



VIEWPOINT



Alain Bayrou
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What concrete actions are planned within the context of the "Mountain for All" project?

First and foremost, we were pleased to learn that the "Mountain for All" project - the aim of which is to facilitate access to mountain areas for handicapped persons - was validated at the last meeting of the Planning Committee. This will open new perspectives on our territory. The first action to be conducted before the realisation strategy is embarked upon will involve evaluating the reality of the current situation in this territory. This evaluation will make it possible to produce a "map" of handicapped persons' needs and of the services on offer for them. Concrete actions will subsequently be conducted. Plans include operations on the ground such as the provision of equipment for key sporting and leisure services and the adaptation of language and communication practice (e.g. signs in Braille). It is also important to ensure that the professional operators are trained and, above all, that their awareness is optimised. Our main objective is to change people's perceptions of handicapped persons.

What challenges and opportunities characterise the cross-border cooperation in the territory - notably in the context of the 2006 Turin Olympics?

It is clear that the Games will place the spotlight on our territory, which will, notably, serve as a training ground for the athletes. We should also highlight the considerable importance of Briançon's Les Escartons hospital centre, which was selected for its specialist excellence and its strategic border location. The aim, therefore, is to offer strengths which - as is the case in these two examples - will be essential for the success of the Games, while at the same time planning for the post-Olympic years. It is in this context that the full importance of cross-border cooperation becomes clear. The aim is to make use of resources in both Italy and France to ensure that this exceptional event remains a reality after 2006 and to forge even stronger links enabling us to dream up and bring to fruition common projects that serve citizens in their day-to-day lives.

France - Italy - "Hautes Vallées" territory

"Mountain for all"

The European Commission's aim in proclaiming 2003 the "European Year of the Handicapped" was to raise public awareness of handicapped persons' entitlement to equal rights and to full involvement in all fields of human activity. It was in this context that a project entitled "Mountain for All" was implemented in the "Hautes Vallées" territory, which is located between the Hautes Alpes and Savoie départements on the French side and the Piemonte region on the Italian side. This project obtained Interreg IIIA financing in April 2005.

The constituent parts of the cross-border territory concerned by this project share certain environmental, historical and economical characteristics. This makes it a logical step to pool resources and to consolidate the territory's economic development by providing a tourism offer that is accessible to all. The project partners* - and other players from the territory's civil society - have, for a long time, been sharing experience, providing training, raising awareness among tourism and cultural operators and proposing actions designed to enhance the overall quality of the tourist experience.

The project, therefore, is not merely a plan designed to adapt existing structures. On the contrary, it makes provision for a complete rethink of how people access the environmental, tourist, cultural and natural resources of this cross-border territory. The proposed actions will, first and foremost,



2003, "European Year of the Handicapped"

make it possible to adapt the territory so that it meets these needs, to help develop an environment where handicapped persons feel comfortable, to create a network that is capable of responding to special needs and to enhance public perception of handicapped persons.

It is also important to note that the project takes on a new dimension in the run-up to the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Turin in February 2006 - an event for which the territory's local and regional authorities are key players.

() The Briançonnais, Pays des Ecrins and Haute Maurienne Vanoise communities of municipalities, the La Vanoise national park and the mountain community encompassing Val Sangone, Valli Chisone e Germanasca, Val Pellice, Alta Val Susa, Bassa Val Susa and Pinerolese Pedemantano.*

France - Germany - Upper Rhine

A cross-border network for the towns of the Upper Rhine

Nine French and German towns in the Upper Rhine region have decided to create a cross-border network. These are Strasbourg, Karlsruhe, Fribourg, Pforzheim, Mulhouse, Offenburg, Baden-Baden, Lörrach and Landau. Elected representatives and other people representing the communities of municipalities concerned agreed, on 14 April, to meet "at least twice a year to examine shared concerns".

The aim is not to create new structures or cooperation bodies, but to set up an informal network enabling them to examine shared problems, exchange views and ideas concerning projects and find cross-border solutions. The network is, therefore, by no means in competition with the European district. However, towns on either side of the border experience similar difficulties and need to pool their competencies.

The network should therefore bring the quality

of member towns' representation more into line with that enjoyed by the major European urban areas. It is important that the towns concerned strengthen their links in order to remain competitive and make their voices heard on the international scene. The network, which Karlsruhe's mayor, Heinz Fenrich, describes as having many centres, none of them dominant, has no intention of becoming a closed shop, and other towns - such as Basel, Colmar, Mannheim, Ludwigshafen, Heidelberg and Hagenau - have already shown an interest in joining.

The many areas for action which have been suggested include the environment (air pollution), the development of bilingualism, the adaptation of high-speed rail links (TGV and ICE*), the question of truck tolls on German motorways and the impact of factory outlets.

