

## 2.3 France

France, one of the founder members of the European Community, covers an area of 665 000 km<sup>2</sup>, of which Metropolitan France accounts for 552 000 km<sup>2</sup>, and is therefore the largest country in the EU. It has land borders with 13 countries, 9 of which neighbour Metropolitan France, namely: Belgium (620 km), Luxembourg (73 km), Germany (451 km) and Switzerland (573 km) to the northeast and Italy (513 km) and Spain (623 km) to the south, with a Spanish enclave (Llívia) inside French territory. France also shares two borders with micro-states, namely: Monaco (4.4 km) and Andorra (56.6 km). The Treaty of Canterbury signed on 12 February 1986 changed the maritime border between France and the United Kingdom to a land border, which has been crossed by road and rail traffic since the Channel Tunnel opened in 1994. With its Overseas Departments and Territories inherited from its colonial past, France has a 730 km border with Brazil and a 510 km border with Suriname in French Guiana, and borders with Canada on Green Island, close to the archipelago of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, and the Netherlands on Saint Martin in the Antilles.

The history of France's borders is linked to the long history of continental Europe and the formation of nation states in the 19th century, in which France played an important role, in particular by disseminating ideas born out of the French Revolution in 1789, which stirred up a desire on the part of the peoples of Europe to identify themselves as nations and establish their territories (this was the introduction of Westphalian sovereignty). It is also bound up with a past marked by numerous territorial conflicts between European powers, as a result of which the post-World War II borderlines still awaken painful memories and resentment in certain border populations. The territorial rivalries between France and the United Kingdom up to the 19th century — when they gave way to confrontations mainly outside Europe — were violent, and France's border conflicts with Germany and Italy were no less so. Alsace-Moselle has been tugged back and forth between France and Germany ever since the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), changing national affiliation three times since it was attached to France under the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia: it became German in 1871, when it was annexed to the Reich, then

French again in 1918 after World War I, German again under the National Socialist government in 1940 and then French again following liberation in 1945. The border between Italy and France has also been disputed: Corsica was annexed by France in 1769, whereas Savoie and the County of Nice did not join France until 1860, during the unification of Italy, when the border on the River Var was moved east. The Franco-Monegasque border changed at the same time, with Menton and Roquebrune opting in a referendum to join France. The French borders were finally fixed under the 1947 Paris Treaties. France gained 700 km<sup>2</sup>, following its enlargement in the Departments of the Alpes-Maritimes, Hautes-Alpes and Savoie and a number of minor subsequent changes to the borders with Switzerland, Andorra and Luxembourg.

France's cross-border projects and regions have developed in three main phases. The first started in the early 1960s and mainly concerned the Franco-German border, but also the borders with Switzerland and Luxembourg. France's first cross-border cooperation projects developed along the Rhine and the Moselle in Alsace and Lorraine, two regions long disputed between France and Germany. The creation of Franco-German regional cooperation structures can therefore be seen as a step in the reconciliation process launched in parallel by the two countries at a bilateral level. Thus the first cross-border association was the Regio Basiliensis, created in the Franco-German-Swiss area around Basel in 1963, coinciding with the signing of the Élysée Treaty by Konrad Adenauer and Charles de Gaulle. However, that Regio was driven from the Swiss side, even though two other Regios were subsequently created on the French and German sides, namely the Upper Rhine Regio (Regio du Haut-Rhin) in Mulhouse (1965) and the Freiburger Regio in Freiburg (1985). Together these associations represented the local level of cross-border cooperation, which was strengthened in 1995 when they merged into a single association, the Regio TriRhena. At regional level, cooperation in the Upper Rhine area was institutionalised when an intergovernmental agreement was signed in Bonn in 1975 and the area was joined by the federal states of Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate, the region of Alsace and the two cantons



