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The original cross-border cooperation of the Mont Blanc area (Espace Mont Blanc, EMB) has experienced new momentum in recent months. The PIT is undoubtedly an important element of that renewal; likewise the establishment of the "Communauté de Communes de la Vallée de Chamonix", which highlighted cross-border cooperation in its regional development plan.*

The EMB is one of the most emblematic instances of cross-border cooperation in European mountain regions. Initially environmental, it is in fact the mainstay of a genuine project of sustainable development with economic and social aspects. The Mont Blanc massif is not only a unique heritage, but also a region where men and women live and work.

Today, cross-border cooperation can no longer be content with the cycle of cooperation projects, and the governance of this territory cannot be dependent on the fluctuations of European programmes to establish its political objectives in the long term.

*Twenty years of cooperation experience, the SDD**, the PIT, prospects of the EGTC*** must sustain the current debates at the European level on the local dimension of cross-border cooperation and on the need for a special focus on mountain areas.*

A more appropriately structured "global envelope" and political interventions geared to the specific geographic conditions of the Mont Blanc region are essential if public policies are to be more efficient.

The Mont Blanc cross-border territory, which comprises a resident population of 100,000 inhabitants, boasts many local assets, holding out the hope of growth that is intelligent (innovation and ICT), sustainable (eco-innovation and biodiversity) and inclusive (social aspects) as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century. The Mont Blanc also benefits from the fact that it is an organic link between the Valais, the Valle d'Aosta and the Pays de Savoie, between the eastern Alps and the central Alps.

* Integrated Cross-border Plan
** Sustainable development perspective
*** European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation

The Mont Blanc area between France, Italy and Switzerland

The Mont Blanc area (*Espace Mont Blanc*, EMB) launched in 1991 by the ministers of the environment of France, Italy and Switzerland is the result of a process of political consultation involving the representatives of the territory's national, regional and local entities: 35 municipalities, 2,800 km², 100,000 inhabitants, a cross-border region straddling the Savoie, the Valais and the Valle d'Aosta of great natural value and landscape beauty.

Over the years the EMB has implemented a range of actions, thanks in particular to successive Interreg funding, studies and initiatives which have made it possible to "try out" on site the application of common policies for the management of the natural and cultural heritage. This cross-border, participatory approach has helped establish a common working method, a permanent network of border relations, and a follow-up structure.

A sustainable development perspective (SDD), a genuine framework for strategic action, has been drawn up. To implement the SDD, an integrated cross-border plan (PIT) has also been launched (EUR 12 m).

The European funds raised, together with the national, regional and local funding, mean that these projects can be carried out in a very real way.

But not all the SDD is taken into account under the PIT. Cultural development, social



cohesion, land management, urbanisation, etc., are not addressed at a time when the region's authorities and its inhabitants are considering initiating cross-border actions.

Affording the EMB legal status would provide the stability it needs to achieve its objectives and the recognition necessary for its efficiency; it would at least be a strong component allowing it to federate and invigorate all the initiatives developed locally in terms of cross-border co-operation.

Clearly the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is now the operational tool best suited to meet the needs of the EMB's operations, appearing to offer the best answer to the requirements of this co-operation between France, Italy and Switzerland.

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Simplified cross-border health care

On January 19, the MEPs adopted the directive on cross-border health care, bringing more than two and a half years of negotiations to a close.

In cross-border territories, this vote represents a significant simplification of measures for EU citizens.

According to the European Commission, each year around 1% of Europeans seek health care in another country, for the following three reasons:

- they choose a clinic specialising in their pathology,
- they live close to a border and are looking for a solution nearby,



- they are looking to avoid excessively long waiting lists in their own country.

Under the terms of the Directive they are now allowed to seek health care in another Member State for "planned" health care*, the principle being that any such health care is then refunded by the patient's health insurance based on the reimbursement rates applied "at home". For certain types of care, patients will need to request "prior authorisation" from their health insurance company, but MEPs have obtained strict limits on the criteria that would allow insurance companies to deny any such authorisation.

As Françoise Grossetête, MEP rapporteur of the text, put it during the debate in plenary session at the Parliament: "Medical progress is such that the offer can no longer be a strictly national offer for all pathologies and it is sometimes necessary to cross borders to obtain health care".

* Emergency health care is already covered as part of European regulations on social security.

European consultation on the fifth report on cohesion

MOT network emphasises the importance of taking cross-border territories into account

The fifth European Commission report on economic, social and territorial cohesion defines the framework of the debate on the reform of the cohesion policy for the post-2013 period. **The MOT network responded to the public consultation** initiated by the Commission until 31 January regarding the conclusions of this Report in order to underscore the need to take account of cross-border territories in the best possible way. This article features excerpts from the MOT's contribution:



"The fifth report reminds that "over 196 million people or **almost 40 % of the total European Union population live in border regions**". "We support that **all the European regions continue to benefit from the cohesion policy** (independent from their level of development) through the importance of this policy for the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the European Union."

