

Abstracts – TEIN Annual Conference Organized by the Institute for Euregional and Transnational cross border cooperation and Mobility

The history and future of European integration in border regions

Contact

Birte Wassenberg, Professor of Contemporary History
Sciences Po Strasbourg
Birte.wassenberg@unistra.fr

Title: Attitudes on European Integration in Border Regions in the light of the European Parliament Elections 2024

Abstract

The panel on attitudes on European Integration in Border Regions in the light of the European Parliament Elections 2024 aims to examine positions on European Integration in EU-border regions at the moment preceding the elections to the European Parliament in 2024. The approach is comparative with regard to an analysis of Franco-German borderlands on the one side and Franco-Belgian borderlands on the other. How does the local press assess European topics in the border regions during the electoral campaign of the European elections? What are the positions –pro- or anti-European- of candidates to the European Parliament and how do they link to the border region and possible cross-border cooperation? Which attitudes to the EU and to European topics do cross-border institutions in the border regions defend? The panel deals with these three questions by means of an analysis of local and regional press during the elections campaign, by exploring interviews with candidates in the border regions or members of political parties standing for election for the European Parliament and by analyzing discourses of stakeholders from cross-border institutions.

Speakers:

Bernard Reitel, University of Artois (bernard.reitel@univ-artois.fr)

Bernard Reitel is Professor of Political and Urban Geography at the Artois University, in Arras. He held a Jean Monnet chair on ‘Borders and European integration’ from 2017 to 2020. His research work is to decipher the effects of European construction on trans-border cities and regions in Europe and to question functional, institutional and symbolic integration from a multi-scalar perspective. He is member of the franco-belgian Research group ‘Institut des frontières et des Discontinuités’.

Cross-border regions as laboratories for European integration in the perspective of the European elections 2024: a comparison of the Franco-German and Franco-Belgian borderlands

On the two borderlands we are comparing, the Franco-Belgian and the Franco-German, many cross-border cooperation initiatives focus on strengthening the participation of citizens living in the area close to the border in each country. Another specific feature of these borderlands is that several of these institutions are located in cross-border metropolitan regions (West-Vlaanderen/Flandre-Dunkerque-Côte d'Opale EGTC, Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai EGTC; Saarmoselle Eurodistrict EGTC, Strasbourg-Kehl Eurodistrict EGTC, Basel Trinational Eurodistrict).

The aim of this paper is to examine the idea of a laboratory for cross-border spaces in a context of heightened nationalism and euroscepticism, with a view to the 2024 European Parliament elections. Semi-directive interviews will be conducted with representatives of cross-border cooperation institutions on the perspectives

they see emerging after these elections in terms of cross-border cooperation and citizenship. What are their expectations? What vision of cross-border integration do they want to promote? How do they envisage working with future elected representatives, particularly those representing populist or nationalist parties, if elected? Two hypotheses will be tested: the first is that the nationalist vision is likely to call into question more or less important aspects of cooperation; the second, on the contrary, considers that the functional interdependence between adjacent border regions means that a pragmatic vision conducive to cooperation with reconsidered objectives will prevail. A comparison between the two cross-border areas will enable us to verify the relevance of these two hypotheses, and identify the existence of similar attitudes or, on the contrary, original dynamics between the Franco-German and Franco-Belgian borders.

Birte Wassenberg, Sciences Po Strasbourg (birte.wassenberg@unistra.fr)

Birte Wassenberg is Professor in Contemporary History at Sciences Po at the University of Strasbourg. She holds a Jean Monnet Chair, is director of the Franco-German Jean-Monnet Center of Excellence and director of the Master in Border Studies, International Relations. From 1993 to 2006 she was responsible for cross-border cooperation at the Région Alsace. Her research fields are: border regions, EU territorial cooperation and the history of European Integration, especially of European Organizations (EU, Council of Europe).

European narratives at the Franco-German border (Upper Rhine and Greater Region) in the light of European Elections 2024

This contribution analyses perceptions on Europe, European integration and cross-border cooperation in the two cross-border regions at the Franco-German border (Upper Rhine Region and Greater Region). Based on a regional media analysis during the election campaign of the European elections in 2024 and on interviews with candidates and members of political parties standing for election in the border region, it assesses attitudes on European Integration. The contribution evaluates if there is a push towards Euroscepticism in the border region or if the attitudes on the EU are rather positive, taking into account the specific “in-between” situation of the borderland. It will also examine the main issues favoring pro-European or Eurosceptic attitudes, for example: mobility, exchange on the one hand and fear of the other or resentment on the other. Finally, specific attention will also be drawn to the pertinence of the so-called “Franco-German” motor of European Integration in the border region.

Fabienne Leloup, UCLouvain (fabienne.leloup@uclouvain.be)

Fabienne Leloup is full professor at the UCLouvain. She teaches in public administration, political sciences, development studies and manages a certificate in local governance. As a researcher, she is a member of the Institute of political sciences Louvain Europe (ISPOLE). Her research addresses the processes of territorial development and governance. In this context, cross-border regions, institutions, and governance constitute exceptional laboratories for the delivery of public and collective action. She is also funder member of the Institute of Borders and Discontinuities, a scientific Franco-Belgian research group.

What future in terms of cooperation for a pioneering cross-border region? A study at the Franco-Walloon border.

The Franco-Belgian cross-border region is a pioneering region for European cross-border cooperation, not only because Belgium and France were founder countries of the EEC but also because long-standing cross-bordering exchanges have been developed and created interactions, arrangements and even institutions gathering public and private actors.

This functional horizontal integration can be questioned in the light of the future European elections. How do French and Belgian candidates for the European elections living in this cross-border area perceive the cross-border stakes, constraints, and opportunities? Which priorities for Europe and for the cross-border regional or local realities do they propose? How do they assess the current process to govern such a cooperation? Which innovation in terms of governance do they imagine?

The analysis is concerned with the French speaking part of the Franco-Belgian border (Wallonia and France) and is based first on a qualitative analysis of the written press – in order to collect speeches and public narratives - and on semi-structured interviews with candidates of the various political parties, who are border residents.

The objective is then to clear what is known by these specific European candidates in terms of local cross-border cooperation, what they expect to implement and why. The fact of interviewing candidates on this subject will light the possible priority and future of cross-border cooperation in a specific context. The results of the elections in June 2024 will be included in order to put into perspective the conclusions of the paper.