The Regio Pamina Eurodistrict covers the southern Palatinate and the Mittlerer Oberrhein districts (Germany) and Northern Alsace (France)

of Basel. From 1991 onwards, this cooperation was managed by the Upper Rhine Conference based in Kehl in Germany. It was enlarged in 2000 to include the five cantons in north-western Switzerland (the two Half-Cantons of Basel and the Cantons of Aargau, Jura and Solothurn), under a new intergovernmental agreement signed in Basel. Finally, the Trinational Metropolitan Region of the Upper Rhine was created in 2010 in order to put proper multilevel governance in place in the cross-border area. This governance was also designed to involve the local cooperation associations which started to emerge after 2000. Four eurodistricts have been created in the region. The first, the Strasbourg-Ortenau Eurodistrict (2005), was launched by Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schröder during the 40th anniversary celebrations of the Élysée Treaty in Strasbourg and Kehl in 2003. The Regio Pamina, set up as a local cross-border cooperation grouping in 2001, was converted to a eurodistrict at the same time. These were followed by the Freiburg Region/Central and Southern Alsace Eurodistrict in 2005 and the Basel Trinational Eurodistrict in 2007.

Cross-border cooperation in the area between Lorraine, Saarland, Luxembourg and the Palatinate developed along similar lines to cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine Valley. The term SaarLorLux was first coined in 1969 by Hubertus Rolshoven, President of the Steering Committee of the Saarland Mining Corporation. Cross-border cooperation in this region was originally

closely bound up with the crisis in the steel industry, which hit this mining region extremely hard and caused economic problems simultaneously on both sides of the border (with unemployment, a need for retraining, etc.). It was later used as the name of the intergovernmental committee and regional committee set up in 1971, even though the regional committee already included the western Palatinate region in Germany and therefore extended beyond the SaarLorLux area. A legal basis was adopted for this cross-border cooperation in 1980, when an intergovernmental agreement was signed in Bonn between the three countries involved. However, the name for this cooperation area later changed. After a summit of the regional executives was held in 1995, the area was renamed the Greater Region (Grande Région) and sometimes referred to as SaarLorLux+ in order to take account of its extended geographical scope. That in turn grew over the course of time, with the inclusion of three Belgian federated entities (the Walloon Region and the French and the German-speaking Communities) in the Greater Region in 2005. At local level, the Greater Region is also divided into several intermunicipal units: the Longwy European Development Pole (PED) founded in 1985 between the municipalities of Aubange (in the Belgian Province of Luxembourg), Mont-Saint-Martin/Longwy (in the French Department of Meurthe-et-Moselle) and Pétange (in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg). A similar association was created 11 years later, in 1997, between those municipalities, Saarland, the Department of Moselle and the Region of Lorraine, becoming the

SaarMoselle Eurodistrict in 2010 based on an EGTC. Finally, the Ecocity of Alzette-Belval was established in 2009 as a public development agency between the Region of Lorraine and the southern region of Luxembourg.

A second phase of cross-border cooperation in France started in the 1980s and primarily involved regions close to the mountain ranges of the Alps, Jura and Pyrenees. That cross-border cooperation was driven by the national governments, as the French, Swiss, Italian and Spanish authorities gradually set up cross-border working communities. The Franco-Genevan Regional Committee was set up in July 1973 between the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud on the Swiss side and the prefectures in the Rhône-Alpes Region, Ain and Haute-Savoie and the Departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie on the French side. They were joined in 2004 by the Region of Rhône-Alpes itself and in 2006 by the ARC (Association régionale de coopération des collectivités locales du Genevois/Regional Cooperation Association of Genevan local authorities). This top-down process was completed in the 2000s by the bottom-up Greater Geneva agglomeration project (see below). The working communities and conferences established in the 1980s tended to focus on cooperation between local and regional authorities, especially following the first French decentralisation law passed in 1982, which delegated greater responsibilities to the Departments and introduced a new institution for regional cooperation in France, the regional council. After the transition

