



VIEWPOINT

Philippe Suinen

Director-General

Directorate-General for Foreign Relations - Walloon Region



What motivated Wallonia to join the MOT network?

The Walloon Region has had a certain interest in the many actions implemented by the MOT for a long time. However, it was no doubt the objectives (2005-2008) defined by the MOT in June 2005 in Bayonne which enabled us to take the plunge and become a full member of the network. Just as the MOT proposes, Wallonia wants to pursue the development of active partnerships with foreign regions and authorities within the more general framework of the development of a regional strategy. There is a need for detailed dialogue, more sharing and further experiments, and the network seems to be the ideal forum to accomplish this.

What is the place of regional cooperation, and more particularly cross-border cooperation, in Wallonia?

A place of choice, and it has been for almost 20 years. We are convinced that the building of an integrated Europe requires the strengthening and development of relations between the different partners, all the more so with our immediate neighbours.

A Europe of regions will be attained by removing internal borders: the border as a separating "cut" must be eliminated and replaced by the border as a joining "seam". In a context of globalization, working together is more essential than ever. Regional cooperation must also be considered from this perspective, using the instruments at our disposal, such as INTERREG.

What is the involvement of Wallonia in the INTERREG cross-border programmes?

It participates actively in four programmes that cover all of its borders and practically all of its territory (excluding the Walloon Brabant province). These are the Euregio/Meuse-Rhine, Debelux, France-Wallonia-Flanders and Wallonia-Lorraine-Luxembourg programmes. The Walloon region is the managing authority for the two French-Belgian border programmes.

With a budget of more than 204 million euros, the INTERREG III France-Wallonia-Flanders programme benefits from the means to attain its ambitions. This envelope is co-financed at 40% by the European Union through the ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) and 60% by the various partners in the areas concerned. This funding has been used to start up 221 projects, already selected at the end of 2005, in 7 strategic sectors. The INTERREG III Wallonia-Lorraine-Luxembourg programme has an overall financial envelope of almost 57 million euros, including 43% from European Union sources. Since the beginning of the programme 72 projects have been started up. We can report that over almost 20 years on this border more than 670 projects have been completed, involving a total expenditure of almost 600 million euros.

"The Radar of the North"

In order to optimize the management of natural risks related to heavy rainfall in the Escaut, Meuse, Sambre, Somme, Oise and Aisne river basins between France and Belgium, Météo France, the Walloon Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and the Royal Meteorological Institute (Brussels) launched the "Radar of the North" project. This involved the installation of a new radar, operational since the end of 2005, in northern France at Taisnières, covering all of these basins.

This new system plugs a gap in French and Belgian coverage: since 2001, a radar located at Wideumont, near Saint-Hubert, has covered the eastern half of Wallonia; in contrast, there was no radar covering the Hainaut and Walloon Brabant provinces, although these regions experience frequent flooding. Certain vulnerable river basins in northern France were also not covered.

Funded as part of the France-Wallonia-Flanders INTERREG III programme, the objective of the "Radar of the North" project is to provide effective warning of the risks of flooding of rivers and other watercourses located either side of the French-Walloon border, while improving the quality of the information provided to the French and Belgian emergency services. The rainfall and time-space distribution data are essential



The Radar of the North

for better forecasting of river flow volumes.

The point of this collaboration is to improve flood forecasts by pooling measurement systems on the scale of basins rather than countries, as rainfall does not stop at borders. A cross-border data sharing and measurement pooling system between the two countries has been set up.

The new radar is capable of detecting dangerous phenomena within a radius of 150 to 200 km. The area covered encompasses the Aisne, Ardennes and Nord departments of France and the Belgian provinces of Hainaut and Namur. This cross-border area has a population of 6 million persons and covers 30,000 sq km.

The Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion takes shape

On 10 February 2006 the presidents of the Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon regions and of the Catalonia, Aragon and Balearic Islands autonomous communities, which form the Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion, met in Toulouse on the occasion of their annual meeting. In addition to adopting guidelines for actions for 2006, they restated their determination to unify their efforts to establish in the north-western Mediterranean a "hub of sustainable development based on innovation and social and territorial cohesion", particularly "competitive" compared with those in the north of Europe.

The Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion was established in October 2004 with the signature of a founding declaration between the 5 regions. With an area of 157,757 sq km, it is one of the most highly populated in Europe, home to 17% of the combined population of France and Spain, about 13 million inhabitants. It is characterized by the strong growth of its major conurbations (including Barcelona, Toulouse, Montpellier, Saragossa...), its research clusters, its modern economy, its expanding tourism, etc.

During 2005 the structure and organization of the Euroregion was set up and various

cooperation projects were decided: establishment of a cultural portal, a socio-economic monitoring unit, a "EuroBIORegion", a tourism research centre and a Euroregional network of chambers of commerce.

The meeting on 10 February saw the signature of a joint declaration on transport, restating the necessity of building high-speed railway lines between the two countries (linking Bordeaux and Montpellier to Barcelona) and a central crossing of the Pyrenees. A "charter for research" was also adopted, aimed at coordinating actions in information technologies, nano- and biotechnologies (the "EuroBIOTech" bringing together Euroregion scientists and businesses), agri-resources and tourism. Other progress: establishment of a steering committee on university research and a proposal to set up a fund to facilitate student exchanges and closer links between the competitiveness clusters of the two countries (Spain is in the process of developing clusters equivalent to the French ones).

