



**EUROMÉTROPOLE**  
**EUROMETROPOOL**  
LILLE • KORTRIJK • TOURNAI

## MINUTES

# EUROPEAN CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN GROUPINGS OF TERRITORIAL COOPERATION

## IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROMÉTROPOLE LILLE-KORTRIJK-TOURNAI

The European Conference of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation was held on 27 - 28 January in Lille and Brussels. On 27th January more than 200 stakeholders from all over Europe came together in the Lille Métropole Communauté Urbaine. The meeting gave participants the opportunity of taking stock of the current situation of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation. Stef Vande Meulebroucke, general director of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai was responsible for organising the meeting that day. The next day, participants were invited to Brussels for the launch of the EGTC Platform.

### 27 JANUARY 2010

#### • OPENING PLENARY SESSION

After welcoming all participants, Stef Vande Meulebroucke, general director of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, handed over to Michel-François Delannoy, mayor of Tourcoing and vice-president of Lille Métropole. Michel-François Delannoy is also chairman of the Eurométropole's "Economy" Thematic Working Group.

- **Speech of Michel-François Delannoy, chairman of the Eurométropole's "Economy" Thematic Working Group.**

Michel-François Delannoy started by reminding participants that the Eurométropole was celebrating its third birthday. On 28 January 2008, Pierre Mauroy had announced the setting up of Europe's first European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). Since then, the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai had worked on a number of topics, including transport, the economy, tourism, sustainable development and employment. In addition, it could already point to a number of achievements: the compilation of the first cross-border tourist map; the planning of Next, the cross-border festival; job fairs; and university get-togethers. Furthermore the two hospitals, Mouscron and Tourcoing, had developed a number of innovatory cooperation projects. The Eurométropole had also taken initiatives in housing projects for senior citizens. The pooling of means and resources enabled mutual growth, he said.

The discussions to be held during that day would enable participants to share their experiences, any hurdles encountered, innovatory projects, etc. And to support those territories which were beginning to have doubts about institutional arrangements. The EGTCs, as innovation regions and political clusters, have one main aim: to bring together citizens from different countries. Winding up, Michel-François Delannoy underlined citizens' expectations for responses completely in tune with operational requirements.

***Stef Vande Meulebroucke reminded participants of the importance this conference had for the Eurométropole, as well as for existing EGTCs or the ones in the process of being set up. Following the showing of a film on the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, Europe's first EGTC, Stef Vande Meulebroucke proposed continuing with the speech of Colin Wolfe, the representative of the European Commission.***

- **Speech of Colin Wolfe, the representative of the European Commission.**

Colin Wolfe started by saying that though frontiers were obviously obstacles, they also represented major opportunities. In his view, living in a cross-border region represented a great opportunity, especially with regard to employment. The people gathered together that

day were interested in the example of the Eurométropole. The first EGTC European Conference was taking place in collaboration with the Committee of the Regions. This event enabled a discussion on the future of cohesion policy before developing a legal framework. The objective was to identify all possible ways of facilitating cooperation. One third of European citizens live in cross-border regions. This percentage illustrates the importance of defining the right mechanism for implementing cross-border cooperation. There are a lot of things needing to be regulated in a cross-border setting, for example transport or energy issues. Winding up, Colin Wolfe pointed out that there was still a lot of work to do and that putting cooperation into practice was no easy task. According to him, EGTCs are a way of overcoming such problems.

***Stef Vande Meulebroucke then handed over to Mercedes Bresso, president of the Committee of the Regions.***

- **Speech of Mercedes Bresso, president of the Committee of the Regions.**

A speaker from Brussels, Mercedes Bresso, president of the Committee of the Regions, welcomed the contribution made by the EGTCs. After wishing the Eurométropole a happy birthday, she recalled the determination and will that had led to the establishment of such an important organisation. The existence of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai marked a turning-point in the whole perception of borders. The Eurométropole proved that it was possible to set up a permanent cross-border structure with clear objectives, a sizeable budget, its own staff, strong political backing and a civic forum. The Eurométropole serves as a positive example for everyone who thinks that setting up an EGTC is a long and tedious process. One of the difficulties encountered involved aligning administrations with the different legal frameworks, said Mercedes Bresso. The Eurométropole is a true cross-border community, enabling the construction of a Europe playing a role in the everyday lives of citizens. This conference is very important for promoting EGTCs, explained Mercedes Bresso.

