

Declaration of the European Cross-border Citizens' Alliance
Cross-Border regions at the heart of tomorrow's Europe

The internal border regions cover 40% of the EU's territory, accounting for 30% of its population (150 million people) and hosting almost 2 million cross-border commuters. Since the establishment of the single market and the Schengen area many new opportunities have been created in border regions, and these regions in many cases have ceased to be peripheries, and have been turned into places of growth.

Nevertheless, many obstacles still remain. Citizens living in border regions continue to encounter difficulties in their daily lives, whether it be finding a job, accessing healthcare, everyday commuting or overcoming administrative problems. Similarly, businesses face obstacles that hamper their growth and local and regional authorities (LRAs) keep facing challenges in establishing a deeper cross-border cooperation such as cross-border public services.

These challenges became even more apparent during the COVID-19 crisis where after decades of free movement, borders were closed overnight putting citizens and businesses in border regions in great difficulty and resulting in massive negative economic and social impacts. It is therefore crucial to overcome these obstacles in order to mobilise the opportunities that open borders offer to citizens and businesses and to take the necessary measures to achieve and maintain this even in a situation of crisis.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the crisis also animated multiple forms of cooperation, and revealed cross-border interdependencies and solidarity, that now must be organised and strengthened through European and national public policies taking fully into account the specificities of cross-border regions.

As the signatories of this Declaration we:

1. underline the importance of cross-border cooperation for the process of integration of the European Union and, in light of the unsatisfactory level of funding allocated to the European Territorial Cooperation in the next financing period, we call for **cross-border regions to be placed back in the central political and legislative focus of the European Union**;
2. call on the EU to **actively involve border regions and cross-border groupings in the Conference on the Future of Europe**. Europe's border regions, European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTCs) and Euroregions will organise cross-border public consultations on the Future of Europe to ensure that the views of cross-border citizens are adequately taken into account and we encourage them to actively contribute to the democratisation of cross-border cooperation by organising permanent cross-border councils and interregional parliamentary assemblies;
3. underline the need for **border authorities to have appropriate powers, dedicated resources and accelerated procedures¹** for themselves and their cross-border groupings in order to overcome obstacles in the implementation of their cross-border projects;

¹ As stated in the Aachen Treaty, signed on 22 January 2019 by Germany and France, in the chapter devoted to cross border cooperation.

4. call on the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission to **complete the negotiations on the proposed European Cross-Border Mechanism Regulation (ECBM)**² and to ensure its adoption. We also ask for a similar approach to be established for the EU's external borders;
5. call on the EU institutions, local, regional and national authorities to **remove any legal and administrative obstacles** to the freedom of movement, to cross-border work, to shared cross-border public services, to cooperation of emergency and health services, and to cooperation of any kind that would benefit the citizens living in border regions;
6. recommend in light of the lack of coordination of Member States and regions with legislative powers in the transposition of EU Directives, that the **European Commission carry out Cross-Border Territorial Impact Assessments** that would not only look into the effects of EU legislation on border regions, but also into the effects of a lack of coordination in the transposition of EU law on border regions. Transpositions of EU legislation should come with an obligation of coordination with neighbouring Member States so that no new barriers are created;
7. call on the Member States and regions to **establish cross-border observatories aimed at monitoring cross border integration, identifying and removing border obstacles** and ensure cooperation with national and regional contact points to exchange experiences and discuss problems that LRAs, citizens and businesses are facing on a particular border;
8. call on the EU to **establish an efficient framework for cross-border public services, enabling them to be put effectively into practice**. This would present a clear added value to the territorial cohesion of EU, as it would allow LRAs, as well as Member States, to support European citizens living in neighbouring States, by providing them with much needed services that were not and could not be provided in their own Member States;
9. call on the EU institutions, and the Member States, to **actively involve border regions in all phases of the implementation of the European Green Deal, the Next Generation EU** and similar far-reaching future policies;
10. call on the EU institutions to **guarantee a minimum level of cross-border cooperation in the case of global, European or regional crises**, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This legislation should also guarantee to keep internal borders open, ensure the delivery of cross-border public services and the full functioning of the single market and the Schengen area. In this respect, we recommend the adoption of harmonised criteria at EU level on the management of future pandemics and EU-wide urgencies in order to avoid a fragmented approach which undermines an effective crisis response.

² COM(2018)0373.