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Three years after the creation of the first EGTC, and with the establishment of sixteen in total in Europe, the time has come to bring the participants and other organisations concerned together in a more organised manner. The events of 27 and 28 January in Lille and Brussels constituted a key moment. They demonstrated that, despite the diversity of territories and situations, the many questions still asked by local participants in the establishment and management of their EGTC could be answered by the pooling of experiences from all over Europe. To achieve this, the platform introduced on 28 January must still be transformed into a firmly-based structure bringing together not only the EGTC participants but also their partners (States, local authorities, etc.), as well as European institutions and other expert organisations such as the MOT. It is now up to the Committee of the Regions to take the initiative and set up an active unit to follow up this launch.

The first objective of the platform is to meet the need for technical assistance: How can the setting-up of EGTCs be improved and made more flexible? How can projects be made more effective? What answers can be given to the common problems of personnel recruitment, the need for standardisation of procedures, etc.?

The second objective is to make the EGTCs heard at national and European levels. The answers to some of the problems already raised by the EGTCs will be found only at these levels. Furthermore, it is time to highlight the advantages of this new instrument, not only in the programmes of DG Regio but also in other European programmes relating for example to innovation, businesses or youth. There still seems to be a lack of information and knowledge about the potential of the EGTC at the very heart of European institutions. The platform must therefore be a means of raising awareness of this potential.

Upcoming events include the conference on EGTCs in Gödöllő, Hungary, on 21 to 23 March within the framework of the Hungarian presidency (refer to page 2) and the Mediterranean Open Days organised by the Galicia/North Portugal EGTC in July.

EGTC celebration!

On Thursday 27 January, the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis celebrated its third anniversary on the occasion of the European conference of European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Organised at the Lille Urban Community, this event was attended by more than 200 European representatives, who participated in five workshops on topics relating to EGTCs.

Established on 28 January 2008, the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis was the first EGTC in Europe. Its members are 14 Belgian and French institutions which have decided to work together to support and promote cross-border, transnational and inter-regional cooperation.

With a territory of 3,550 square km encompassing 147 municipalities, the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis is the largest cross-border metropolitan area in Europe. Lille, Tournai and Kortrijk are the hub cities within this binational and tricultural (Flemish, Walloon and French) area.

There are now 16 EGTCs in Europe. These groupings are intended to facilitate and promote cross-border cooperation. They act on behalf of their members, which must come from at least two EU countries.

Welcomed by Michel-François Delannoy, vice-president of Lille Metropolis, the many participants underlined the progress made by these groupings and the need to keep in mind the practical expectations of the citizens.



Mercedes Bresso, president of the Committee of the Regions, praised the contribution of the EGTCs and stressed that the Eurometropolis was an example: "You have built a truly cross-border municipality. You are building Europe day by day".

The participants then met in workshops to discuss the status of EGTC personnel, cooperation with European funds and the type of governance to implement in these structures. One workshop was dedicated to the specific problems raised by the establishment of an EGTC and their possible solutions.

The meeting of the Committee of the Regions the next day asked European legislators to simplify the rules governing the delivery of cross-border infrastructures and public services to citizens. A platform intended for public authorities setting up and managing this type of cross-border organisation was also launched.

(See the Point of View on this page and the article on p.2.)

Inauguration of the Perpignan-Figueres HST



The Perpignan-Figueres high-speed line (HSL) was inaugurated on 27 January. Linking the two cities in 23 minutes, this new line is part of the Trans-European Transport Network "High-speed railway axis of south-west Europe" priority project defined by the European Union.

At the inauguration, French Secretary of

State for Transport Thierry Mariani did not fail to emphasize that the new line was "a fine joint success between France, Spain and the various partners. In a difficult economic context, it is evidence of our capacity to join forces on a major project".

The new section, already used by 16,000 passengers since it was opened on 19 December, is a double-track high-speed line conforming to European gauge standards. It is 44.4 km long, 24.6 km on the Spanish side. The line shortens travel times between Paris and Barcelona 7h25 min, with a further reduction to 5h40 min in 2012 when the Barcelona-Figueres HSL is opened.

This project was completed within the framework of a concession contract signed in 2004 with TP Ferro, formed for the purpose by the French group Eiffage and the Spanish group ACS Dragados.