Moreover, the plenary session of the Committee of the Regions is going to adopt an own-initiative opinion under the title "New perspectives for the revision of the EGTC regulation" The Committee's opinion would represent a major policy contribution for the European Commission. The latter has to present a report on the implementation of proposals reforming the EGTC regulation by this summer at the latest. Mercedes Bresso stressed the importance of the Committee of the Regions' opinion in influencing the European Parliament

and the Council of Europe, as these also have to give their opinion on the possible revision of the regulation.

Last but not least, the Committee of the Regions has set up the EGTC Platform as a meeting place for all stakeholders and other parties involved in EGTCs. The platform provides expertise on territorial cooperation with a special focus on cross-border affairs. It will allow the Committee of the Regions to monitor more closely the evolution of EGTCs in Europe, while at the same time giving greater visibility to the ideas of individual EGTCs.

***Stef Vande Meulebroucke asked Colin Wolfe to comment on these remarks.***

- **Reaction of Colin Wolfe, representative of the European Commission**

Colin Wolfe explained that the draft text was very important. This summer, the European Commission will be submitting a report on enhancing the EGTC regulation. The European Parliament is in support of this project. The objective is to bring people on both sides of a border together. There are a number of concrete projects. There is a great deal of work to be done, and the European Conference of the EGTCs is an opportunity to tap everyone's expertise.

***Before handing over to Jan Olbrycht, Stef Vande Meulebroucke stressed that both the Commission and the Parliament support the EGTCs.***

- **Speech of Jan Olbrycht, MEP**

Jan Olbrycht expressed his satisfaction with the establishment and development of EGTCs, saying that cohesion policy constitutes their legal framework and that an EGTC is a legal instrument aimed at facilitating cross-border cooperation. Each Member State needs to define the legal provisions needed for the development of EGTCs on its territory, taking the cross-border aspect into account.

Jan Olbrycht also thought it necessary to revise the EGTC regulation. He does not want to continue seeing the European funds contained in the regulation. The removal of such provisions will avoid EGTCs being seen as an instrument for tapping such funds. Any

revision needed to highlight the fact that European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation are management authorities for cross-border programmes.

***Stef Vande Meulebroucke then invited participants to come together in the various workshops to discuss the status of EGTC staff, cooperation with existing European funds, the type of governance needed in these new structures, and the individual problems faced when setting up an EGTC.***

## **• CLOSING PLENARY SESSION: CONCLUSIONS FROM THE WORKSHOPS AND OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE EGTC EUROPEAN CONFERENCE**

***After more than three hours of discussion, Stef Vande Meulebroucke invited the representatives of each workshop to present their conclusions.***

### **• Working Group 1**

#### **Hiring procedures in the EGTCs: towards more standard procedures**

EGTCs have one expectation: the definition of a consistent legal framework for hiring staff. At present, the diversity of employee statuses within a single team is a source of difficulties. There are differences in the treatment of staff, whether in the application of labour legislation, social security membership, or the payment of taxes. The hiring and management of EGTC staff creates a legal and administrative situation unprecedented in Europe.

Hiring and management of staff are dependent on EGTC statutes previously agreed by the Member States or, where not present, the law applying to an EGTC's registered office. For example, the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai is experimenting with the dual construction of a French public-sector statute and a Belgian private-sector one. However, each EGTC is unique with regard to the partners involved, the territory covered and its tasks. Each has specific requirements regarding the composition of its team, the job profiles sought and in particular the technical and linguistic skills of staff.

