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What are the principal issues and objectives of the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion?

Looking beyond common development issues, the Liguria, Piedmont and Aosta Valley regions in Italy and the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and Rhône-Alpes regions in France have formed strong historical, economic and cultural links.

Nowadays the problems common to the five regions are bringing them closer and leading to the development of cooperation actions on topics related to the living conditions of their inhabitants, such as transport, environment, employment, training and economic development. Cross-border cooperation has thus been established between the regions of the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion, which benefits from the developments accomplished within the framework of the various generations of European programmes.

This experience has resulted in the opening of a joint office in Brussels and established a culture of cooperation which the new 2007-2013 programming will be able to amplify. The main objective of the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion is to raise the profile of the five regions as seen by European institutions and thus affirm the role of the regions in the European area. The Euroregion is defending the central position and the specific characteristics of the Alpine and Mediterranean territory in the context of an expanded European Union. It is building interregional and transnational cooperation spaces, giving the regions greater influence over the major policies of the states and the European Union and enabling them to better defend their interests.

Why have you chosen the form of an EGTC to structure the framework of your cooperation?

The formation of an EGTC will confer legal existence on the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion, providing it with an indispensable basis for its development. By enabling different levels of government (national, regional, local) to work together in a cross-border context while accepting the division of competences, this instrument will allow us to manage a Community programme financed by the structural funds, but also to conduct cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation projects outside the Community programmes, including with the Principality of Monaco.

The Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion

Located on the French-Italian border between the Alps and the Mediterranean, the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion encompasses the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA), Rhône-Alpes, Piedmont, Aosta Valley and Liguria regions. Inaugurated in January 2008, it covers a vast territory of 110,000 sq. km and 17 million inhabitants.

Following an initial declaration of understanding in July 2006 in Turin, the first step of the Euroregion was taken on 18 July 2007 with the signature of a memorandum of understanding that officially established the Alps-Mediterranean Euroregion. The aim was to form a cooperation space intended to intensify exchanges and strengthen economic, social and cultural links between the five regions.

The Euroregion functions based on a rotating presidency held in turn for six months by the partner regions. Five working groups have been formed to cover the five priority action areas: Accessibility and transport, Innovation and research, Environment and risk prevention, Culture and tourism and Education and training.

In order to base the Euroregion on sound legal foundations, the five regions have undertaken to prepare a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). In this context the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière has provided legal and technical support for the formation of this EGTC, within the framework of a study initiated under the presidency of the PACA region in June 2008.



Menton, on the French-Italian border

In late January and early February 2009, respectively, the Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur regional assemblies approved the draft convention and statutes of the EGTC. The location of the registered office, in France, remains to be defined, then the EGTC can be formally established by a decree of the prefect of the region concerned.

The new structure will then be able to implement its development strategy for the Euroregion territory. To help the partners manage this, in autumn 2008 the MOT also conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis covering the whole territory. This analysis resulted in an inventory of the territory and provided the regions with a better understanding of each others' strengths, weaknesses, competencies and opportunities to work together.

Developing trade between Corsica and Italy

Backed by Livorno province, the "Pim-Ex" project was approved by the Interreg IVA France-Italy "Maritime" programme in January 2009. It aims to develop trade in goods between the ports of Haute-Corse and Tuscany.*

The Italian mainland is a local space for Corsica. However, the large majority of the island's trade takes place with Marseille and the French coast.

The "Pim-Ex" project aims to strengthen trading links between French and Italian businesses and develop their economic activities, mainly within the associated ports, which are the real maritime borders and entry gateways between Corsica and Italy.

This objective depends on the implementation of logistic facilities enabling development of shipping traffic and reducing goods feeder costs.

The project therefore highlights two practical actions:

- the establishment of an import-export office tasked with developing the trading potential of SME/SMLs, providing incentives to businesses to open up export markets and encouraging relations between Italian producers and supermarket distribution in Corsica.
- the establishment of one or more logistics platforms: as the supermarket distribution market is expanding in Italy, the establishment of a platform (the first would be in Bastia) will strengthen trading links, reduce feeder costs for food products and speed up flows while making them more reliable.

* The other partners of the project are the Haute-Corse chamber of commerce and industry (F), Lucca and Massa Carrara provinces (I) and Savona, Olbia and Cagliari municipalities (I).



"EGTC" URBACT project

First thematic seminar on the "internal governance"

More than 100 participants met in Chaves, Portugal, on 12 March 2009 for the first thematic seminar of the "EGTC" URBACT project, organized by one of the six partner conurbations of the project: Eurocidade Chaves-Verín. Welcomed by the mayor of Chaves, João Gonçalves Batista, and the mayor of Verín, Juan Manuel Jimenez, the participants discussed the means of strengthening the internal governance of cross-

border conurbations. Other public figures present included the Portuguese secretary of state for regional development, Rui Nuno Baleiras, the President of the Diputación de Ourense, José Luis Baltar, and elected representatives of the Frankfurt (Oder)/Slubice cross-border conurbation.

The seminar identified recurrent problems and common solutions for improving this "internal governance" of cross-border conurbations.

