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New impetus for the Basque Eurocity

The cross-border agency for the development of the Basque Eurocity was enlarged on 9 November 2009 to include the city of San Sebastián and the Sud Pays Basque community of municipalities*. This event is the sign of a new impetus for the cooperation within a "Eurocity" which is gradually filling the gaps in territorial continuity between Bayonne and San Sebastián.



Since 9 November 2009, a historic date for the Basque Eurocity, we are pleased to count among our members the city of Donostia San Sebastián and the Sud Pays Basque community of municipalities.

The Basque Eurocity, which stretches over some fifty kilometres on the Basque coast between Bayonne and San Sebastián, was a project driven by the Bayonne Anglet Biarritz conurbation community and the Diputación Foral of Gipuzkoa. The two new members establish territorial continuity and an institutional presence within the cross-border agency, giving further legitimacy to its action.

The Cross-border agency is a discussion and networking body which seeks to encourage the cross-border action of all operators in the territory. But it also wants to make its own mark on the territory, by linking up and structuring this cross-border living area.

We know that there is competition and that there are problems, but the interest of cooperating goes further: our cooperation must help us to do better and offer our fellow citizens a living space that meets their needs.

Today a large step has been taken in this direction, and we are leaving the door open to other candidates who would make this new governance still stronger.

This is also expressed by the interest of other Basque country institutions in organizing and managing the territory differently. On 4-6 November 2009, the Adour Pyrenees town planning agency and the Basque country development council organized a conference on sustainable territorial planning.

Various issues were examined, and over three days specialists discussed topics such as sustainable management of the space, establishment of sustainable mobility, and the planning of towns and villages.

The enlargement of the Cross-border agency reinforces this trend which encourages the networking of territorial actors and looks for the most effective geographical scale for action. The Basque Eurocity can advance only between everyone and with everyone, which is why we are still leaving the door open to other potential members which would give still greater legitimacy to the construction of the Basque Eurocity.

The territory of the Basque Eurocity, with its population of 600,000, is on one of the main road corridors of south-western Europe. Very attractive, between mountain and sea, it is also a territory under pressure from saturation of its transport routes and shortages of property and land. In addition to the management of urban development and environmental issues, the challenge of cooperation is to give the territory genuine continuity, for example in terms of infrastructure.

Established in 1993, the Bayonne San Sebastián Basque Eurocity acquired a legal structure in 1997 in the form of a European economic interest grouping (EEIG). In 1999 there was a major advance, with the production of a white paper providing a diagnosis and a common strategy for the cross-border territory, with three principal objectives: build a logistic hub for intermodal trade, structure the conurbation as a "linear metropolis with several networked centres", and protect and promote its heritage. In parallel, the Eurocity was reformed as a "cross-border agency", marking the transition from a mission of

observation towards a more operational mission of project implementation.

The arrival in 2008 of Jean Grenet as the new president of the CABAB** gave new impetus to the cooperation. Becoming co-manager of the Basque Eurocity, he wanted to relaunch the project on two themes: the broadening of the Eurocity and a review of the white paper according to two priorities, mobility and sustainable development. A study on mobility and travel patterns in the Eurocity is currently under way: the report on an initial inventory phase has recently been submitted, and the next two phases are intended to give rise to practical projects. The topic-based priorities for sustainable development are being validated. Lastly, the publication at the end of 2009 of a guide to the competencies in the various administrative bodies of the Eurocity should be mentioned, intended for project sponsors, elected representatives and administrative bodies. In 2009 cooperation thus took a definite step forward in this territory!

* Twelve municipalities around Saint-Jean de Luz.
** Communauté d'agglomération Bayonne Anglet Biarritz (Bayonne Anglet Biarritz conurbation community).

Aquitaine-Euskadi Summit

The Aquitaine-Euskadi Summit was held on 30 November 2009 in Bordeaux. Alain Rousset, president of the Aquitaine regional council, and Patxi López Alvarez, Lehendakari (president) of the Basque government, signed a joint declaration on reinforcing cross-border cooperation between the two regions.

This declaration formalizes their political commitment to the construction of an Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion and opens the way to the establishment of a European grouping of territorial cooperation to provide a legal basis for the Euroregion. Alain Rousset, who "has been waiting for this moment for eleven years", welcomed the new Lehendakari, Patxi Lopez Alvarez, in a context of reinforced cooperation. Having very rapidly agreed to the holding of this summit, Lopez Alvarez has shown a marked determination to cooperate.

The Euroregion, which will be open to welcome other members, will encompass six million

inhabitants. Its major priorities will be defined over the next six months. Other than legal structuring and the establishment of a large space for relations, discussion and joint projects "that have a significant place in Europe", a number of topics have been put forward.

Transport is a major issue. The "Basque Y", a new railway network linking the principal Basque conurbations (transportation of passengers and goods), is intended to integrate the Basque country into the Trans-European network of high-speed lines. The objective is also to reduce road traffic congestion and favour local mobility.

A number of other cooperation topics have been put forward, including energy resources, research and innovation (competitiveness clusters and centres), agriculture, health, culture and tourism, as well as university cooperation with the development of the Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarre universities network.

Agenda

URBACT EGTC seminar

"Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations"



The next seminar of the URBACT EGTC project will take place in Tournai, Belgium, on 11 February 2010 on the topic of the "Involvement of civil society within cross-border conurbations". The discussions will be organized around the following issues:

- popular mobilization in cross-border projects,
- cross-border media and the construction of a virtual community,
- participative democracy in cross-border conurbations.

On 12 February in Lille, a European conference "URBACT CityLab" on metropolitan governance will be held, in partnership with the "EGTC" and "Joining forces" projects and the URBACT Secretariat.

