

## Covid-19 - The Franco-German border Towards a cross-border model of crisis management?

### Yves Le Breton

Director-General of the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion (ANCT, France)



"The National Agency for Territorial Cohesion, which was created out of the merger of the CGET, the EPARECA and the Digital Agency, was founded on 1 January 2020. Its name well encapsulates its purpose – which is to strengthen territorial cohesion and combat social division. To do this, the ANCT supports local elected representatives in the implementation of their projects, adapting to the needs on the ground.

It offers to all of France's territorial authorities, whether rural, urban or in mountainous, coastal or border areas, a range of services including the provision of technical assistance tailored to their projects, support of national programmes, and territorial contracts between the ANCT and territorial authorities to ensure implementation of their development strategies. Day-to-day, the Agency's territorial delegate, i.e. the Prefect, will be the primary contact person on the ground. Regarding cross-border territories in particular, the Prefect Christian Rock has been tasked with developing the procedures and conditions for the mobilisation and governance of support facilities for players in border territories, and looking at the interaction between the Agency and its territorial delegates. The Covid-19 health crisis has demonstrated our territories' interdependence, which demands joint actions and efforts at all levels. [...]." [Continued on p.3.](#)



The barriers that were put up between the two countries from the start of the health crisis have had a major impact on citizens who were used to crossing the border on a daily basis\*. In this context, there have been many local cooperation initiatives and the MOT would like to highlight them. Already on 16 March, the date on which the border between France and Germany was closed, a contact group was set up between the Grand Est Region, the regional Prefecture and the three German Länder along France's border. The aim of the group was to be in daily contact about the restrictions on free movement and their impact on cross-border workers. The group was later expanded to include the regional health agency, the French border departments, the German health and police authorities, the German Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the French

Interior Ministry. These daily exchanges facilitated the transfer of patients from the Grand Est Region to the neighbouring Länder. A concrete expression of multi-partner and cross-cutting communication, the setting-up of this binational group in the context of the crisis made it possible to forge a joint response to the health emergencies, while also enabling information to be passed on about the difficulties linked to crossing the border faced by economic players who found themselves on the frontline. A local contact group also involves the departments, chambers of commerce and industry and Eurodistricts.

#### More info

This cooperation is occurring within the framework put in place by the Aachen Treaty and its Cross-Border Cooperation Committee, which brings together French and German players, and whose last meeting was held on 23 April, with the stated goal of: "Stepping up cross-border cooperation at the time of Covid-19 and moving together towards more Europe". [More info](#)

At a time when the easing of lockdown measures is raising thorny questions in the cross-border setting, the functioning of this crisis contact group is highlighting the ability to act urgently at the level of a shared living area rather than through predefined territorial structures.

\* As illustrated by the little border village of Scheibenhart, cut in two: [see Arte's news report.](#)

## EVENTS

**Launch of three MOT working groups** in the form of webinars, co-facilitated with several members:

- "Territorial solidarity" working group, 12 June;
- "Cross-border governance" working group, 17 June;
- "Metropolitan cooperation initiatives" working group, 24 June.

[More info \[FR\]](#)

**2020 MOT's general assembly** and conference on Franco-German cooperation, 8-9 September, in Colmar [FR] and Freiburg [DE], at the invitation of the Haut-Rhin Department. [More info \[FR\]](#)

**Regional conference** "What is the outlook for Franco-Italian cooperation initiatives in the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region?", 17 September in Marseille