Launching of an EGTC support platform*

At the Committee of the Regions plenary session in Brussels, on 28 January, mayors and regional presidents set out ways to improve a key legal tool, the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). They also launched a platform for public authorities setting up and running such cross-border bodies, a platform with which the MOT is associated.

Sixteen EGTCs have been established to date, nine of which include French members, and a number of others are in preparation. The European Commission will propose to the European Parliament and the Council a review of the current legal framework before the summer, providing a window of opportunity to simplify procedures even further.

Alberto Núñez Feijóo, president of the region of Galicia in Spain, who drafted the CoR own-initiative opinion which was adopted on 28 January, said: "The EGTC that we set up in my region together with Norte de Portugal is a good framework for cross-border projects. However, [...] some parts of the EGTC regulation are rather fuzzy, and the EU institutions must provide regional and local authorities with greater clarity."

The Committee of the Regions' proposals are based on the consultation of existing EGTCs, conducted during the first half of 2010, in which territorial authorities and other organisations including the MOT took part. One of the key issues raised by the CoR is the lack of coordination that has dominated the past five years. This resulted in a patchwork of national implementing measures that are not necessarily compatible with each other. The Committee opinion therefore urges clearer guidance from the EU institutions on how to apply the concept in national law. Another obstacle is that national capitals often take a long time to process requests for setting up EGTCs, which the CoR wants to reduce.

To follow up its proposals and to feed practical experience back to Brussels, the CoR launched an EGTC Platform. This new body will bring together all experts and stakeholders (including the MOT). Its work will be coordinated by the president of the CoR's Commission for territorial cohesion (COTER), at present Michel Delebarre, mayor of the French city of Dunkirk, president of the EGTC West-Vlaanderen / Flandre-Dunkerque-Côte d'Opale, and president of the MOT.



Map of the EGTCs in Europe, downloadable from: www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu/carte_gect.pdf



* This article consists of extracts from the Committee of the Regions press release dated 27 January.

Further information: <http://portal.cor.europa.eu/egtc>

Press Review

■ **Cohesion forum - Barroso: The EU needs a cohesion policy more than ever**, *Europe Information*, 1 February - "The coming discussions on the future budget of the EU will take place 'under probably the most difficult conditions ever for discussions on financial prospects', declared José Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, at the opening of the Forum on cohesion, on 31 January in Brussels. That is why [...] 'we must more than ever justify all the decisions in terms of added value, cost-effectiveness and results'."

■ **Cross-border matters - "Something has to happen!"**, *L'Alsace*, 29 January - "A hundred elected and socio-economic representatives attended the 'Rencontres transfrontalières' cross-border conference held in Strasbourg at the initiative of the regional council. Even before the submission of the report on cross-border policy by three parliamentarians, including senator Fabienne Keller, the minister Philippe Richert, president of the regional council, stressed the determination of the government to 'not waste any time'."

■ **Alsace is going to experiment with a single Council**, *Les Echos*, 31 January - "The president of the region and those of the two departments have agreed on the experiment of an Alsace Congress or Council. A referendum will be conducted in late-2011. [...] 'We are also asking for an extension of the powers of this body, particularly with regard to cross-border relations'..."

■ **Monaco to help French workers**, *Nice Matin*, 26 January - "Young children - Hundreds of families of French employees in Monaco deprived of allowances. At least for three months. After the anxiety provoked by this news, the announcement by the Monaco social security funds that they were making available an interest-free loan is likely to be a relief for many households."

■ **The proposed HSL between Nice and Ventimiglia traces its route**, *20 Minutes*, 24 January - "Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet has decided. The transport minister has approved the [...] project."

■ **The Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion prepares to become a reality**, *Sud Ouest*, 29 January - "The signature of the memorandum of understanding for the EGTC [...] takes place on 4 February."

Events

■ Conference on the EGTC and multilevel governance

The MOT will take part in this Hungarian presidency event to be held on 21, 22 and 23 March 2011 in Gödöllő, Hungary.

■ MOT network annual event

The General Assembly of the MOT will take place on 16 June 2011 in Reims, at the invitation of one of its members, the Champagne-Ardenne Regional Council. The annual conference will be held on the previous day, 15 June.

Further information will be available shortly on the website:

www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu