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Press review - Resources

The EU stands united in the face of the virus - the need for coordination

Europe is now the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19. In response to its spread, several EU Member States have implemented uncoordinated border closures and unilateral measures. On 13 March, the European Commission called for border measures to be "coordinated, operational, proportionate and effective".

The European Commission's role consists in helping Member States to respond to the crisis by making recommendations on coordinated action and common leadership. For this purpose, the Commission's crisis management mechanism, ARGUS, has been activated. The Commission's proposals which take the form of "[Guidelines on border management measures to protect public health and ensure the availability of essential goods and services](#)" were endorsed on 17 March by the Extraordinary

European Council.

Concerning internal borders, the guidelines are intended to restrict internal border controls and barriers to the single market. Corridors will be established for lorries carrying essential supplies, in particular for health workers. For cross-border workers, particularly those working in the health and food sectors, passage must be authorised or even facilitated. The Commission is also taking action to reduce the socio-economic consequences of the epidemic and has launched the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative \(CRII\)](#), to which the EU Cohesion Policy and the EU Solidarity Fund contribute. Finally, the Commission proposes to reallocate unspent structural funds of €37 billion to support healthcare systems, SMEs and the most affected sectors and workers. [More info](#)

Robert Herrmann

President of the Eurometropolis of Strasbourg, President of the MOT



The coronavirus epidemic affects us directly; we will overcome the challenge thanks to personal vigilance and solidarity. This special edition of the MOT newsletter shows the lack of projection and coordination beyond borders, at European and global level. As elected representative from a cross-border metropolis, capital of an open Europe, I would like to recall that the virus knows no borders... The only approach that makes sense is cooperation! When faced with danger and uncertainty, our cultures, our systems of solidarity and decision-making remain above all national. At a time of containment, borders remain legitimate, but deserve a coordinated and consensual proximity management.

It is now time to learn to move forward together! Faced with the interdependence of our territories, this issue reveals a full-scale experiment: teleworking, including for cross-border workers; sharing of knowledge and resources; the first decisions taken by the European Commission. We need to think about the future. Let us provide the EU with new tools for dealing with large-scale crises, more ambitious policies integrating public health, a significant budget for the post-2020 period, new own resources, better tax coordination between States, and a more active democracy. In this way, Europe will make further progress in overcoming this new crisis. Thank you all, public service professionals, ordinary citizens, builders of our Europe at its borders, for your commitment. Take care of yourself!



PLEASE NOTE

This special edition of the newsletter gives a picture of the situation on the date of its publication, but this situation is changing rapidly. As far as possible, the MOT will try to keep its members informed via its press reviews.

APPEAL TO THE NETWORK

We thank you in advance for sending us any new information likely to update the contents of these articles.

A consultation of the network will be launched before the end of March in order to draw up an inventory of the consequences of the situation and the impacts at the French borders.

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In the Grand Est Region : a European equation to be found between border closures and economic interdependence

Since 16 March, the Strasbourg Transport Company has no longer been authorised to serve Germany, and the tramway going from Strasbourg to Kehl stops at the border. Within a few days, following the spread of the coronavirus in Europe, control and restriction measures were put in place at the Grand Est borders, while population containment was implemented. On 12 March, the first controls were introduced at the border, following the decision of the German Robert Koch Institute, responsible for disease control, which declared the Grand Est Region as a "risk zone". On 16 March, the French-German border was closed except for the transport of goods and cross-border

workers. On Tuesday 17, France implements population containment; Luxembourg announces a "state of crisis" while Switzerland closes its borders to those who do not reside or work in Switzerland. Finally, Belgium adopts strict containment measures on the 18th of March.

Concerns arose in this context of drastic travel restrictions about the preservation of the rights of cross-border workers and the sustainability of economic ties on both sides of the border. The neighbouring countries took urgent common measures. They agreed to maintain employment contracts of cross-border workers, to extend teleworking possibilities beyond 25% of the employee's

working hours, and to guarantee all social protection rights and full remuneration. The details of these measures are listed and indexed by the association "Frontaliers Grand Est" ([link here](#)), a resource centre for cross-border workers.

The emergency and exceptional measures required by the situation of cross-border workers also reflect the interdependence of local economic systems on regional borders. They are today proof of the continuity and integration of these territories. In times of crisis, this continuity can represent a basis for operational cooperation between European states.



Jean Isenmann, ADEUS

The cross-border dependence of the Luxembourg health system on coronavirus tested

While the coronavirus crisis is challenging and will challenge all European health systems, the equation should be even more complex to solve on the Franco-Luxembourg border. Indeed, the Luxembourg health system is highly dependent on cross-border workers: while they represent 45% of jobs in Luxembourg, this rate rises to nearly 70% in the medical professions, the majority of whom are French. The Luxembourg government is therefore considering a drastic measure, namely to introduce certificates to enable cross-border commuters to "settle on the territory" of the Grand Duchy during the crisis period. The aim is to have border medical staff in the immediate vicinity in the event of even stricter measures taken by France and other border countries. Luxembourg is studying the possibility to welcome medical staff and their families in hotel rooms, a disposal that is unprecedented in Europe. While this initiative could be a solution for the sustainability of the Luxembourg health system, it could also raise questions for the French medical system itself, given that the Grand Est Region is already one of the most affected in France and could pretty soon lack of medical staff.

This shows the urgent need for a coordinated approach between the two States, both to manage the crisis and to set up structured cooperation in the field of public health.

The situation at the Franco-British border

Great Britain is considered as part of the European Union until the end of the post-Brexit transition period in December 2020 and even though it had never been part of the Schengen area, facing the closure of this area to third country nationals since 17 March at 12 noon, the border with France remains open.

As regards ferry crossings, the DFDS company has decided to limit the number of passengers per crossing by 50%, in order to leave more space for everyone and to reduce the risks of transmission, until at least 6 April. A similar measure has been taken by Eurotunnel for its freight shuttles. P&O ferries does not intend to reduce the loading of its vessels. Trucks, cars and people normally travel through the Channel ports although no more than 100 people are allowed in any space on ships.

[More info](#)

Statements by French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe

On 'France Television',
March 17, 2020

"Regarding the question of borders, the President of the Republic has made great efforts with all the Member States of the European Union to reach a common position."

"As long as we are in a lockdown situation, it makes sense to do health checks at the borders."

"Closing the borders completely also makes it more difficult to get the raw materials and products we need into the country. It also makes border work more complicated, though it is essential for those who work and for the receiving country. There are a lot of French people employed on the other side of the border, in Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Spain".

"The right response to this epidemic lies both in national measures, but obviously also in European cooperation and coordination."

France-Italy, tighter border controls

Italy, the first country to be severely hit by this health crisis, recently called for a "European coordination" in the healthcare and economic field to deal with the coronavirus. Italy's borders remain generally open to goods traffic, which is essential to supply the country with medical equipment from other countries.

At the French-Italian border,

only Italian and French border residents who are able to submit a self-declaration can now cross it. Because of the double border to be crossed by the many Italians travelling to Monaco, these cross-border workers may soon have to provide themselves with three separate national authorisations. [...]

[More info](#)



France-Spain-Andorra: controls and health coordination

As of March 18, Spain is the second most affected country in Europe by the COVID-19 epidemic with 13,910 diagnosed cases and 623 deaths. Since midnight March 17, Spain's land borders have been closed "in order to reduce the number of people infected with the virus both nationally and in Europe," according to Spanish Minister of Interior Fernando Grande-Marlaska. Only Spanish citizens, residents in Spain, cross-border workers, diplomatic personnel and cases of force majeure, as well as goods trucks, can enter the country.

From west to east, border controls have been re-

established. The Guardia Civil and the Spanish police are posted at every border crossing point. In the Basque Country, every vehicle and pedestrian is checked by police officers. Cross-border workers living in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques and working in Euskadi continue to cross the border. But it is no longer possible, for example, to travel to Spain for shopping. Further east, the French-Spanish Cerdanya has seen many Barcelonians arrive in their second homes in the mountains. The mayor of Puigcerdà, the border town of Bourg-Madame, Albert Piñeira demanded that "nobody

goes up to Cerdanya any more, because the area's health structure, the Cerdanya cross-border hospital, is not designed to receive so many people". The [Cerdanya Hospital](#) nevertheless continues its cross-border activity because a health corridor has been set up with France.

In terms of cooperation, the Principality of Andorra has requested the Toulouse University Hospital, within the framework of their cooperation agreement, for transfers of critical care patients to Toulouse. [...]

[More info](#)

Franco-Belgian coordination

In France, since Tuesday 17 March at 12 noon, for a period of at least fifteen days, and in Belgium, since Wednesday 18 March at 12 noon and at least until 5 April, any unjustified leave from home, any friendly and family meetings and all gatherings are prohibited, on pain of a fine for offenders.