() German high-speed rail network*



Alain Lamassoure's report: French local authorities' cross-border relationships

On 18 May, following the evaluation and reflection mission with which he was entrusted in August 2004, MOT Vice-President and MEP Alain Lamassoure submitted his report on cross-border cooperation to Foreign Minister Michel Barnier and Minister with Responsibility for European Affairs Claudie Haigneré. This report provides an overview of cross-border cooperation initiatives and puts forward a variety of recommendations aimed at further developing what has been accomplished thus far.

In a context in which cross-border cooperation is changing (Eurodistricts, European districts and EECGs) and cooperation initiatives are evolving into global territorial initiatives, this report provides an insight into underlying trends in French local and regional authorities' cross-border relations. It puts forward 15 proposals for action.

The first observation concerns the great diversity of situations, objectives and projects concerning French border areas. Despite this diversity:

- all of the sites investigated had seen common approaches, and similar difficulties were encountered by the various cooperation players. A particular challenge was the need to ensure that cross-border projects fell within the legal framework for territorial development;
- needs are similar: proceed to the realisation phase and take a global territorial approach within a secure legal framework with recognition at national and community levels.

As Alain Lamassoure points out, the importance of helping border territories resides in the fact that cross-border cooperation "constitutes a veritable laboratory for European construction". He underlines the fact that "cross-border flows, which have been accentuated by economic and fiscal disparities, generate specific needs" in terms of service offers for the local population. Due to this, "cross-border cooperation has [...] become an integral part of territorial planning and development. Elected representatives expect the State to provide them with support and to raise awareness among its partners".

He goes on to say that the current period is "a crucial one for cross-border initiatives" and puts forward 15 proposals for action built around six principles:

- Achieve unity of action for a given cross-border territory, in order to meet the needs of the local population and of the socio-economic players,
- Rethink the role of the State,
- Ensure that intercommunality receives equal treatment whether it be cross-border or national,
- Take account of the cross-border phenomenon in territorial planning and development policy and in related contracts,
- Facilitate the implementation of these projects within the framework of the future European regional policy,
- Facilitate the solving of day-to-day problems in cross-border areas.

The complete text and summary are available at www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org

■ Third progress report on economic and social cohesion

The third progress report on economic and social cohesion was presented on 17 May by Danuta Hübner, Commissioner with responsibility for regional policy. This document provides details of income, employment and productivity levels in the regions of the enlarged EU.

For further details: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy

■ New professional Master's at Longwy

Starting in the 2005-2006 academic year, Longwy IUT, in collaboration with the University of Nancy and Institut National Polytechnique de Lorraine, is launching a new Master's in "Project management and territorial development" with special focus on "cross-border development".

For further details: <http://www.master-projter.uhp-nancy.fr>

■ The Basque Eurocity releases a CD-ROM and a "didactical unit"

The twin objective of these two trilingual (French, Spanish and Basque) releases by the cross-border agency for the Basque Eurocity is to develop the feeling of belonging to the cross-border region and facilitate communication between its inhabitants. The "Bayonne-San Sebastián Eurocity didactic unit", which is distributed in schools, concerns the geographical, historical, economic and cultural aspects of the Eurocity area.

For further details: <http://www.eurocite.org>

In the press in May

■ Cross-border initiatives progress despite legal grey areas - feature in the Gazette des Communes, 30 May

Cross-border areas are still waiting for a stable legal framework - Culture: The Belgians and French set up a joint theatre project - Health: A hospital for Catalonia and the Pyrénées-Orientales département - Transport: Both Longwy-Rodange lines a success - How to consolidate the projects

■ Three cycle paths planned to develop leisure tourism - Le Républicain Lorrain, 26 May

The Forbach Porte de France community of municipalities has approved the development of three circuits, including cycle paths in the area...

■ SNCF and Deutsche Bahn erase the border - Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 24 May

In Strasbourg, the presidents of SNCF and Deutsche Bahn have signed a letter of intent for the creation of a semi-public company dedicated to the operation of Franco-German high-speed rail links...

■ The Rhône-Alpes département and Baden-Württemberg encourage mobility - Le Progrès, 27 May

The Region and the Franco-German Youth Office have signed a framework agreement designed to encourage mobility on the part of senior territorial managers (both public-sector and non-profit-sector) in the Rhône-Alpes département and Baden-Württemberg, as well as on the part of young people attending school, apprentices and jobseekers...

■ No concerns regarding cooperation in Basel - Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 31 May

The French "Non" in the EU constitutional referendum does not appear to be hampering continued cross-border cooperation for our neighbours in Basel...

■ Zurich player saves the Geneva-area cross-border express project - Tribune de Genève

In a fairy-tale move, knight in shining armour Moritz Leuenberger has come to the rescue of the CEVA project with a promise of financial backing...

■ Aragon seeks enhanced links with Midi-Pyrénées - L'Indépendant, 19 May

Delegates at the first international Pyrenean congress, which was held in Huesca, noted encouraging signs of stronger relations between the two sides of the Pyrenees. However, the transport network remained unsatisfactory on the French side...