to democracy in Spain and the establishment of the autonomous communities there, regional cooperation also became possible on the Franco-Spanish border. The Pyrenees Working Community was set up in 1983 between the Regions of Aquitaine, Midi-Pyrénées and Languedoc-Roussillon in France, the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, Aragon, Navarre and the Basque Country in Spain and the Principality of Andorra. This was followed by the creation of the Western Alps Working Community (COTRAO) in 1983 (between the Cantons of Geneva, Valais and Vaud and the Regions of Rhône-Alpes and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, which were later joined by Valle d'Aosta, Piedmont and Liguria), the Jura Working Community in 1985 (between the Cantons of Jura, Berne, Neuchâtel and Vaud and Franche-Comté: prefecture of the region, region and departments), and the Lake Geneva Council (Conseil du Léman) in 1987 (between the Cantons of Geneva, Vaud and Valais and the Departments of Ain and Haute-Savoie). Based on these initial forms of collaboration with foreign neighbours, cross-border cooperation was stepped up in the 1990s and extended to other partners. In the Alps, the Mont Blanc Cross-Border Conference was set up in 1991 between the Canton of Valais, two communities of French municipalities in Savoie and Haute-Savoie and municipalities and the region of Valle d'Aosta, thereafter known as the Mont Blanc Area. Another two conferences were subsequently set up with Italian neighbours in 2000: the Franco-Italian Alps Conference (CAFI) between the French Departments of Alpes-Maritimes, Alpes-de-Haute-Provence, Hautes-Alpes, Isère,



Col des Émigrants, on the border between France and Spain

Savoie and Haute-Savoie, the Italian Provinces of Imperia, Cuneo and Turin and the autonomous region of Valle d'Aosta; and the Conference of the High Valleys, which was pitched at a more local level between communities of French municipalities and Italian mountain communities. Finally, cooperation was also placed on an official footing in the Jura with the creation in 2001 of the Trans-Jura Conference to replace the old Jura Working Community. This second phase of cross-border cooperation also gave rise to the concept of joint management of natural spaces. The first European nature park (Alpi Marittime-Mercantour) was established in 1987 by merging the Mercantour National Park in France and the Alpi Marittime Nature Park in Italy and has been managed by an EGTC since 2013. In the Pyrenees, the Pyrenees National Park on the French side and the Ordesa y Monte Perdido National Park on the Spanish side have been cooperating in a less integrated manner since 1988, but are nonetheless classed as a single UNESCO World Heritage Site. The first nature park on the Franco-Belgian border was established much later. In 1996, the Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park was set up between the Scarpe-Escaut Regional Nature Park (one of the oldest regional parks in France, established in 1968) and the Scheldt Plain Nature Park in Belgium.

While the need to manage natural areas such as mountain ranges gave rise to synergies for cross-border cooperation, other border areas in France needed a greater external impetus, which came from the Interreg programme launched by the European Commission in the early 1990s. This marked the start of the third phase in cross-border cooperation in France in places where local initiatives had previously been few and far between, such as on the northern border with Belgium and with the United Kingdom. The adoption of Interreg programmes in all French border regions eventually resulted in the management of cross-border projects and the creation of joint cooperation institutions at local and/or regional level (covering different areas from those covered by the Interreg programme management bodies) and even in the formation of euroregions. Following the first generation of Interreg programmes (1990-1995), cross-border cooperation between France and its

neighbours increased and intensified at all levels: national, regional and local. Landmark projects were implemented, such as the first international marine reserve of Bouches de Bonifacio, launched in 1992 by France and Italy between the Territorial Authority of Corsica and the Department of Corse-du-Sud and the Region of Sardinia and the Province of Sassari. The memorandum of understanding for the marine park resulting from this maritime cooperation project was signed in 1993. Cooperation with Spanish border regions has also developed very dynamically. It was thanks to strong regional identities (Catalan and Basque) that local and regional partners spawned numerous cross-border bodies and projects. The Department of Pyrénées-Orientales set up the Pyrénées-Cerdagne Cross-border Community of Communes with Cerdanya District Council in 1996, which was to become an EGTC in 2011. It also launched the Catalan Cross-border Area Eurodistrict project with Catalonia in 2008. On the Basque side, the Basque Eurocity of Bayonne-San Sebastián was formed in 1993. Today it includes the Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, the city of Donostia-San Sebastián and the Oarsoaldea local development agency on the Spanish side, and the Côte Basque-Adour agglomeration and the Sud Pays Basque agglomeration on the French side. The Bidasoa-Txingudi Cross-border Consortium was also set up at local level in 1998 between the municipalities of Hendaye, Hondarribia and Irun. In the 2000s, Franco-Spanish cross-border cooperation gave rise to cross-border structures and projects which were increasingly important from both an institutional and a legal perspective. The Region of Aquitaine (France) and the Basque Autonomous Community (Spain) started to collaborate in the 1990s by setting up a joint cooperation fund. The fund acquired a legal personality in 2004 with the creation of the Aquitaine-Euskadi Logistical Platform in the form of a European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), followed by the creation of the Aquitaine-Euskadi Euroregion in the form of an EGTC in 2011. The Pyrenees-Mediterranean Euroregion was set up in 2004 between the Regions of Languedoc-Roussillon and Midi-Pyrénées and the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia and the Balearic Islands. It too was converted to an EGTC in 2009. At a more local level, the flagship project is the Cerdanya cross-border hospital project set up as an EGTC