Two paths are available for arriving at a consistent framework for hiring and managing EGTC staff. The first consists of carrying out an investigation of existing EGTCs to get to know the different legal solutions used by EGTCs for hiring their staff. Such an

investigation would enable the promotion of solutions defined on a European level to bridge the legal gaps. The second consists of giving an EGTC a choice with regard to employment contracts, allowing them to opt for one of the labour regimes in effect in the EGTC. In addition, the concept of having an opening clause in EGTC statutes could provide the possibility of exemptions from the legislation originally foreseen through the EGTC registered office - in specific cases and not for general use. This would enable staff to choose the optimal solution while maintaining legal certainty.

- **Working group 2**

### **EGTC cooperation with European Funds and their managing and operational authorities**

The core issues discussed in this workshop were: how to better integrate EGTCs into the implementation of European cohesion policy. What added value could EGTCs provide to European programmes?

EGTCs are predestined to play an important role in the development and implementation of European regional policy, possessing a number of assets in their capacity of a cooperation instrument. First of all, they constitute an instrument *par excellence* for implementing projects rooted in the territory. As an independent legal entity, they are in a position to exercise competences in their own right, at the service of a given territory. Last but not least, an EGTC enables the whole range of competences to be brought together, thereby making it closer to citizens.

It is nevertheless important for an EGTC to work in fields where it can unfold its full potential. The setting up of an EGTC represents an option, with its strategic outreach dependent on the mission assigned to it. But it is no solution for all problems. In addition, even if an EGTC is a legal instrument, it will never function properly without the existence of mutual trust between the various institutions involved. It has to be understood that mutual trust represents the keystone of any regional policy, and therefore of any territorial and cross-border cooperation.

- **Working Group 3**

### **Setting up a new EGTC: the do's and the don'ts**

The establishment a new EGTC brings with it the potential emergence of a new level of administration and power. It is therefore important to work together with Member States

involved to avoid obstacles. Where cross-border structures already exist, the setting up of an EGTC seems to be just an additional step. Setting up a new EGTC could be more or less easy, depending on the history of the countries concerned. On the other hand, in countries with no previous cooperation, the setting up of an EGTC represents a major challenge. In such cases, it is important for the cooperation between the two partners to have been sufficiently discussed.

The setting up of an EGTC offers a number of advantages. Such an institution allows certain measures to be introduced, certain standards to be defined for a given territory, and above all to make such cross-border territories competitive and attractive. In many cases, such territories are not faced with the same problems as national territories. It is not worthwhile setting up an EGTC just for a project lasting 2 - 3 years, as the actual establishment of such an institution takes up a lot of time. It is therefore only suited for long-term programmes.

- **Working Group 4**

#### **Multi-level EGTC governance**

An EGTC allows the introduction of multi-level governance at national borders. This form of governance involves the introduction of a dialogue on local problems between the participating States and territorial authorities of different sizes. In addition, an EGTC is an independent legal entity, having its own budget and its own staff. Nevertheless, the question of legitimacy arises.

The political representatives on EGTC governing bodies are not directly elected by citizens. In order to bind civil society to an EGTC, it is therefore necessary to focus primarily on projects and above all to "market" them. It is crucial to demonstrate to the populations involved that such a new structure provides answers to their problems and needs.

EGTCs are discussing ways of participatory democracy. The question is already arising on a national level, but also arises in a cross-border context. Several initiatives have been mentioned, including the creation of an internet forum enabling a dialogue with the population on strategies, projects, etc. In the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the "Forum" constitutes the formal discussion platform for dialogue between the institution and civil society.

- **Working Group 5**

#### **Single-tier EGTC governance**

An EGTC can also be based on single-tier governance. This solution is often chosen by partners with an identical status and very similar competences. Single-tier governance constitutes a good tool for municipalities and inter-communal organisations working together in an EGTC. To choose the right form of governance, it is important to take a number of factors into account, and above all to discuss them. Mutual trust between the institutions involved is therefore an absolute "must". In addition, any cooperation has to be long-term, with projects requiring the full-time support of the partners. There are innovative solutions available for integrating other institutions into an EGTC within a single governance structure. The State can for example act in an advisory role. The main thing is to carry on bringing EGTCs together and enabling them to exchange their experiences.

