Was it by chance that Robert Schuman, the father of Europe, came from a “seam” region located at the heart of the European continent? Probably not. Today, as at the time, the common historical heritage represents the future prospect of Europe as he described it in his declaration of 9 May, 60 years ago. For Schuman, both a Lorrainer and a Luxemburger, the common cross-border life, like the dividing effect of borders, was a day-to-day reality. From this historical knowledge was born a “small Euticque” under the name “SaarLorLux Grande Region”. The region, with its constituent partners in Belgium (Walloon region and German-language community), Lorraine, Luxembourg, Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate, is unique in Europe in its diversity. This uncommon nature is a consequence of the very broad societal, economic and political roots through which the common integration of Europe takes concrete form in the Grande Region.

Saarland currently holds the presidency of the 12th Summit of the Grande Region, which is the principal gathering of the political leaders in regional cross-border cooperation. This federal Land demonstrates innovation in the practical organization of the cross-border territory. For this it can be considered as the most French and - according to the conception of Robert Schuman - the most European of the German Länder. The current projects on our agenda at the summit have been designed to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants of the region in practical terms. The Border Worker Task Force is an example. Its objective is to increase mobility in the cross-border employment market and identity legal and political solutions to the problems encountered by the individuals concerned. A very large number of Europe’s cross-border workers live in the Grande Region: 200,000 persons there cross a national border every day to go to work in a neighbouring country.

The cross-border regions develop in particular where the inhabitants, crossing the borders, can meet each other. In this regard, it is mainly the local level that provides proximity and contact. A few days ago the Saar-Moselle Eurodistrict established an EGTC to give itself one of the most effective legal instruments provided at present by the European Union. It is the first time that Saarland is participating in an EGTC. The new body will organize Saar-Moselle cross-border cooperation between Saarland and Lorraine municipalities with a more practical emphasis and will be able to overcome the administrative obstacles.

I consider that this new flexibility will be of great value, and I hope that our border “laboratory” will lead to the formation of as many EGTCs as possible. Robert Schuman knew it: “Europe will be made by practical achievements”. It is up to us, the new generation of European politicians, to transmit the heritage of Robert Schuman with courage to the 21st century and ensure its evolution.
The balance sheet of Pyrénées-Atlantiques - Gipuzkoa cooperation

In the Basque country, on the French-Spanish border, the Diputación de Gipuzkoa and the Conseil général des Pyrénées-Atlantiques have drawn up the balance sheet of their collaboration since the signature of their cooperation agreement in April 2005.

Meeting to draw up this balance sheet, Inaki Galdos, Gipuzkoa’s officer for external action, and Jean-Jacques Lasserre, vice-president of the Conseil général on the French side, affirmed their determination to pursue the joint work, while emphasizing the need to cooperate with the other cross-border organizations of the territory, such as the Basque Eurocivit and the Euroregional Conference.

The balance sheet after five years appears to be very positive. The agreement has given impetus and structure to cooperation and has emphasized six areas: social policy, environment, economic development, infrastructure and transport, spatial planning, and culture. The cooperation methodology has been based on topic-centred working groups between the departments concerned and the setting-up of a cross-border technical unit.

A number of projects in the territory have been initiated or strengthened, such as the establishment of cross-border children’s holidays, the production of a white paper on the organization of sport in Gipuzkoa and Pyrénées-Atlantiques and the upcoming opening of a website on cross-border sport* for the promotion of cross-border sporting collaborations, a cross-border coastal trail, an Interreg Lorea project on oceanography, and a number of actions related to social policy, for example a triilingual baby guide to the rights and obligations of Spanish parents resident in France (and vice versa) and meetings on the management of handicaps.

The balance sheet was also an opportunity to list the territory-specific difficulties encountered every day by the teams. In first place appears the poor knowledge by the technicians of the neighbouring language and administrative structure. A recurrent obstacle in the project approach is the transition from the experience-sharing phase to that of practical actions and projects. Adjustment to turnover of technical personnel is another issue in improving cooperation.

This assessment, very positive while remaining objective about the difficulties encountered, is accompanied by new political impetus. The new agreement for 2011-2016, to be prepared by the end of the year, will be the occasion to define new rules in order to benefit from this first experience.

New cooperation topics have already been identified, such as civil defence and emergency services, collaboration between archives and cooperation on attention models for persons with Alzheimer’s disease.

HEALTH NOTE: On 27 May, under the aegis of the Conférence Atlantique Transpyrénéenne**, a cooperation agreement on emergency medical assistance was signed between the Centre hospitalier de la Côte basque (Basque coast hospital) and Osakidetza, the Basque health service. For many years the Bayonne SAMU-SMUR emergency services have been working with their Basque counterpart Osakidetza in the field of emergencies.

** Members: regional council, Basque government, department council, Diputación de Gipuzkoa, the state, Council of Basque country elected representatives.

Press Review

Informal health council: Madrid reopens the debate on cross-border health care. Europe Information Service, 26 April – “[...] Spain submitted a compromise document to the ministers of health meeting in Madrid on 22 and 23 April in order to push forward the discussions.”


New cross-border: France will have its eco-neighbourhood before Geneva. La Tribune de Genève, 30 April – “Kick-off of a cross-border energy policy [...] All the French-Swiss meeting held yesterday in Archamps on the topic of the energy challenges of the France-Vaud-Geneva conurbation.”

A revolution for border workers expected in June with the binational mobile phone... Le Dauphiné Libéré, 4 May – “[...] most people who spend time on both sides of the border have two telephones, one Swiss, the other French [...]. A long-running story, the cross-border plan is going to arrive.”

Border worker pensions at last boosted! Froml’îgine, 7 May – “The European cross-border grouping had taken action to persuade the French and European authorities that border workers who have had part of their career in France and the other in the European Union or Switzerland should no longer be penalized when their French pension is calculated. These steps have resulted in a new circular.”

Television de Catalunya continues to be received in Northern Catalonia thanks to DTT. Lettre de la Casa de la Generalitat de Catalunya a Perpinyà, May-June – “The minister of culture and the media of the Generalitat, Joan-Manuel Tresserras, held an information session during which he particularly highlighted the first reception by DTT of the four channels of Televisión de Catalunya [...] in almost the whole of northern Catalonia.” – Note: The MOT worked with local partners to reach this solution.