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In Brief

■ Visa waiver in the Balkans

On 30 November 2009 the European ministers of Justice and the Interior adopted a decision allowing the citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia to travel throughout all the countries of the Schengen space without visas for 90 days in any period of six months. This will considerably reinforce the opportunities for cooperation and trade with these countries.

■ Healthcare in Europe

The draft European directive on cross-border health care, and the compromise proposed by the Swedish presidency, were not approved by the Council of the European Union Health meeting on 1 December 2009, due to the opposition of several countries. The purpose of the directive was to clarify the conditions under which patients can receive healthcare in another member state. The principal blocking points concerned the reimbursement for healthcare provided by non-contractual providers and the issue of the definition of the member state of affiliation.

■ DG Regio working papers

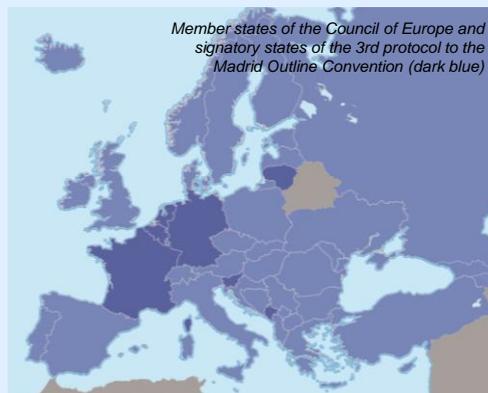
DG Regio is publishing a new issue of "Working papers" entitled "Territories with specific geographical features". In it, border regions are presented as the first of the five types of specific European regions.
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/work/2009_02_geographical.pdf

■ Town planning agency meeting

Nearly 800 persons attended the 30th national congress of town planning agencies (and 8th biennial of European towns and town planners) from 2 to 4 December 2009 in Nancy (France). The MOT and the Agence d'urbanisme de Dunkerque (Dunkirk town planning agency) co-moderated a workshop on "Cross-border towns, new centres of development of the European territory".
www.fnau.org

The Euroregional cooperation grouping (ECG)

The Council of Europe Conference of ministers responsible for local and regional government on 16 and 17 November in Utrecht opened to signature by the 47 member states of the Council of Europe the 3rd additional protocol to the Madrid Outline Convention* introducing a new cooperation structure: the Euroregional Cooperation Grouping (ECG), similar to the EGTC. Seven member states have already signed: Belgium, France, Germany, Lithuania, Montenegro, the Netherlands and Slovenia. Some extracts from the protocol are given below.



Member states of the Council of Europe and signatory states of the 3rd protocol to the Madrid Outline Convention (dark blue)

Part I - Article 1 – Euroregional cooperation groupings (ECGs)

[...] The objective of the ECG shall be to promote, support and develop, for the benefit of populations, transfrontier and interterritorial co-operation between its members in their common areas of competence and in keeping with the competences established under the national law of the States concerned.

Article 2 – Legal personality, legal capacity and applicable law

The ECG shall be a legal person, governed by the law of the Party, Council of Europe member State, in which it has its headquarters.

The ECG shall have the most extensive legal capacity accorded to legal persons under that State's national law.

The law applicable to the type of corporate entity chosen for the ECG by the members shall be stipulated in the agreement establishing the ECG [...]

The ECG shall have the right to its own budget and the power to implement it.

The ECG may enter into contracts, hire staff, acquire movable and immovable property and bring legal proceedings.

Article 3 – Membership

Members of the ECG shall be territorial communities or authorities of a Party and may also include the respective member State concerned of the Council of Europe. All legal persons established for the specific purpose of meeting needs in the general interest, not having an industrial or commercial character may be members if:

- their activity is financed mainly by the state, a territorial community or authority or similar body; or
- their management is subject to the control of these entities; or
- half the members of their administrative, managerial or supervisory organ are appointed by the state, a territorial community or authority or similar body.

[...] Territorial communities or authorities of a State non-Party to this Protocol, which shares a border with a Party which is or will become the State in which the ECG has its headquarters, may take part in the establishment of, or join, this ECG if an agreement between these two States so allows, without prejudice to the provisions of this Protocol.

* European Outline Convention on transfrontier cooperation between territorial communities or authorities, signed by the member states of the Council of Europe. To download the full text of the protocol:
<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=206&CM=8&DF=09/12/2009&CL=ENG>

Press Review

■ Austrian Johannes Hahn in the post of commissioner for regional policy, *Localtis*, 27 Nov.

"On Friday 27 November, José Manuel Barroso presented the portfolios of the new team that he is going to lead for a second term from February 2010."

■ Towards concerted action by regional policy players, *Localtis*, 16 November

"The mini-crisis triggered [...] by the draft communication of the Commission on the reform of the cohesion policy has opened an initial debate on the future of the cohesion policy."

■ EU/Russia: launching of five cross-border cooperation programmes, *Europe Information Service*, 26 November

"On the occasion of the EU-Russia summit on 18 November, the European Commission and the Russian ministry of regional development signed the financial agreements to launch five cross-border cooperation programmes."

■ Territory. The Eurodistricts looking for a meaning, *Le Journal des Entreprises*, 4 December
"Who are we? Where are we going? What must our role be in the development of the territories? The representatives of the four Eurodistricts in the Upper Rhine region attempted to give a preliminary answer to these questions last month at their first annual conference."

■ Border workers: no double taxation, *La Voix du Nord*, 26 November

"[...] Tuesday evening, the parliament adopted definitively and without amendment [...] the codicil to the French-Belgian tax agreement of 10 March 1964 intended to avoid double taxation."