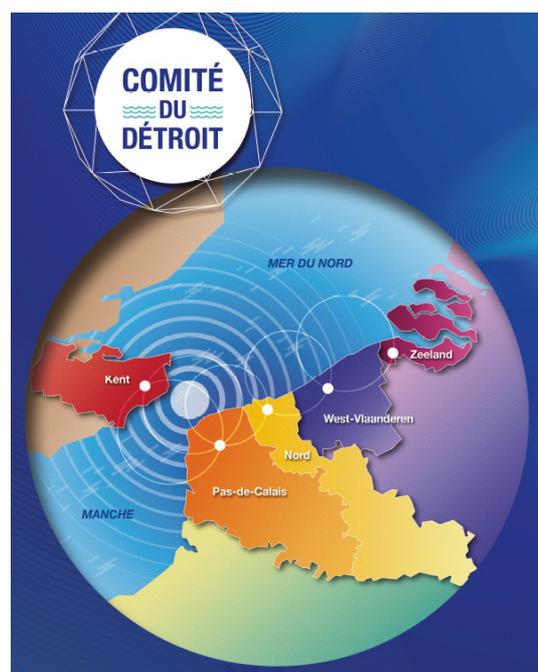
**1st Borders Forum**, 9-10 November, in Paris.

[All the events](#)

## A Straits Committee has been set up by the local authorities on either side of the Channel

Six local authorities bordering the Strait of Dover and the North Sea have decided to turn their bilateral relations into a multilateral area for dialogue in order to encourage the emergence of cross-border projects across the territory of the Strait.

Following its launch at a conference that took place in Arras on 5 February and that brought together 200 people from the public, higher education, business and voluntary sectors from across the whole area of the Strait, the Straits Committee was able to begin its work in spite of the constraints linked to the current health crisis. This initiative by the Pas-de-Calais Department and Kent County Council, which also includes the Nord Department, the provinces of West and East Flanders (Belgium) as well as the province of Zeeland (Netherlands), aims to facilitate flexible governance of the Strait of Dover and is setting itself up as a new space for dialogue and cross-border collaboration.



Faced with the impact of Brexit on the territories that border the Strait, it seeks to strengthen the interinstitutional relations that have existed for over 30 years, by extending this cooperation to include the territory's stakeholders.

Among the three work areas that have been targeted by the Committee are young people, the ecological transition and economic development. This latter area is the subject of the Committee's initial work, with the setting-up of a working group on tourism in order to support the territory's players in dealing with the consequences of the current travel restrictions.

[More info](#)

## Covid-19 - Calls for an easing of border restrictions

While a circular issued by France's Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, dated 12 May has just extended France's internal border controls until 31 October 2020,<sup>1</sup> there have been growing calls to give attention to the difficulties faced in border territories, notably for the 360,000 cross-border workers who cross the French border every day to work in a neighbouring country. The President of France's Assemblée Nationale, Richard Ferrand, and his German counterpart have called for the rapid reopening of borders between European countries. The Franco-German Parliamentary Assembly, which is co-chaired by Christophe Arend, the LREM MP for Forbach, and Andreas Jung, Vice-President of the CDU-CSU group in the Bundestag, has adopted a position in favour of reopening the entire border between Germany and France. Brigitte Klinkert, President of the Haut-Rhin Department, and the MEPs Fabienne Keller and Anne Sander have issued a joint appeal to the French Prime Minister to reopen the country's borders immediately. On the German side, political pressure is mounting for the border with France to be completely reopened. German ministers and MPs, and mayors of border region municipalities have issued many calls to this end. On the Franco-Belgian border, a petition has received 7,000 signatures. On the Franco-Swiss border, elected representatives in the Greater Geneva area call for the cross-border situation to be taken into account. On the Franco-Spanish border, Michel Pelieu, President of the Hautes-Pyrénées Department, has alerted the French President, Emmanuel Macron, to the economic need to remove the cross-border movements to and from. Lastly, around 20 MPs have also called on the French Interior Minister to ease the restrictions on the EU's internal borders. [More info.](#)

## Covid-19 - Restrictions on movement and introduction of health measures along France's borders

French government press release of 22 May.

## Covid-19 - GeoRhena, an observation tool for the Upper Rhine

GeoRhena, the Upper Rhine geographic information system, has developed a simplified dynamic mapping tool that enables people to view and search for regularly updated data on developments in the Covid-19 epidemic in the Franco-German-Swiss trinational region.

