



Gyula Ocskay

Executive manager
Ister-Granum Euroregion
Development Agency Ltd



What are the challenges of the development of the Ister-Granum Euroregion ?

The Ister-Granum Euroregion is situated in the Slovak-Hungarian border area. It was created by 102 local authorities in 2003, of which 85 (46 Hungarian and 39 Slovak) have established the second EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) in the European Union. We see this new instrument as a very important support capable of revolutionizing the world of cross-border cooperation. As a common legal personality it will have its own institutions and enterprises. We intend to establish a euroregional tourist destination management system with networks of experts, and a joint energy agency which should help the transition to renewable resources in the whole region. We would like to organize our healthcare and public transport system on a euroregional level as well. The EGTC is a stable legal and financial basis for these initiatives.

We also have an experiment in the area of cohesion. The 'capital' of the EGTC, the city of Esztergom, has set up a Solidarity Fund based on the local income taxes (approx. 16 million euros in 2007) of the town. It is a fund to help under-resourced towns and villages within the EGTC area, located on both sides of the border, to realize their own aims.

Our strength is the participation of NGOs in the regional work. There are 1100 NGOs working in the Euroregion. In 2006 we established a regional parliament of NGOs. The executive board of the parliament (six persons) is taking part in the work of the regional development council. The hardest aspect of our work is the traditional point of view of the national administration.

What do you expect from the "EGTC" URBACT project ?

The EGTC project is a learning process for us. I have often said that it is the same as when a young person used to the soccer pitch of a housing estate can play a match in the Bernabeu stadium. We are now getting to know how the Euroregions in Western Europe are working, what kind of experiences they have, how they communicate with the EU institutions. The project is dealing with a really exciting topic: how to build cross-border structures that help the peripheral regions. This kind of approach requires a brand new outlook on the space organized around us, and courage. Courage, because this approach opposes the traditional, national citizenship-based sense of sovereignty. However, I am sure it is the approach of the future.

Promoting innovative governance tools for cross-border conurbations

Cross-border conurbations are at the heart of the territorial cohesion issues currently under discussion by the French Presidency and the European Commission. The EGTC (Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations) project, which has just been approved by the URBACT programme, concerns the promotion of innovative governance tools for structuring and developing them. The launch conference of the project will take place on the 19th November 2008 at the European Parliament in Strasbourg.*

More than 60 cross-border conurbations have been identified in Europe. Astride two or even three borders, they are "laboratories" of territorial integration, spaces of convergence of national policies and places where "European citizenship" is lived day-by-day by the inhabitants. The main challenge of cooperation for them is to give concrete answers to the needs of the inhabitants in fields such as urban planning, transport, public services, economic development, environment, health, etc. For this purpose, they may establish cross-border governance tools bringing together the relevant stakeholders (public and private) and implementing common work programmes.

Therefore, the objective of the EGTC project is to analyze the development of the cross-border conurbations, in order to identify best practices and define « governance models ». These models could be developed in the new Member States. The project also aims to study how the European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) could become a European tool of reference to support governance of cross-border agglomerations.



European picnic in the "Jardin des Deux-Rives" between Strasbourg and Kehl

The project brings together seven partners: the MOT as Lead Partner, Lille Métropole Urban Community (for the Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, France/Belgium), the City of Slubice (for the Frankfurt (Oder)/Slubice conurbation, Germany/Poland), the City of Chaves (for the Eurocidade Chaves-Vérin, Portugal/Spain), the City of Esztergom (for the Ister-Granum EGTC, Hungary/Slovakia), the Urban Community of Strasbourg (for the Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau, France/Germany), the Canton of Basel-Stadt (for the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel, Switzerland/Germany/France).

Further information: <http://urbact.eu/egtc>

* See box on the opposite page.



PROJECT PART-FINANCED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Europe of healthcare at the service of patients

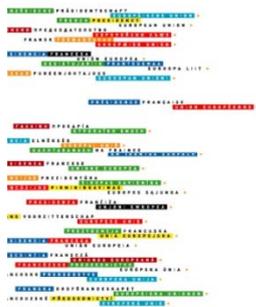
A conference on the Europe of healthcare at the service of patients (Europe for patients) was organized within the framework of the French Presidency on 13 and 14 October at the Institut Pasteur, Paris.

The discussions, attended by nearly 400 persons, revealed the added value of Europe on health questions and compared advances, issues and patient expectations in the area of health. A round table, opened by Alain Lamassoure and Jacques Houbart on behalf of EUROMOT, covered patient management and the law applicable to patients in the case of mobility in border territories.

These discussions took place in the context of the adoption by the Commission on 2 July

2008 of a draft Directive on cross-border health care aimed at facilitating procedures for citizens who receive health care in another country. The Directive would give these persons the right to receive non-hospital health care in another Member State without prior authorization. For hospital care (hospital admission for one night), it would allow the States to set up prior authorization systems providing for patient reimbursement.

Border areas are particularly concerned by these issues. EUROMOT also recommends for them the development of the "cross-border health community" concept, which enables health to be included in the territory project, thus optimizing healthcare provision with regard to the needs of the populations.