"In general, **territorial cooperation deserves a significant budgetary increase** in the new programming period. [...] Particular mention should be made in this context of cross-border cooperation. [...] **The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)** is a precious tool to facilitate cooperation especially in the context of cross-border cooperation."

"It is important that the list of themes addressed by the **future regulations** of cohesion policy remains essentially **open for these cross-border territories** and that it integrates a territorial dimension in order to allow **integrated approaches**."

"With regard to drawing up **operational programmes**, more emphasis ought to be placed on territorial approaches. This could be achieved by integrating **territorial** rather than just theme-based priority axes. [...] Specific territories whose cohesion potential has not been exploited such as cross-border territories must be the subject of particular incentives, for example through **dedicated global grants**."

"In order to improve **the involvement of local and regional stakeholders, social partners and civil society**, it means to enhance **the governance of cooperation programmes**: in drawing up cohesion policy programming documents ; [...] in the bodies in charge of monitoring the operational programmes ; [...] through dialogue and information among local partners throughout the programming period ; [...] and through participation of local partners in the projects."

To download the MOT contribution : www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu

Press Review

■ **Towns on Franco-Belgian border join forces to promote tourism**, Relaxnews, 16 January - "Tourism industry stakeholders on France's Opal Coast and Belgium's west coast have joined forces to launch an initiative titled 'Côte à Côte, le littoral sans frontière' [Coast to Coast - A Shoreline Without Borders] aimed at promoting tourism in this sector."

■ **Geneva repays EUR 175 m to the Ain and the Haute-Savoie**, Les Echos, 14 January - "The strong Swiss franc and the rise in the number of border residents have resulted in a 30% leap, compared with 2009, in the tax compensation paid by Geneva to the French authorities to cofinance certain types of transport infrastructure."

■ **Discussions on the LGV Paca high-speed rail link bring Nice closer to Genoa**, Les Echos, 12 January - "Christian Estrosi, concerned over the future of the LGV Paca high-speed rail link, is considering enabling the rail link-up between Nice and the Italian network for 2020, by which time the dualling of the Genoa - Ventimiglia rail track will be completed."

■ **Rail: Franco-Italian Trenitalia-Veolia alliance with Europe in prospect**, AFP, 19 January - "On Wednesday the Italian railway company Trenitalia and the French group Veolia Transport presented their joint venture, which is set to operate trains between France and Italy from autumn 2011 and in the long term is aimed at the European market."

■ **The Basque Country's north and south are collaborating through the establishment of a reference centre on renewable energies and energy efficiency in San Sebastian**, EnvironnementOnLine.com, 14 January - "For some months now, the Eskal Eureka regional cluster on construction has been establishing strong links with San Sebastian's Fomento cluster on the issue of energy efficiency. The Enerctic Centre, whose foundation stone was laid on Wednesday, January 12, is a bio-climate building that will bring together the two clusters' areas of expertise."

In brief

■ Cross-border transport

The threats that were hanging over certain cross-border lines such as the Sarrebrücken-Sarrequemines tram line due to the flat-rate tax on network companies (Ifer) have finally been removed. The amending finance law for 2010 (No. 2010-1658 of 29 December 2010) has indeed specified the former provisions: "Not affected by the tax calculation is rolling stock intended to operate in France exclusively on sections of the national rail network linking, on the one hand, an intersection between the national rail network and a border between the French territory and the territory of an adjacent state and, on the other, the French passenger railway station of the section concerned closest to the border."

■ EGTC events

On January 20, as part of the national technical assistance programme Europact, DATAR in France organised a seminar dedicated to the EGTC, together with the DGCL (French Ministry of the Interior) and the DAECT (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and with the support of the MOT. The technical seminar convened representatives of the EGTC members, existing and proposed, as well as the state ministerial and decentralised departments in charge of appraising requests for new EGTCs and monitoring EGTCs. The event led to discussions at the national level on the application of EU regulations relating to the EGTC, three years after they came into force. It was also an opportunity to discuss the successes and challenges with which EGTC players are confronted, now and in the future. The findings will soon be posted online at www.europe-en-france.gouv.fr

N.B.: an EGTC conference has been organised by the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis to be held in Lille on 27 January, 2011. It was the venue for launching an EGTC platform in Europe, on 28 in Brussels, initiated by the Committee of the Regions. More information in the next MOT Newsletter.

■ Expert group

A MOT network of experts has just been set up, with the former director general Hans-Günther Clev appointed by Michel Delebarre to act as its president. The group is to draw up a list of experts on cross-border issues within the MOT network on numerous topics and territories in Europe.

■ Partnerships

The MOT and Euro-Info-Consommateurs recently signed a partnership agreement aimed at strengthening their exchanges, particularly on issues relating to consumer rights and services to citizens in border regions.