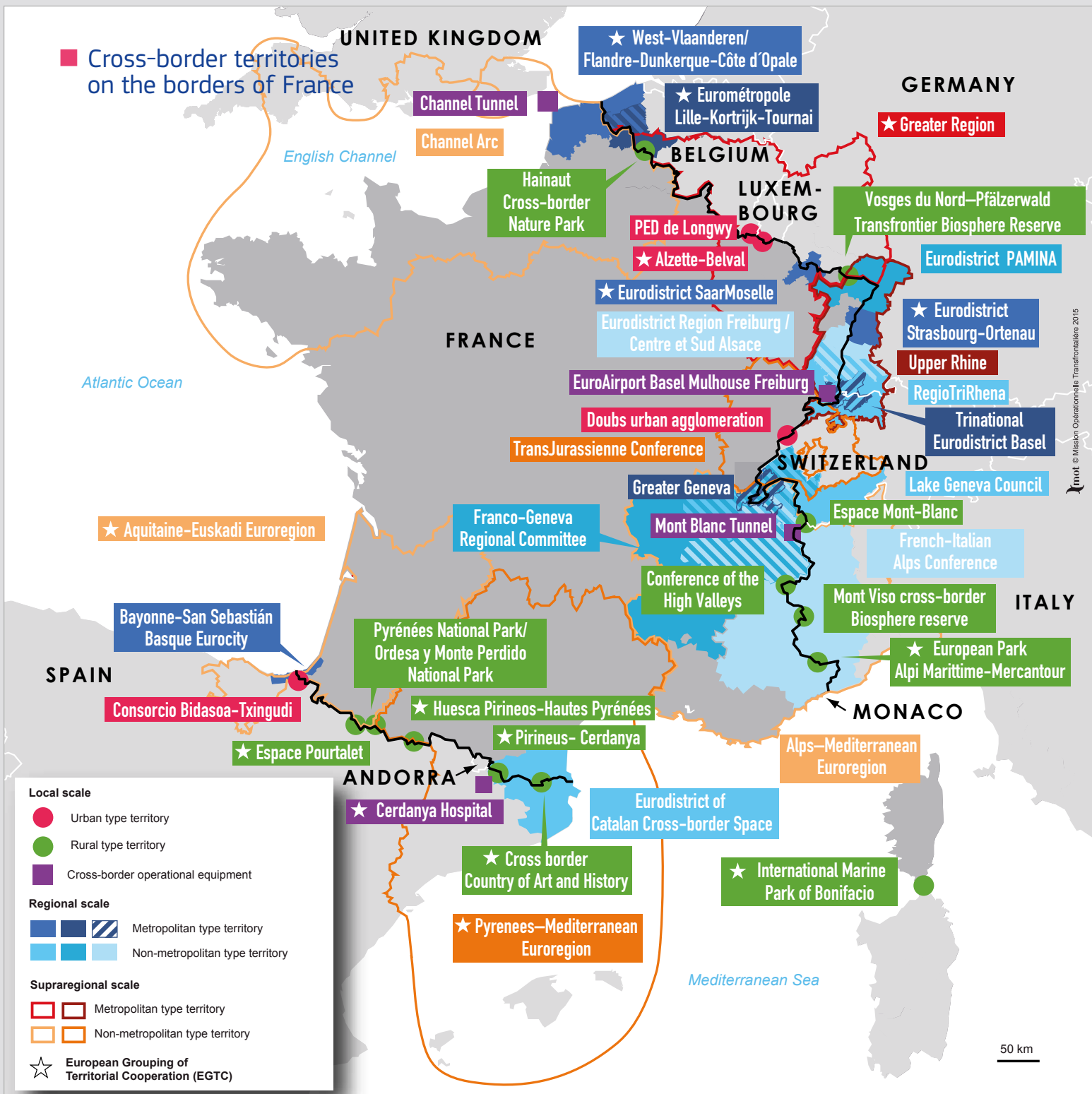
between France and the Catalonia Health Council in 2010. This was the first project to pool health services between two European countries. Another example is the EGTC between the Department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques and the Autonomous Community of Aragon, which manages the Pourtalet area.

