

# Keeping cross-border cooperation in the focus of the European project

## (STRASBOURG DECLARATION)

Meeting in the Palais de l'Europe in Strasbourg on 7 October 2021, at the invitation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities at the Council of Europe, the Presidents of three organisations - the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (MOT) and the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI) - have agreed the following:

- (1) The unprecedented outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 led national governments to apply certain measures with a view to protecting their citizens. These measures lacked coordination and had a devastating impact on the primary achievement of the EU - the free movement of persons across the borders of Member States. These measures had a particularly harmful effect on the lives of border citizens, many of them cross-border commuters, and on the health and social institutions in which they worked. Other cross-border activities have also suffered.
- (2) The European Committee of the Regions (CoR), along with MOT, CESCI and AEBR, has created a European cross-border citizens' alliance to preserve what has been achieved by the 70-year-old integration, the 35-year-old Schengen Agreement, the 30-year-old Interreg programmes and Single Market. In cooperation with the European Commission, the Alliance has collected and published stories on the impact of COVID-measures on border areas. It has also carried out an online public consultation. The lessons learnt and the envisaged future challenges have been summarised in a CoR Resolution.
- (3) The Alliance has been of great value and, by signing this declaration, the representatives of AEBR, MOT and CESCI commit themselves to establish ever closer cooperation. We do this to preserve what has already been achieved along the internal and external borders of the EU and to facilitate their further development. Our aim is to emancipate borderlands and border citizens, who are the pioneers of the European project. In particular we seek to protect their living standards (access to quality services, education and employment) and their rights (representation and governance).
- (4) The three undersigned parties hereby declare that they will strengthen their cooperation and will act jointly in the following ways:
  - at local/regional, national and European levels;
  - with both short-term and long-term perspectives;
  - in the fields of cross-border obstacles and solutions; cross-border crisis management and border policies; cross-border observation, spatial planning and the development of functional areas; funding of cross-border investments; cross-border public services; and cross-border governance;
  - by collecting evidence and drafting analytical documents; elaborating policy papers; mapping cross-border phenomena; developing and maintaining knowledge and data bases; networking; capacity building; awareness raising and knowledge sharing activities; liaising with European institutions (EU and CoE).

In all these fields, the parties want to remove the obstacles and find cross border solutions.

- (5) In signing this document, the parties declare that their cooperation is not aimed at replacing any of the existing movements, organisations, initiatives and alliances. On the contrary, the undersigned parties seek maximum synergy among themselves and with any other organisation to reach their common goal - the well-being and guarantee of the four freedoms for border citizens.

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**Karl-Heinz Lambertz**  
AEBR President



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**Christian Dupessey**  
MOT President



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**Zsuzsanna Fejes**  
CESCI Vice-President

