the first Interreg 4A projects have just been approved. For this new programming period, the accent is focused on innovation, energy and research. The SIS (Sustainable Industry Sites) project for example addresses the development of renewable energies.

This impulse should help the Euroregion improve its competitiveness and ability to compete with other dynamic regions in Europe.

Cooperation between two French and Italian parks

Located between the department of Alpes-Maritimes and the Province of Cuneo, the National Park of Mercantour and the Natural Park of Alpi Marittime have been actively cooperating since their twinning in 1987. There has been a step forward in this partnership with the project to form a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) by the end of this year.

The year 2008 marks the end of four Interreg 3 projects: the first concerned the pursuit of a common visual identity and the restoration of the cross-border Larche/Maddalena pass. Another project addressed the edition in June 2008 of a "Common technical restoration handbook" for cross-border paths. A third, inspired by the "European Sustainable Tourism Charter", has led to a number of actions encouraging this type of tourism with the establishment, for example, of Educ-tours*. The last project consisted of an action plan defining the modalities of future work to be carried out in common by both parks.

The epitome of this cooperation is the project to form an EGTC, the purpose of which will be to help manage European funding and to set up a strong legal structure between the two parks in order to organise and secure the continuation of actions.

As far as the 2007-2013 programming period is concerned, an ICD (Integrated Cross-border Dossier) has been submitted. It contains a number of projects such as a common biological census or the promotion of cross-border heritage, often little-known. The parks also wish to strengthen their support to agriculture-related activities, especially "agritourism". The development of renewable energies, "soft modes of transport" (rambling, bicycle, train) and rendering access to the parks easier for the disabled have also been put forward.

* Trips and circuits for tourism professionals to test before they are offered to the public.

EUROMOT actions in 2008

The conference-debate which took place on May 28, 2008 in Saarbrücken, within the framework of the MOT general assembly, addressed the implementation of EUROMOT. Formed on 8 November 2007 in Lille on the occasion of the European conference "Cross-border territories: Day-to-day Europe", the European network of cross-border local authorities highlights five landmark events presented in its action programme for 2008.

Conference-debate on EUROMOT, 28 May at the town hall in Saarbrücken, Germany.

EUROMOT today consists of the City Twins Network[1], Eixo Atlantico[2] and the MOT. Its action programme for 2008 is as follows:

At the beginning of 2008, two European projects aimed at supporting EUROMOT actions were submitted :
- An **Interreg 4C project** was submitted on 15 January 2008. The main goals of this project are to support EUROMOT activities. These will concern operational assistance to projects, studies, training and research concerning of cross-border cooperation, networking (exchange of good practices, seminars, production of guides, etc.) and the interface between the local and the European level. The aim is to bring together European actors in the area of cooperation to promote the development of employment areas and cross-border territories.
- An **Urbact project** called "Expertising Governance for Trans-border Conurbations" (EGTC) was also submitted (and approved in the initial phase on April 18). The lead partner will be the MOT and the other partners include seven cross-border conurbations in Europe, the objective being to capitalise on good practices and promote innovative governance tools on a sample of European cross-border conurbations.

As regards the **strategic alliance between EUROMOT and AEBR**, Martín Guillermo-Ramirez recalled, on the occasion of the conference debate of May 28, that EUROMOT and AEBR will be able to cooperate within the framework of seminars and joint events. He quoted the example of health cooperation as a primary theme of cooperation (following the "Health" workshop at the conference in Lille, joint production in terms of cross-border health cooperation, etc.).

The **Manifesto for cross-border cooperation in Europe**, a strategic document of practical recommendations to help cross-border cooperation advance on twelve major topics (resulting from twelve workshops at the Lille conference) has been officially presented to national and European authorities. It has also been widely disseminated, in Europe.

As regards the development of EUROMOT, a **three-year strategic programme** is being defined, which is to serve as a basis for its organisation (definition of members, operating procedures and budget). A constitutive assembly should be organised in early 2009 to give form to this European network of cross-border local authorities.

*Nota bene: the MOT also takes part in events pertaining to the **European Union Presidencies**. Within the framework of the current French Presidency, it organised the workshop on cross-border cooperation during the first regional conference on cross-border cooperation, sustainable development, territories and decentralised cooperation in the Balkans on 3 and 4 July in Sofia, Bulgaria (see Cross-border News no. 41, May 2008). It also participates in a number of strategic preparatory meetings aimed at enhancing the consideration of cross-border issues.*

[1] Network of twin cities involving Germany, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden, Finland and Russia.
[2] Network of border towns between the North of Portugal and Galicia in Spain.

French Presidency of the European Union

France, succeeding Slovenia to the Presidency of the European Union in a somewhat difficult political setting after Ireland's rejection of the Lisbon Treaty and the decision by Poland not to ratify it, wants to promote **a territorial cohesion policy which takes into account "the specificities of each territory"**. Hubert Falco, French Secretary of State for Spatial Planning, has announced three priorities in terms of spatial planning: "the future of the economic and social cohesion policy", "territorial cohesion" and "the territorial agenda and the Urban Development Charter". He pointed out regarding territorial cohesion, that it "should mean better consideration of the specific nature of European territories" and that "only if we manage to achieve this territorial cohesion in the whole of European territory will we make of the European Union the most competitive area in the world". EUROMOT will be able to contribute with its experience in terms of cross-border specificity.

A number of events will be organised in the autumn to discuss these issues. For further information see www.ue2008.fr.

"Europe of citizens lagging behind" according to Alain Lamassoure

The MEP, Alain Lamassoure, submitted to the president of the French Republic on July 25, a report on "citizens and the enforcement of community law" which identifies the shortcomings of a "Europe of citizens lagging behind" while ten million citizens live in a European country other than their own. He puts forward 61 proposals to "make Europeans' lives easier".

The MOT is recruiting a junior project manager "network/communication". Info on www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu

Press review

An airport and a cross-border exhibition centre?, Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 2 July
"Created in 2003-2004 during the era of Keller-Grossmann, Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict has reached a turning point: its new French spokesperson, Roland Ries, and his German counterpart, Wolfgang Müller, wish to provide it with a special legal and fiscal status, based on the "co-decision principle"…"

Transport: a single fare soon on the border between France, Germany and Switzerland?, Localtis, 7 July
"The Interreg 4A Upper Rhine cross-border cooperation programme has already selected seventeen projects, among which one is proposing a single transport fare in the region of the three German, French and Swiss borders…"

Swiss cross-border workers are not in cross-border statistics, Tribunal de Genève, 10 July
"The Swiss settled in neighbouring France are not accounted for in cross-border statistics. […] OCSTAT confirms and points out that a survey to give a more precise number of the Swiss and of people with dual citizenship living across the border is under way in close cooperation with INSEE…"

A Franco-Spanish consortium for the management of the Aragnouet-Bilesa tunnel, Le Moniteur, 20 June
"The Hautes-Pyrénées department and the autonomous government of Aragon have recently formed a consortium for the management, conservation and operation of the Aragnouet-Bielsa border tunnel…"

Electrical interconnection: "historic" French-Spanish agreement, Europe Information Service, 9 July
"France and Spain have concluded an agreement on the construction of an electrical connection over the Pyrenees. On 27 June in Saragossa the Spanish Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and his French counterpart, François Fillon, accepted the idea of an electrical interconnection…"

These communities which cross the borders, La Gazette des Communes, 7 July
"For a long time Roussillon respected its French borders. Until it remembered its Catalan roots and became aware of all the synergies to be envisaged with its southern neighbour…"