[More info](#)

## Covid-19 - Players in cross-border territories have their say

### Covid-19 – MEPs call for the removal of border restrictions



Anne Sander, Vice-President of the MOT, and Pascal Arimont and other MEPs have called on the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, "to firmly recommend the immediate ending of checks and entry restrictions on our internal borders": "the current situation is putting great pressure on citizens and workers living in border regions, and the negative socioeconomic impact is huge". [Read the call](#)

"The coronavirus crisis is putting our European ideals to the test, and obliges us to invent tomorrow's world. We need to think, in the design of our policies, about the impact of our decisions on our neighbours. This is how we will create European value added and the cohesion that characterises our Saarland-Moselle cross-border area and makes it so unique." [Stephan Toscani, President of the Saarland Landtag, and Patrick Weiten, President of the Moselle Department.](#)

"Our cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine and PAMINA Eurodistrict has never gone through such a dark period. The border closed, controls for cross-border workers at crossing points, [...]. The challenges that await us as we come out of this crisis are huge. We are making the wish that we will be able to review our policies and vision for the future up to 2030 and the governance of our cross-border structures." [Rémi Bertrand, President of the PAMINA Eurodistrict, and Patrice Harster, Director of Services](#)

"Covid-19 knows no borders. That is why cross-border cooperation is crucial to combat this virus effectively. In the Franco-Geneva area, it has been possible to step up the already concrete and well-established cooperation thanks to the mutual trust and solidarity that have built up between the French and Geneva authorities over many years." [Press release from the Canton of Geneva, the Ain Department Prefecture and the Haute-Savoie Department Prefecture.](#)

"Covid-19 is prompting us to think about the new challenges for European territorial cooperation. Will we succeed in our transition from caterpillar to butterfly? What kind of butterfly will we be? No idea! Nonetheless, we need to think about the future of our shared living areas. How will Europe help us to do this? By focusing the political agenda on the issues of healthcare, mobility, solidarity, environmental protection and citizenship. And by daring to put in place a large-scale European Marshall Plan to help countries to get back on track." [Loïc Delhuvette, Director of the Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis.](#)

"The health crisis is having a major impact on cross-border territories. Cross-border cooperation will be vital to address the coming difficulties." [Arola Urdangarin, Director of the Nouvelle-Aquitaine-Euskadi-Navarra Euroregion.](#)

### Covid-19 – Reopening borders and free movement: Europe's recommendations

On 13 May 2020, the European Commission set out a coordinated approach in three phases to gradually reopening the EU's internal borders. [More info](#)

It is also providing a list of the internal border controls in place at any given time. [More info](#)

On 8 May, it published guidance on the free movement of health professionals and harmonisation of training in relation to Covid-19 emergency measures. [More info](#)

### Covid-19 – The Committee of the Regions' exchange platform

The European Committee of the Regions, the European Commission (DG REGIO), the MOT, the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) are working together to give a voice to local and regional players in border territories in the context of the Covid-19 health crisis. You can now share your border region and cross-border experiences on the platform created by the Committee of the Regions. [More info](#)

### INTERACT – "Introducing more territoriality into Interreg"

The INTERACT programme offers training courses to players involved in the management of and decision-making for Interreg programmes. Jean Peyrony, the MOT's Director-General, contributed to a training session devoted to the relevance and concepts of territoriality and functional areas in the upcoming 2021-2027 programming period, in which political objective 5 aims to give greater prominence to territorial strategies and action by local players. [The presentations can be consulted on INTERACT's website.](#)

### Continuation of editorial on page 1

"[...] In this context, the ANCT is mobilising, in close coordination with the regions and managing authorities, in order to optimise the use made of European funding to tackle the Covid crisis. This follows on from the launch by the European Commission of a Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) in order to utilise European funding available from the 2014-2020 period to step up our collective response capacity. In parallel, the preparation of European programmes for 2021-2027 is continuing, with the aim of contributing to the post-Covid recovery. This has become our priority for action in the territories."

# PRESS REVIEW

## ▲ A reopening of EU borders — on a bilateral basis at best

Localtis/ Banque des Territoires, 18 May

"In a circular to ministers on 12 May, the Prime Minister recalled the measures taken to combat the spread of Covid-19 with respect to border controls. France's external borders will remain closed until further notice and controls will continue on its EU internal borders until 31 October, with access remaining extremely limited until 15 June, or later. Some initial adjustments have however already been agreed with Germany. In spite of the EU's recommendations, the reopening of its internal borders is fairly disorderly."

