

31 May 2016

The Annual Conference of the MOT brought together 150 participants on 24 May 2016 in the Palais de la Porte Dorée, home of the French National Museum of the History of Immigration, in conjunction with the exhibition “Frontières” (“Borders”) currently on view.

With 2 million cross-border workers in Europe and close to 400,000 on French borders, freedom of movement – a major objective of the European Union – is an everyday reality in cross-border regions. However, the re-establishment of numerous border controls is creating difficulties in these regions where borders are crossed regularly, forming part of everyday life.

In opening the conference, Hélène Orain, Director-General of the Établissement public du Palais de la Porte Dorée, emphasised what is at stake: “The utopia of a world without borders, which came to its apogee with the fall of the Berlin Wall, has collided with another reality, at once economic, migratory, and human, which is today threatening the Schengen Area. Our strength is as a country of immigration and diversity. Cross-border territories are the places where we must find inspiration for accepting these movements and these new forms of mobility in Europe. We must work together to move in this direction.”

The President of the MOT, Michel Delebarre, then opened the debate with the following question: “How can we reconcile the need for open borders for inhabitants in border regions, with the necessity of strengthening controls?”.

The first round table helped to illustrate, with factual testimonials, this lived experience of borders as a “resource”, which can be fragile and easily “put at risk”:

At the French-Swiss border, the Jura Arc Cross-Border Forum promotes citizen meetings on either side of the border and generates debate around lived experience of the border within civil society. These actions help to fight against negative attitudes towards cross-border workers which are unfortunately continuing to increase within the region.

On the French-Belgian border, in the sphere of the economy, the experience of the company “KPMG – Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai”, which offers audit and consultancy services to businesses on all border issues¹, illustrated the reality of a cross-border economic market, that businesses need to adapt to and find ad hoc solutions for, but where they can also, once trust has been established, boost their development.

Joël Giraud, MP for the Hautes-Alpes department, Mayor of L’Argentière-la-Bessée, Vice-President of the MOT, gave the example of a very integrated mountainous region straddling the **French-Italian border** around Briançon and Montgenèvre, where journey times have been tripled or quadrupled with the introduction of systematic border controls, provoking the exasperation of inhabitants. He also brought attention to a consequence brought about by the Law strengthening the fight against organised crime, terrorism and



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¹ Of legal, commercial or fiscal nature, etc. (example of posting of workers on either side of the border).

31 May 2016

their financing², which provides for the re-establishment of exit permits for leaving French territory for all minors: “the consequences will be dramatic in this region where many minors, notably primary and secondary pupils, cross the border every day to go to school.” While the necessity for border controls has been affirmed, the consequences on daily life at the local level need to be taken into account.

Between Denmark and Sweden, the Øresund bridge provides a high-speed link between the two countries, generating considerable cross-border flows (50,000 crossings per day). Nevertheless, the reintroduction of systematic border controls in January 2016 has had very disruptive consequences with a doubling of journey times. In the long-term, decreasing commuter flows, already observed since the introduction of controls, would risk jeopardizing the integration of the territory and would have very negative effects in terms of the populations turning in upon themselves.

The second round table focused on the role of regional, national and EU policy:

Edouard Jacque, member of **the Grand Est regional council**, in charge of cross-border workers, noted that 20 to 25% of inhabitants in this region are affected by cross-border issues. He underlined the exasperation of a section of the population that feels abandoned with regard to cross-border problems in daily life, often concerning mobility. He emphasised the urgency for local and regional councils and public authorities to respond to this growing exasperation and recalled that one of the primary missions of the most “cross-border” region in France was to facilitate “rapprochement between the populations”.

The testimonial of the Midi Pyrénées Languedoc Roussillon SGAR (General Secretariat for Regional Affairs) illustrated the possibility of an excellent coordination of State authorities on cross-border issues on **the French-Spanish border**.

The contribution from the German-Dutch border gave the example of an open border where the very high degree of integration seems to go hand in hand with a sentiment of security and shared trust within the population.

According to Anne-Laure Amilhat Szary, professor at Université Grenoble Alpes, who co-moderated the two round tables: “for cross-border regions, the more they cooperate, the safer they are”. **“The main question is knowing how to mobilise the inherent resources belonging to each border, in order to aim for a positive equilibrium between “barrier effects” and “necessary openness”.** In this context, **“the role of public authorities is first of all to ensure that the border does not become a place that generates inequalities”.**

Jiri Burianek, Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions, highlighted that cross-border cooperation is today at a crucial stage in its history. Aside from current events that have pushed the topic of borders to centre stage, progress at the European level in developing cooperation is considerable. He cited the work of the Presidencies of the European Union, like that of Luxembourg which proposed the creation of a new legal

² “Loi renforçant la lutte contre le crime organisé, le terrorisme et leur financement” - Law definitively adopted on 25 May 2016.

31 May 2016

instrument³, the setting up of an inter-state group at the level of the Council of the EU on cross-border cooperation⁴, as well as the work of the COTER Commission of the Committee of the Regions which gave itself the goal of systematically analysing the impacts of European legislations on cross-border cooperation. This work has begun with a focus on two major topics: transport and cross-border investments.

In his closing address to the conference, **Marc Abadie, Director of Network and Territories at the Caisse des Dépôts**, highlighted his group's commitment to **supporting cooperation**: “we have been working with the MOT in order to identify the priority cross-border projects that could benefit from investments on the part of the Caisse des Dépôts”. He reiterated the necessity of “speaking to citizens” by way of concrete results, in order to re-establish Europe's legitimacy.

Marie-Caroline Bonnet-Galzy, General Commissioner for Territorial Equality (CGET) confirmed this national commitment: “the risk of widening inequalities on our borders is real. Creating communities of interest and building Europe upon our border territories is indispensable. Analysis of cross-border dynamics, and statistical observation for the implementation of appropriate policies are essential. The CGET is working and will continue to work towards this goal, and we are counting on the MOT to help us!”.

Walter Deffaa, Director-General of Regional and Urban Policy at the European Commission, confirmed the great consideration given to cross-border issues at the European level, citing the first results of the Cross-Border Review, launched last autumn in order to analyse obstacles to cooperation⁵. He also emphasised: “The porosity of borders is today being undermined, yet it is essential for the 150 million men and women who live in our border regions, because it is affecting mobility”.

He concluded with this wish: “I hope that these regions will demonstrate that it is neither in turning in upon ourselves, nor in closing ourselves off that we will find the future of Europe, but rather that it is in this strengthened cooperation that all of our futures lie.” A fine challenge for our cross-border regions, which the MOT will continue to represent and promote!

³ For facilitating cooperation and experimentation on each border. More info on the work of the Luxembourg Presidency: [click here](#).

⁴ Group currently being established, for which the MOT will act as secretariat.

⁵ More information on the Cross-border Review and its initial results: [click here](#).