Euroregions and eurodistricts were set up on other French borders in the 2000s. The Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis was established as an EGTC in 2008, as the successor to a cooperation project launched in 1991 with the Standing Intercommunal Cross-Border Conference (COPIT). It involves the European Metropolis of Lille, the Department of Nord, the Nord/Pas-de-Calais Region and the French State on the French side, and several intermunicipal groupings, the Provinces of West Flanders and Hainaut, the Flemish Region and Community, the Walloon Region, the Wallonia-Brussels Federation and the Belgian State on the Belgian side. A second EGTC was set up in 2009 in the region from West Flanders to the Flandre-Dunkerque-Côte d'Opale area. It is structured in a similar fashion, but it revolves around the urban community of Dunkerque and the intermunicipal association of West Flanders and also involves regional and national partners. The most important projects between France and Switzerland in this context are, first, the urban agglomeration of Doubs, the declaration of intent for which was signed in 2006 and which was converted to an EGTC in 2014 (involving the municipalities of Morteau, Villers-le-Lac and Fins on the French side, and Le Locle, La Chaux-de-Fonds and Les Brenets on the Swiss side); and, second, the local cross-border cooperation grouping (LCCG) of Greater Geneva set up in 2013 involving the Cantons of Geneva and Vaud, the City of Geneva, the District of Nyon, the Region of Rhône-Alpes, the Departments of Ain and Savoie, and the ARC, a mixed syndicate of communities and municipalities in the French part of Greater Geneva.

In contrast, cross-border cooperation between France and the United Kingdom has remained poorly developed, especially at the institutional level, even after the opening of the Channel Tunnel linking the two countries in 1994. Whether it is because neither State has a federal structure and local and regional authorities lack any real power

or because the British prefer flexible, non-institutionalised forms of cooperation, the only real cooperation forum is the Channel Arc, which began in 1996 and was set up in 2003 as a regional assembly composed of five French regions (Upper Normandy, Lower Normandy, Picardy, Nord/Pas-de-Calais and Brittany) and six English counties and unitary authorities (Kent, West Sussex, Hampshire, Devon, Brighton and Hove, and Southampton). However, this is more an interregional than a cross-border cooperation arrangement. All in all, France's borders are home to a plethora of cooperation arrangements at various levels, which have developed either bottom up (from local authorities) or top down (from the French State and neighbouring federated or federal states). This has given rise to a multilevel cooperation model, which differs from one border to another and which illustrates the awareness of the need for cross-border cooperation on the part of authorities at different levels — at the national level, with the indispensable involvement of national governments in cooperation arrangements (intergovernmental committees); at the supraregional level (Greater Region, Upper Rhine Valley, Trans-Jura Conference, Pyrenees Working Community and Pyrenees Euroregion); at the regional level, with eurodistricts (along the lines of euroregions on other German borders); and at the local level, in urban or rural cross-border areas — and, ultimately, the need for coordinated action between those levels. This need for multilevel governance is also illustrated by the creation of the Mission opérationnelle transfrontalière (MOT — Cross-Border Operational Mission) in 1997, which brought together authorities at the various levels of government on either side of France's borders and their cross-border groupings.

**Cross-border territories on the borders of France**



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50 km