Territorial cohesion at the heart of the French Presidency of the EU

Territorial policy, at the heart of the work of the EU French Presidency, is based on five priority objectives, two of which concern cross-border cooperation directly: “Cohesion policy and spatial planning” and “Territorial governance and local authorities”.

The debate on the future of the cohesion policy was boosted on 6 October 2008 with the adoption by the Commission of the Green Paper on territorial cohesion (see box to the right). This debate is also sustained by the successive Presidencies of the European Union in the form of an informal political approach on spatial planning and urban development. This approach plays a substantial role in terms of political impetus and contribution to the debate on the future of the European cohesion policy. It is intended as a contribution to the preparation of the post-2013 period and the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (which grants a substantial place to territorial cohesion), and is based on work done by the preceding Presidencies: the **Territorial Agenda** which defined a reference policy framework for the territorial issues of the European Union and the action programme of which was finalized in the Azores in November 2007, and the **Leipzig Charter** on the “sustainable European city” agreed in May 2007 between the European ministers with responsibility for urban development.

Important events for the future of the cohesion policy in Europe

A major conference is organized on territorial cohesion and the future of the cohesion policy on 30 and 31 October in Paris. One of its workshops is devoted to “governance and integrated territorial development”. The discussions are prepared by meetings between the spatial planning director generals of the 27 member states, in which representative associations including EUROMOT participate. All of this work also informs the **informal meeting of European ministers** with responsibility for spatial planning and the cohesion policy, to be held in Marseille on 26 November 2008. Much is at stake, since the challenge is to define the European cohesion policy and issue practical recommendations for the post-2013 period.

“Territorial cohesion” and “cross-border specificity”

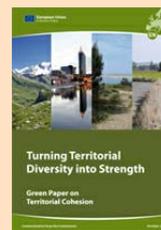
EUROMOT is participating in this work with the aim of ensuring that specifically cross-border aspects are better taken into account in these policies. The **challenge of territorial cohesion** is to obtain a better balance in relations between territories and a reduction of their disparities. It is therefore of direct concern to **peripheral and border regions**.

To achieve this, it is necessary to support the development of **integrated cross-border territory projects** in border regions with the aim of obtaining convergence of public policies, defining action programmes at local level and building a **shared governance** involving all the relevant actors (local, national and European levels). The **EGTC formula** now seems to be the best way of achieving this multi-level governance.

EUROMOT recommends other practical measures to encourage the development of this cross-border governance, such as:

- the setting-up of co-decision bodies by the States to encourage cross-border governance;
- the introduction of a “cross-border integration bonus” in European programmes, taking the form of an overall grant, with the aim of facilitating project funding;
- the recognition at European level of a right to experimentation, in order to remove some of the legal obstacles still raised against cooperation.

Adoption of the Green Paper on territorial cohesion



On 6 October 2008 the Commission adopted the Green Paper on territorial cohesion: “**Turning territorial diversity into strength**”.

This publication opens the debate

between regional and local authorities, associations, NGOs and civil society in order to obtain a deeper common understanding of territorial cohesion and its consequences for the future of regional policy in Europe. EUROMOT will participate in this debate and in the **public consultation opened by the Commission until 28 February 2009**.

“The City: sustainability and solidarity”

The **URBACT Annual Conference** and the **Cities Forum** organized within the framework of the French Presidency of the European Union will take place from 30 November to 3 December 2008 in Montpellier (FR).

www.villes2008.fr/

A novel cross-border apprenticeship scheme

The Strasbourg/Ortenau Eurodistrict is launching this new experimental scheme under which, for the first time in a border area, apprentices will be able to undergo their practical training in the neighbouring country while taking their theoretical training in their own country. Enterprises located within the perimeter of the Eurodistrict are involved in this scheme, covering some twenty professional sectors. This formula will give a number of apprentices the opportunity to speak the language of their neighbours on a daily basis. www.eurodistrict.eu

Press review

- **Establishment of a platform for the Grande Région nature parks**, *NewsPress*, 30 September
“The project to establish the Grande Région (Saarland, Rhineland-Palatinate, Wallonia, Luxemburg and Lorraine) nature parks network has just been adopted as part of the Grande Région 2007-2013 European Territorial Cooperation Cross-Border Programme...”
- **The TER at the rhythm of the RER: the neither yes nor no game**, *Le Républicain Lorrain*, 3 October
“Jean-Pierre Masseret, president of the Lorraine Region, did not take long to react to the proposal by the SNCF to transform the TER into an RER to Luxemburg. Possible? Yes, but... And in the best case, not before seven or eight years!...”
- **IBA Basel 2020 – As part of the Architecture Days, an exhibition “On the way... to IBA Basel 2020”**..., *DNA*, 3 October
“The objective of this exhibition, under the aegis of the Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (TEB), is to show how the territorial authorities of the trinational urban region can work together to grow together sustainably without losing their cultural identity and diversity...”
- **Cross-border cooperation now feeds the drinking water supply**, *Territoire Pays de Gex*, September
“The Pays de Gex drinking water supply system resembles the web...”
- **Catalonia is funding a 100% Catalan middle school near Perpignan**, *La Gazette des Communes*, 29 September
“Catalonia has contributed more than 3 million Euros for the construction of a Catalan-speaking middle school in Pyrénées-Orientales...”