## ▲ Coronavirus: can the health crisis restart the Europe of healthcare?

20 Minutes, 15 May

"The coronavirus crisis has witnessed nationally-based and divergent responses across Europe, and highlighted the importance of better coordination of healthcare policies."

## ▲ Borders open or closed? An update on the situation in EU countries

Le Monde, 20 May

"While borders in the Schengen Area were closed within a few days, the lifting of these restrictions is taking place in an extremely disorderly fashion."

## ▲ People in border areas forgotten in the lifting of the lockdown

L'Avenir, 13 May

"As the lockdown is lifted, not everyone can be reunited with their loved ones. The reason for this? The border, which is due to be closed until June."

## ▲ Homeworking, culture and tourism: three levers to restart cross-border cooperation

La Semaine, 7 May

"Following the shock of the closing of borders within the Greater Region, the situation is conducive to restarting cross-border cooperation. This is the view of Roger Cayzelle, President of the Greater Region Institute."

## ▲ The border has been reopened

DNA, 17 May

"Closed unilaterally by Germany on 16 March, the border was reopened on the morning of 16 May. Local elected representatives are pleased, but are waiting to see what happens next. [...] 'Europe is like a jointly owned property, it doesn't have competence for healthcare,' Antoine Herth goes on. Closing the border marks a step backwards', whereas local players have always worked hand-in-hand. 'The Germans have treated French patients and I thank them again for that. The Franco-German Parliament has been very active during the crisis' and will continue to be, the situation being far from stabilised. 'An economic and social crisis is coming. We need to strengthen our cooperation to address it.'"

## ▲ Switzerland reaches an agreement with Germany, Austria and France on the opening of its borders

Zone Bourse, 13 May

"The borders with Germany, Austria and France should be completely opened on 15 June 2020, provided developments in the epidemiological situation allow it."

## ▲ Lifting the lockdown: an MP from the Hautes-Alpes calls for 'free movement' with Italy

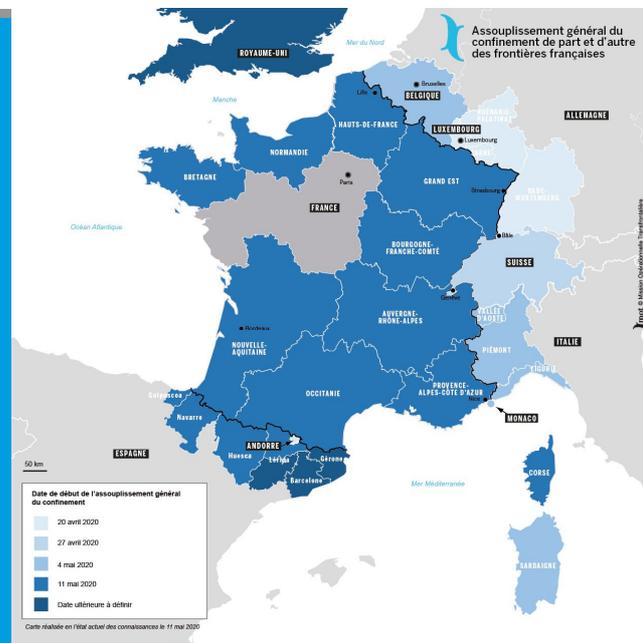
La Provence, 7 May

"Joël Giraud raises particular situations including that of the Briançon area, where there is substantial cooperation in the fields of healthcare, education and transport with neighbouring Piedmont."

## Covid-19 — The MOT's maps showing the easing of lockdown measures along France's borders

Since 11 May, the MOT has published on its website and on social media a series of maps showing the situation with respect to the easing of lockdown measures along France's borders.

To download the maps: <http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/news/news/news/show/a-lheure-du-deconfinement-la-mot-publie-des-cartes-de-la-situation-aux-frontieres/>



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