Among the problems or obstacles encountered in the territories, the points highlighted by the partners included:

- cross-border conurbation projects do not receive sufficient recognition and consideration in overall policies at national and European levels;
- linkage between the political level and the operational level must be strengthened;
- the formation of a joint structure (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) for example) is not enough: the most difficult part is to make the instrument work on the basis of an overall strategy and structuring projects.

The need for a strong political commitment

The impetus imparted by political leaders is essential; their "cross-border vision" drives the cooperation. Political action is inseparable from the technical teams which implement the political decisions. The need for a stronger link between these two levels was strongly emphasized. The "EGTC" project partners recommended the organization of discussions at European level between elected representatives and civil servants of cross-border territories to strengthen this link and generate a genuine European and cross-border administrative culture.

The need to reinforce the operational teams

The success of cross-border cooperation is based to a very large extent on the quality of the operational teams that implement it. The impact of the operational teams must be reinforced, not only by bringing them closer to the political decision centres but also by introducing training courses intended to develop their language skills and their knowledge of the border territories, cultures, and legal and administrative frameworks.

A governance structure that must be made to work

The project partners also emphasized the fact that, beyond the establishment itself of a governance structure, the challenge lies in the definition of practical projects that the structure will implement and the financial resources available to it for its action. EGTC (European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation), Eurodistrict or straightforward cooperation agreement: the formulas vary according to political impetus, the size of the authorities and the magnitude of the projects. There is no single governance model, even though the impact and the legitimacy of the EGTC is an asset in terms of visibility in the European Union, as the partners emphasized. In this context, the partners foregrounded the need to involve all the key entities of the territory (private sector, civil society, etc.) in the governance structure. Involvement of the local population is a fundamental factor in the success of a cross-border conurbation project. This aspect will also be one of the topics of the next project seminar, which will take place in Lille in October 2009.

* Expertising Governance for Transfrontier Conurbations, www.urbact.eu/egtc

** Eurometropole "Lille-Kortrijk-Tourmai" (FR/BE), Frankfurt (Oder)/Slubice (DE/PL), Eurocidade Chaves-Verín (PT/ES), Ister-Granum EGTC (HU/SVK), Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau (FR/DE), Trinational Eurodistrict Basel (CH/FR/DE).



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Invited by the Pyrénées-Orientales department council and the generalitat of Catalunya, the **2009 Annual General Meeting of MOT** will take place on 11 June at the royal château of Collioure, in the Pyrénées-Orientales. A **conference-debate*** will take place on the 10th, organized on the other side of the border at the monastery Sant Pere de Rodes, near Figueras, on the topic "**Local cross-border cooperation in the future European territorial cohesion policy**".

Further information and draft programme at www.espaces-transfrontaliers.eu

* Languages: fr, en, cat

EGTC

Eurometropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tourmai

The General Assembly met on 16 March to appoint Stefaan de Clerck, Mayor of Kortrijk and Belgian minister of Justice, as new president of the Eurometropole (an EGTC since 28/01/07).

Strasbourg-Ortenau

On 26 March the council of the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict approved the statutes and the convention of an EGTC giving the Eurodistrict a legal and fiscal status.

Dunkerque Côte d'Opale

The West-Vlaanderen Flandre-Dunkerque-Côte d'Opale EGTC was established on 3 April 2009 in Bruges (Belgium) between thirteen French and Belgian partners.

Further information in the next issue of "Cross-border news".

Press review

- **Annemasse - The cross-border show**, *Le Dauphiné Libéré*, 22 March
"As is the case every year, the show organized by Le Dauphiné Libéré and the Groupement transfrontalier européen will be a mine of practical information for border workers and the border world in general: Dauphinés, applicants for jobs in Switzerland, businesses, etc...."
- **Launch seminar - FASST (cross-border Alpine taste and aroma industries) project**, www.alcotra-fasst.eu, March
"The launch seminar of the FASST project will take place on 27 March 2009 in Turin on the occasion of the first edition of CAMPUS - the new agriculture show..."
- **Puigcerda hospital: work starts**, *L'Indépendant*, 21 March
"After the official presentation of the site in March 2006, work on the Puigcerda joint cross-border hospital started on 28 February..."
- **Europe under construction - Hautes-Pyrénées and Aragon prepare a common future**, *La Nouvelle République des Pyrénées*, 27 March
" 'Europe, there are those who talk about it and those who do it'. Josette Durrieu, president of the department council, borrowed Michel Pelieu's phrase to explain the joint approach undertaken with Aragon. Marcelino Iglesias, its president, was in Tarbes yesterday to sign a series of agreements outlining a community of destiny between Hautes-Pyrénées, Huesca and more broadly Aragon that crosses political and geographical borders..."
- **The MEPs want to remove bureaucratic obstacles to regional policy**, *Localtis*, 26 March
"On Wednesday, 25 March, the members of the European Parliament, in plenary session, adopted a resolution which could extend the present 2007-2013 financial framework until 2016. [...] The previous day the MEPs adopted five own initiative reports on ways to improve the cohesion policy..."