The border between France and Belgium remains open for the time being, both by road and by train or bus, but train traffic is greatly reduced and crossings are filtered. In both countries, any movement across the border is in principle prohibited unless it is essential and justified (by work, care, feeding). Non-essential travel outside Belgium is prohibited until 5 April. Checks are often carried out to ensure that travel is justified (for the reasons mentioned above). In order to enter France or Belgium, each person must be in possession of a duly completed certificate.

Concerning cross-border workers, as social distancing measures are under way on both sides of the border, they should restrict travel to a minimum and give priority to the telework wherever possible. If they are unable to telework and have the certificate above, they are allowed to cross.

With regard to health care, border residents are now asked to contact their national health services, even though the health structures in the French and Belgian Ardennes are "in continuous contact" (source: ARS Grand Est). If assistance is required, it will be provided in France for French people and in Belgium for Belgians. [Daily updates on the situation within the cross-border territory are provided by the Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai.](#)

The influx of cross-border workers remains essential to the economy of the Swiss cantons

When looking at the share of people infected per capita, Switzerland turns out to be the second most affected country in the world after Italy. The large flow of workers between the canton Ticino and the Lombardy region, Italy's first region in terms of total number of infected people, has certainly speeded up the process.

The federal authorities indicate that entries to Switzerland from the four neighbouring countries is now only possible for Swiss citizens, persons with a residence permit in Switzerland and persons who need to travel to Switzerland for professional reasons.

[This means that the French-Swiss border remains open to cross-border workers, who are essential to the economy of the border cantons and to the medical sector.](#)

In addition, secondary customs are closed so that traffic can be channeled through the main ones, where controls are.

Among the main challenges, traders and cross-border workers mention the speed at which emergency measures are evolving, which implies the need for constant monitoring for all those -like them- who contribute to the cross-border economic system.

▲ Brussels learns to manage its new borders

Le Monde, 18 March

"Limiting the contagion of the SARS-CoV-2 virus without threatening the integrity of the internal market, which is one of the keystones of Community construction: this is the challenge facing the European Union (EU) today. It forces it to reconsider the question of its borders, both external and internal, in a radically new way."

▲ Call for a European response to the Coronavirus threat

Euractiv, 16 March

"A group of Europeans is calling for a 'European response' to the coronavirus, to protect people as much as possible. The call has been signed by 450 pro-European personalities representing scholars, civil society, companies and institutions."
[More info](#)

▲ EU-27 and Covid-19: "One for all, every man for himself."

Localtis/Banque des territoires, 16 March

"Unable to coordinate them upstream, the European authorities are urgently proposing support measures to Member States tempted more than ever by protectionism."

▲ Luxembourg: towards a requisition of healthcare staff in Lorraine?

La Meuse, 18 March

"Luxembourg remains very attentive to 'state of health emergency' measures that could be taken in France, and which would allow the requisition of healthcare staff living in Lorraine, but working in the Grand Duchy."

▲ Cross-Channel links between Dieppe and Newhaven uncertain

Le progrès de Fécamp, 18 March

"The passage to England via the cross-Channel link from Dieppe to Newhaven was assured yesterday. But for how much longer..."

▲ Geneva fears defection of cross-border workers, Monday at work

Le Temps, 14 March

"The economy is holding its breath, University Hospitals are considering solutions to potential staff shortages."

▲ On the border between Poland and Germany, interminable expectations and uncertainties

Le Monde, 19 March

"Crossings between Germany and Poland have become very difficult due to health checks by the ruling majority in Warsaw."

▲ On the Irish island, an open border to the coronavirus

Euractiv, 18 March

"The political differences between the Republic of Ireland, a European state, and Northern Ireland, a British province, complicate the management of the health crisis. The two jurisdictions are taking different measures, and the border remains open."

▲ Ticino measures the role of its cross-border commuters

Le Temps, 10 March

"At Chiasso customs, flows of vehicles are reduced in both directions. All over the canton, people are adapting to the 'closure' of Lombardy in Italy to contain the spread of the disease."

European and national legal resources

European Union - The coronavirus response team

https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response_en

European Union: Covid-19 Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services, 2020/C 86 I/01, OJ C 86I, 16.3.2020, p. 1-4

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.CI.2020.086.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2020:086I:TOC>

French Government, all the answers to your questions about the Coronavirus COVID-19

<https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus>

Individual Certificate (can be reproduced on free paper). It must be completed for each non-business outing

https://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece-jointe/2020/03/attestation_de_deplacement_derogatoire.pdf

Decree No. 2020-260 of 16 March 2020 regulating movements as part of the fight against the spread of the COVID-19 virus

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000041728476&categorieLien=id>

CROSS-BORDER NEWS

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