Further information: www.euroregion-epm.org

Developing cross-border cooperation of regional nature parks

On 8 February 2006 the Federation of the regional nature Parks of France (Fédération des Parcs Naturels Régionaux de France, FPNRF) and the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) signed a partnership framework agreement. The objective is to encourage cross-border cooperation of regional nature parks and the recognition of the rural areas that they represent within the framework of the next European programming period 2007-2013.

The cross-border dimension of regional nature parks

The aim of a regional nature park is to "protect and promote the natural, cultural and human heritage of its territory by implementing an innovative, environmentally-friendly policy of planning and economic, social and cultural development". In mainland France, 14 regional nature parks are involved in cross-border cooperation projects: 9 are located directly on the border and 5 in border departments.

Three regional nature parks are running multidisciplinary projects on integrated development of cross-border areas, which can take concrete form in the establishment of a biosphere reserve (Northern Vosges regional natural park and Naturpark Pfälzerwald on the French-German border, Queyras regional nature park and the Italian parks around Mount Viso on the French-Italian border). On the French-Belgian border, cooperation between the Scarpe Escaut regional nature park and the Plaines de l'Escaut nature park is a step towards the establishment of a cross-border park (the Hainaut cross-border nature park).

The other parks concerned are involved in cooperation on specific topics (management of a catchment area, landscapes, tourism, etc.).

All of these projects receive support from European programmes (INTERREG). From the legal point of view, no specifically cross-border management structure has yet been introduced. However, in the case of the three cross-border area integrated development projects, commissions and agreements have been signed between the various partners in order to define the objectives and the terms of the cooperation.

Major challenges

The challenges for the regional nature parks in developing their cooperation with their border partners are now recognized by all: management and preservation of ecosystems, regional planning, economies of scale, strengthening of the areas' identities, measures for reducing isolation and for economic development, broadening of perspectives of action and know-how, coordination of practices, etc.

However, the means allocated to meet these challenges remain limited for rural areas, and substantial differences between the partners sometimes hamper projects (different legal and administrative frameworks, investment capacities and areas of competence, technical approaches, etc). The lack of visibility (for elected representatives in particular) with regard to the nature and the extent of project effects is also a hindrance to political mobilization in favour of such projects.

In order to overcome these obstacles, the regional nature parks have expressed the wish to be supported in order to develop cross-border cooperation and incorporate it into their area projects. Backed by their federation (FPNRF) and with the support of the MOT, they wish to be recognized, alongside other organized urban and rural areas at national and European levels, as areas of experimentation in cross-border cooperation contributing to the construction of a more citizen-centred European Union.

The partnership between the MOT and the parks federation thus has the objective of meeting these challenges. Its major elements include substantial mapping work (started in 2005), the identification of synergies between the competencies and complementarities of the two organizations, and support for project preparation and for requests by the parks for technical and legal assistance. The FPNRF will be a member of the MOT in 2006.

■ 2006 annual general meeting

The MOT AGM will be held on 15 June at the invitation of Mulhouse city council, a MOT member. It will be preceded by a conference-discussion the day before devoted to cross-border projects in the future 2007-2013 national and European programming period.

■ France-Switzerland: signature of a new cross-border rivers contract

On 19 January 2006, the cross-border rivers contract for the south-west Lemman area was signed officially in Sciez, for a six-year period. Involving some 18 French and Swiss partners, and benefiting from a budget of 28 million euros, it is the culmination of five years of preparation. It concerns the catchments of 12 watercourses located on the border between the Chablais pre-Alps and Lake Geneva. Its ambition is to restore the quality of these rivers, to protect the water resources, to control flood flows and preserve the quality of lake Geneva. It is the 6th cross-border rivers contract signed between France and Switzerland.

■ European year of workers' mobility 2006

2006 has been designated the European year for workers' mobility. An Internet site has been set up to report on all the activities, events and discussions held within this framework:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/workersmobility2006

Press review

- **Danuta Hübner speaks highly of cross-border cooperation at the Stockholm INTERREG forum**, Info regio News, 1 March
"The regional policy commissioner Danuta Hübner highlighted the benefits of cross-border cooperation for the border regions and called on the EU regions concerned to pool their resources, ideas and experience..."
- **The 2007-2013 state-region project contracts are launched**, La Tribune, 7 March
- **Border travel: grey area for public transport**, La Vie du Rail, 1 March
"While cross-border passenger numbers explode, public transport is slow to propose services that meet this demand..."
- **The foundations for a European hospital are laid**, Le Soir, 3 March
"Framework agreement between Lille and Mons-Borinage. Mons-Warquignies regional hospital centre and Lille Catholic University collaborate..."
- **Cancer: a French-German "first"**, L'Alsace, 24 February
"The representatives of the Cancéropôle du Grand Est and the German centre for cancer research in Heidelberg have signed a five-year cooperation plan. This is a "first" in the history of cooperation between France and Germany..."
- **Ten proposals for a new impetus**, Dernières Nouvelles d'Alsace, 10 February
"The 10th French-German-Swiss tripartite congress, meeting yesterday in Freiburg, adopted a list of ten commandments intended to provide new impetus to the pursuit of cooperation in the upper Rhine..."
- **Cutting-edge biotechnologies in the Alpine arc**, Le Dauphiné libéré, 19 February
"An agreement confirms the determination of three regional sites to establish a cross-border cooperation area. The Adebag for Grenoble/Rhône-Alpes, the Bioindustry Park for Turin/Piedmont and BioAlps for five French-speaking Swiss cantons including Geneva and Vaud..."
- **Cramer wants to go beyond the borders of Geneva**, Tribune de Genève, 28 February
"Planning - The State Councillor suggests a transfer of industrial activities to France..."