- **Closing speech of Stef Vande Meulebroucke, general director of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai**

Stef Vande Meulebroucke began by thanking the Committee of the Regions, the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) and the European Commission for their support in organising the conference. 66 years ago, Europeans had been at war against each other, with fighting taking place in the area now covered by the Eurométropole. We can therefore be proud of having set up instruments aimed at improving cooperation within Europe, he said.

According to Stef Vande Meulebroucke, it is essential for EGTCs to work together. The launch of the EGTC Platform allows a dialogue to be started up, helping to gain time. He pointed out that this communication tool is a vital link and that needs to run efficiently and that is dependent on members making use of it and contributing as much as possible. Furthermore, the EGTCs can count on the support of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions.

Winding up, the general director of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai stresses the fact that the concrete actions of the EGTCs represent the first step in building "a Europe to touch". The EGTCs give a new dimension to the construction of Europe.

- **Closing speech of Philippe Luyten, representing Rudy Demotte, the vice-president of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai.**

The Eurométropole presents itself as a structure of political and technical cooperation and consultation bringing together all levels of administration involved in the development of this Eurometropolitan region. Cross-border cooperation is a way of doing better together. *Rapprochement* with neighbours, on a bilateral basis, is important.

One of the special features of the Eurométropole is the close link between officials and civil society on the one hand and the thoughts and discussions of elected politicians on the other. On 28 September 2009, the "Forum", an instrument similar to a development board, was launched in Tournai, the city where it is to be based. The forum has 60 members, 30 from France, 15 from Flanders and 15 from Wallonia. They all come from the development boards of the three territories. Its chairman is Patrick Peugeot. This advisory body acts as a link between citizens, businessmen, associations, etc. and the discussions and work carried out by the Eurométropole. It can therefore be seen as a place of participatory democracy.

The second feature of the Eurométropole is its Thematic Working Groups. These bring together elected politicians, officials and representatives of civil society from the Forum. This approach has already led to the compilation of a Eurométropole tourist map, the emergence of Interreg projects submitted by the Eurométropole and its partners, and a mobility study, and enabled competitiveness clusters to move closer together. These initial achievements are an incitement to continue with efforts aimed at improving citizens' daily lives.

***Participants went on to celebrate the birthday of the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai.***

## • THE EUROMÉTROPOLE - ALREADY THREE YEARS OLD

Established on 28 January 2008, the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai is Europe's first European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), bringing together 14 Flemish, Walloon and French institutions intent on working together to support and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation.

Covering a total area of 3 550 km<sup>2</sup>, the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai forms the largest cross-border metropolis in Europe. In France, its territory covers the Lille metropolis. In Belgium, it covers seven districts - Mouscron, Tournai, Ath, Kortrijk, Ieper, Roeselare and Tielt - and the communes Silly, Enghien and Lessines.

The final aim of the Eurométropole is to eradicate the cultural, political and administrative frontiers, thereby making life easier for people living in the Eurométropole. French, Flemish and Walloon people are joining forces to initiate and support projects of common interest, in different fields though with a special focus on transport, tourism, the environment, culture, the economy and citizen services. A total of 147 communes have decided to take part in this ambitious project.

## 28 JANUARY 2010

- **THE LAUNCH OF THE EGTC PLATFORM**

**On Friday, 28 January, the representatives of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation assembled at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels for the launch of the EGTC Platform.**

The platform is a virtual meeting place for all actors and stakeholders of the European Groupings of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). It covers both existing EGTCs and ones in the course of being set up, members of the Committee of the Regions' Expert Group, public-sector organisations and other specialists working in the area of European territorial cooperation. Politicians, administrators, officials and experts will all be present on this platform, exchanging information on territorial cooperation and cross-border affairs. It will also enable the Committee of the Regions to better monitor progress in the development of EGTCs throughout Europe.

Europe currently has 15 EGTCs, working on behalf of their members - States, local and regional authorities and public-sector organisations - coming from at least two EU Member States. Like the Eurométropole Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai, the aim of these groupings is to facilitate and promote cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation.