



## ITEM Reflection: European Elections 2024 and Border Regions





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# ITEM Reflection: European Elections 2024 and Border Regions

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*The Institute for Transnational and Euregional cross border cooperation and Mobility / ITEM is the pivot of research, counselling, knowledge exchange and training activities with regard to cross-border mobility and cooperation.*

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## ITEM Reflection: European Elections and Border Regions

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## Introduction

Between 6 and 9 June 2024, the elections for the European Parliament will be held. The elections are an important moment for the direction and future of the development of border regions and cross-border cooperation.

According to the numbers of the European Commission, border regions represent 40% of EU's territory, home to a third of EU's population. Border regions are the so-called living labs of EU integration, where both the positive and negative or missing elements of European cooperation is felt on a daily basis.<sup>1</sup> Border regions are the hot spots of intense cross-border interactions, enjoying advantages of the freedoms and single market but also testing them. In this respect there are also persistent difficulties due to the cross-border nature of border region, as highlighted in the 2017 Communication of the European Commission.<sup>2</sup> In recent years multiple initiatives are deployed to strengthen border regions and cross-border regions. For example, on 12 December 2023, the European Commission revitalized the so-called European Cross-Border Mechanism in the form of an adapted regulation on Facilitating Cross-Border Solutions. The proposal aims to strengthen cross-border cooperation and solve border obstacles by introducing 'Cross-Border Coordination Points' and creating a voluntary 'cross-border facilitation tool'. With the Cohesion Policy up to 2027, investments are also made in cross-border cooperation and territorial cohesion. In this respect, in the period 2021-2027, 8,050 million euros were made available to Interreg as programme for border regions.

However, the development of border regions is at crossroads.<sup>3</sup> The Cohesion Policy after 2027 will be negotiated and, among others, the COVID-19 pandemic showed that the current status quo for border regions is not enough. Also in the Cohesion Reports and Better Regulation Communications, the European Commission addresses the need for stronger place-based<sup>4</sup> policies and legislation for border regions.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, cross-border cooperation and development of border regions does not come automatically but deserves structural investments in time and money.

In the party manifestos, political parties formulate their plans for the future of the European Union, and directly or indirectly shape cross-border cooperation and the development of border regions. What are the plans of the different political parties regarding border regions as so-called *living labs*? What are the effects for the border regions? Ahead of the elections, ITEM has analysed the European Manifestos of the different political groups in the European Parliament. Also fueled with data from national programmes, ITEM will reflect on the dimension of border regions and cross-border cooperation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also: Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'EU Border Regions: Living labs of European integration', COM(2021) 393 final.

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament 'Boosting growth and cohesion in EU border regions', COM(2017) 534 final.

<sup>3</sup> See also: <https://crossborderitem.eu/en/foreword-item-newsletter-february-2024/>

<sup>4</sup> With place-based is meant that it takes better into account the specifics of a territory and is better addressing and designed to the needs and characteristics in the region.

<sup>5</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 'Better Regulation: Joining forces to make better laws', COM/2021/219 final.

<sup>6</sup> Note: this is a living document. The analysis will be complemented by national tables from party programmes in the Benelux area + Germany and France. As not all programmes are available, these will be added in a later stage.

## Method

For the analysis of the Manifestos, the same method was adopted as in the earlier ITEM Reflections.<sup>7</sup> That is, a thematic approach is followed. This includes eight main cross-border themes:

- Cross-border labour market: such as encouraging living and working across borders, development of the so-called 360-degree labour market;
- Cross-border care/welfare: such as cross-border cooperation between hospitals, deployment of ambulances and emergency services, improving life on and across the border;
- Cross-border mobility/infrastructure: such as (rail) connections and facilities across the border, stimulating cross-border mobility in the border region;
- Cross-border education and culture: such as promoting neighbourhood languages, school and bilingual exchanges, cross-border cultural events, cultural exchanges;
- Cross-border security: such as cross-border cooperation between police, fire brigade, crisis management and prevention;
- Cross-border energy transition/climate: such as cooperation in energy projects, cross-border alignment of policies and instruments, nature management and water quality;
- Cross-border innovation: such as stimulating cooperation between universities and colleges, cross-border innovative projects, Interreg programmes;
- Euroregional governance/cooperation: such as concrete plans to strengthen the Euroregional and cross-border organisational structure with neighbouring countries, financial resources for cross-border structures, proactive plans for structural coordination and agenda-setting across borders.

The screening takes place based on a twofold methodology. On the one hand, by selectively searching for relevant components and themes. Relevant elements for border regions and cross-border cooperation or border effects are considered. These may or may not already be named as such in the manifestos. Nevertheless, more concrete plans exist in the manifestos, which have not been included in the screening because no cross-border relevance is considered. Under the heading 'relevance cross-border cooperation', a reflection from ITEM is given on the elements included. On the other hand, a more quantitative approach complements the analysis, which consists of a specific search for the terms 'border', 'neighbour' and 'euroregion'/'Benelux'. This provides a quantitative representation of the quantity and specificity of attention to border regions and cross-border cooperation.

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<sup>7</sup> Such as for the Dutch [Parliamentary Elections](#) and [Provincial Elections](#) in 2023.

## Screening of Manifestos of the European political groups

In the analysis, ITEM has focussed on the European groups that are present and active in the European Parliament. The political groups bring together different national parties based on political affiliation.<sup>8</sup> ITEM has reviewed the manifestos of the European People’s Party, the Party of European Socialists, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, European Democratic Party (ALDE and EDP both belonging to the Renew Europe Group), the Greens, the European Free Alliance, the European Left and Volt Europa. The groups European Conservatives and Reformists and Identity and Democracy (ID) have not published manifestos. In this respect, ID is referring to its program and Declaration of Antwerp. The party of the French president Macron recently announced to forge a new European alliance that unite the EU’s liberal forces: the New Europeans.<sup>9</sup> It has been founded in March 2024 under French law, but there is no information or manifesto published up to this moment.

Table 1: European groups and manifestos, in order of publication on website of European Parliament

European group	Manifesto
<i>European People’s Party (EPP)</i>	<a href="#">Our Europe, a safe and good home for the people</a>
<i>Party of European Socialists (PES)</i>	<a href="#">The Europe we want: Social, democratic, sustainable</a>
<i>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)</i>	<a href="#">Your Europe, Your Freedom: Delivering change for you</a>
<i>European Democratic Party (EDP)</i>	<a href="#">Reinventing Europe</a>
<i>The Greens (EGP)</i>	<a href="#">Courage to change</a>
<i>European Free Alliance (EFA)</i>	<a href="#">A Europe For All</a>
<i>Identity and Democracy (ID)</i>	<a href="#">Declaration of Antwerp</a>
<i>European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR)</i>	No manifesto published.
<i>The European Left (ELG)</i>	<a href="#">Our Moment</a>
<i>Volt Europa</i>	<a href="#">Electoral Moonshot Programme</a>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/organisation-and-rules/organisation/political-groups>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-new-europeans-unite-fragmented-liberals/>

## The Manifesto of the European Peoples Party: Our Europe, a safe and good home for the people

The European People's Party (EPP) is the largest political group in the Parliament. The EPP can set the political agenda and wing critical votes. According to its own claim, since 1999, they have been on the winning side of more votes than any other group in the EP's monthly plenary sessions. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, is the main candidate for the elections in 2024, although not standing as a candidate for the European Parliament. 177 Members of the European Parliament belong to the EPP.

### General information on Manifesto of the EPP

- The Manifesto has 26 pages

### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 26 times, very often in the context of external border and migration.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ Internal border is mentioned 2 times in the context of border controls at the external borders to ensure the open internal borders.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Labour market &amp; Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Therefore, we have to elevate the needs of our regions and local communities when discussing the EU budget. Cohesion policy has a highly positive impact on the single market. It should remain strongly supported in the EU budget, but with simplified rules and with the direct involvement of regional and local authorities in the design and implementation of programmes. We want to improve the subsidiarity check also by assessing the territorial impact of all new EU legislation. We will promote a European plan for rural areas, including vulnerable areas near the EU external border that have suffered from the consequences of Russian aggression and to strengthen the EU strategy for Outermost Regions.</li> <li>- This is why the EPP secured the approval of a new Rule-of-Law conditionality mechanism that ensures that EU funds would stop flowing into governments that breach the rule of law. The EU is not a cash-cow and governments that do not subscribe to our common values cannot expect to benefit from EU funds.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve subsidiarity check. And the need for tailor-made solutions for regions and local communities sounds like a better territorial impact assessment.</li> <li>- Rule of law, conditionality of cohesion fund money.</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	-	-
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- At the same time, we will concentrate our efforts on streamlining the completion and development of the new Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) infrastructures, which are crucial for structuring our European territory and enhancing the efficiency of the European single market.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No particular mention of cross-border infrastructure (rail)</li> </ul>
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	-	
<i>Safety</i>	-	-
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	-	-
<i>Innovation</i>	-	-
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- (...) particularly by further strengthening the EU's external border protection and by preventing illegal migration to Europe in order to realise a secure and completed Schengen Area without internal border controls.</li> <li>- We seek a halt to uncontrolled migration so that Europe's capacity to integrate is not overwhelmed. European Member States, not smugglers, must decide who enters Europe. Important first steps have been taken by the expansion of Frontex to 10,000 staff in recent years, the financing of an electronic and physical infrastructure to protect the EU's external borders, the new Migration and Asylum Pact at the end of 2023 and the closer cooperation with third countries, as is the case with Tunisia.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The EPP is also trying to protect the principle of Schengen, no border controls at the internal borders by emphasizing the protection of the external borders.</li> <li>- Expansion of Frontex for the protection of the external border otherwise the EPP cannot exclude controls at internal borders.</li> </ul>



### Brief Reflection

The EPP manifesto emphasizes the importance of cohesion policy and the financial support. It is also said that regions and municipalities should be involved in assessing the financing needs. This seems to be a positive position towards the future negotiation on the cohesion budget. Regions at the internal borders are not mentioned in the programme as a specific category of concern. The EPP proposes a European Plan for the uttermost regions and external border regions that are hit by the Russian aggression. In general, there is the idea that the EU should better serve the needs of specific regions and municipalities in general. The EPP concludes that there is still a lack of ex ante territorial impact assessment. It is interesting that the EPP links the need for better impact assessment of legislative proposals to the existing subsidiarity check. The manifesto promotes the idea of an improved subsidiarity check system, where also territorial aspects should be better taken into account. The question is whether this is an assignment for the Member States. There, the different chambers of the Parliament are involved in the subsidiarity check of Commission proposals. Or, is it an assignment for the European Commission to better assess the territorial impacts of the legislative proposals in the course of their internal impact assessment scheme.

In general, the EPP manifesto is very much focusing on the protection of the external borders. The most evident link to border regions is the objective to invest more in the protection of the external border in order to safeguard the Schengen regime and the open internal borders.

## The Manifesto of the Party of European Socialists: The Europe we want

According to the own description the Party of European Socialists (PES), Socialists and Democrats bring together the Socialist, Social Democratic and Labour Parties of the European Union and shape progressive policies. The PES Election Congress on 2 March 2024 elected Nicolas Schmit as the common candidate and adopted the PES manifesto for the EU elections. In the European Parliament, the PES is represented by the Progressive Alliance of the Socialists and Democrats, also known as the S&D group. It has 145 Members of the European Parliament from 26 Member States.

### General information on Manifesto of PES

- The Manifesto has 24 pages.

### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 4 times in the context of security at the external borders, inequalities with the borders of the EU, cross-border emergency services in the case of a health crisis.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Labour market &amp; Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We want a strengthened European Labour Authority. We want an Investment Plan for the Green and Digital Transitions to create new jobs and to reindustrialise our economy and make it innovative, competitive and circular.</li> <li>- We will keep delivering on an ambitious Cohesion Policy across Europe to improve quality of life in cities, rural areas and remote regions, and reverse the brain drain.</li> <li>- We defend the partnership approach with regional and local authorities and their crucial role in shaping and implementing Cohesion Policy for upwards social convergence, together with civil society.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This could be an important element of fair cross-border labour markets</li> <li>- No special mentioning of cohesion funds or the future of Interreg</li> <li>- One of few manifestos that explicitly supports today's cohesion policy.</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We want a European Health Union that manages cross-border pandemic responses and supports and respects public healthcare at the national level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The PES is the only party who pledges for a cross-border health union in the case of pandemics.</li> </ul>
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	-	-
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	-	-
<i>Safety</i>	-	-
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We strive for the reform of the energy market to guarantee price stability and affordability, to modernise our infrastructures and strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No mentioning of cross-border obstacles.</li> </ul>
<i>Innovation</i>	-	-
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We will ensure that the EU's external borders are strengthened, managed and controlled effectively, while protecting the safety and rights of people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal borders are not mentioned but the necessity to effectively control external borders</li> </ul>

### Brief Reflection

The PES is supporting an ambitious Cohesion Policy across Europe to improve quality of life in cities, rural areas and remote regions, and reverse the brain drain. Interesting with respect to cross-border labour markets is the fact, that the PES also wants a strengthened European Labour Authority. However, there is no specific link to the improvement of cross-border labour markets in border regions. As a new fund, the PES proposes a special Investment Plan for the Green and Digital Transitions without mentioning certain territorial challenges in border regions. As other parties, also the PES does not refer to the future of Interreg programmes, or specific legal instruments. As the only party, the PES supports the idea of a European Health Union that manages

cross-border pandemic responses. However, this is not going beyond the framework of public healthcare at the national level, meaning there is no mentioning of special cooperation frameworks in border regions.

## The Manifesto of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe: Your Europe, Your Freedom: Delivering change for you

The European liberal party, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) was founded more than 30 years ago in the German city of Stuttgart in 1976. From a Dutch perspective, it is striking that VVD and D66 are both members of the ALDE group in the European Parliament and from both parties, Members have worked on this manifesto. Liberal Democrats in the European Parliament have a seat in the Renew Europe Group (ALDE/EDP and Macron's new group) of which 71 are affiliated to ALDE. Renew Europe as a whole presented three lead candidates for the 2024 European Parliament election, one for each of the three factions that form the joint group: ALDE (Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann), EDP (Sandro Gozi) and L'Europe Ensemble (Valérie Hayer).

### General information on the ALDE Manifesto

- The Manifesto has 26 pages.

#### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 14 times in the context of improving cross-border rail connection, security questions, crime, migration, frontex and the external borders.
- ✓ **Internal border** is mentioned 2 times in the context of the internal market and security.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Labour market &amp; Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased economic integration and removal of all internal borders and existing barriers for products, services and public procurement, making sure our innovators can access venture capital and investor funds across Europe.</li> <li>- Simplify tax reporting arrangements and administration for workers and businesses operating across borders within the EU, and support the implementation of the Common</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The removal of internal borders is related to the internal market. The EU dimension is reflected, however the horizontal dimension between Member States is not mentioned.</li> <li>- The ALDE manifesto is the only manifesto that supports the idea of simplified tax reporting. As in the case of the home office situation of cross-border workers, a salary split and two declarations is certainly not a simple system, where simplification could be strengthening cross-border labour markets, as ITEM reports have shown (Cross-border impact assessment 2022, b-solution cases).</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	-	-
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enable decarbonisation for all types of transport, whether cargo or passenger, through infrastructure development, including the completion of missing cross-border transport connections, electrification of public transport and charging infrastructure in less densely populated areas, active mobility across national, regional, and local levels as well.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support of tackling the missing links in rail infrastructure, however without mentioning a specific instrument or regulation.</li> </ul>
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No special mentioning of cooperation of the education sector in border regions or the cross-border aspect of University cooperation</li> </ul>
<i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tackle the rise in drug-related crime in Europe, which has become a prime market for international drug traffickers. Increase collaboration between Europol, Interpol and national law enforcement agencies through enhanced information and data exchange for all serious cross-border and organised crime.</li> <li>- Make it conditional to receive EU funding to cooperate with the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), which should have the ability to enforce sanctions beyond financial penalties. EPPO's powers should be extended to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not directly linked to police cooperation in border regions but this could also be of added-value for cross-border territories.</li> <li>- Reform steps with respect to external border, also to guarantee open internal borders.</li> </ul>

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>include all serious, crossborder crime that cannot be handled by Member States alone.</li> <li>- Reform Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, for effective control of EU external borders with respect for human rights.</li> </ul>	
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deepen electricity interconnections between Member States to improve the efficiency and integration of EU electricity markets, increase security of supply and reduce dependency on third-country suppliers. We must ensure that the EU interconnection target of at least 15% by 2030 is reached.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ALDE supports cross-border energy markets that could be also beneficial for the cooperation in border regions, where cross-border links are missing and cross-border energy projects are very difficult to implement because of differences in subsidies, permitting, spatial planning and electricity markets.</li> </ul>
<i>Innovation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Through efficient regulation, increased economic integration and removal of all internal borders and existing barriers for products, services and public procurement, making sure our innovators can access venture capital and investor funds across Europe.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No special mention of cross-border synergies (in cross-border territories), but increased economic integration could also be beneficial for border regions, however no specific instruments mentioned</li> </ul>
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We reaffirm our belief that strong external EU borders and open internal borders boost economic growth, business and transport efficiency, and cross-border employment, all of which serve to speed up the cohesion, economic integration, and stability of our Union.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Firm commitment to Schengen and the open internal border, a positive position for border regions.</li> </ul>

### Brief Reflection

ALDE is very much emphasising the need to improve the functioning of the internal market. In this respect, they also see border obstacles for businesses who operate across the internal borders of the EU. This is in line with many ITEM recommendations of the past ranging from better recognition of qualifications to the need to streamline subsidy schemes in the field of renewable energies. However, the policy proposal are not tailor made for the specific needs of border regions and cross-border territories, but transnational. In this respect, also the ALDE programme does not define the border region/cross-border region as a specific category, where special instruments for better horizontal integration are necessary. In this respect, the aim of protecting the external border is to keep the internal borders as open as possible. This is very much in the interest of border regions, however this could be described as a minimum requirements for functioning cross-border labour markets, trade, cultural exchange and cross-border cohesion.

## The Manifesto of the European Democratic Party: Reinventing Europe

Eleven Members of the European Parliament are affiliated to the European Democratic Party (EDP). They are in the European Parliament part of the liberal Renew-Group. The European Democratic Party was according to their own description launched on April 16th 2004 and officially founded on December 9th 2004 in Brussels. According to EDP, the party was founded as a reaction to the growing influence of Eurosceptic parties within the European institutions and thus formed a new multinational centrist bloc. The European Democratic Party describes itself as ideologically centrist and federalist. Since 2004, the EDP has formed a joint European parliamentary group with the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe party (ALDE), later renamed to "Renew". Renew Europe as a whole presented three lead candidates for the 2024 European Parliament election, one for each of the three factions that form the joint group: ALDE (Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann), EDP (Sandro Gozi) and L'Europe Ensemble (Valérie Hayer). The leading candidate of the EDP Sandra Gozi is currently the rapporteur for the revised proposal of the European Commission on the European Cross-Border Mechanism. In this respect, he is the only main candidate of the different parties who is today directly engaged in cross-border questions in the European Parliament. The manifesto of the EDP is the most detailed manifesto compared to the others in the framework of this analysis. The very special aspect is that it defines a list of 300 priority actions in different policy fields.

### General information on Manifesto of EDP

- The Manifesto has 51 pages.

### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 31 times in the context of cross-border associations, protection of external borders, cross-border infrastructure and connectivity, healthcare, educational cooperation, media, removal of obstacles and Schengen Borders Code.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.



Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Labour market &amp; Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We will prioritise the fundamental objectives of this policy: reduce disparities between regions, promote balanced economic growth and eliminate obstacles to cross-border regional cooperation.</li> <li>- Allow the export of social security rights to encourage mobility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Explicit mentioning of the stimulation of cross-border cooperation and mobility.</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage Member States to use public-private partnerships in the health sector and facilitate cross-border healthcare to enable their residents to access planned healthcare abroad, particularly by issuing a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rather abstract support for planned healthcare abroad relevant for cross-border territories. The EHIC is still not the one solution for cross-border healthcare and applies to unplanned situations.</li> </ul>
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve intermodality to facilitate cross-border travel, and introduce in the Revision of the Schengen Borders Code the obligation for States to carry out and examine impact studies on trade and relations in cross-border areas before taking any decision on the reintroduction of controls.</li> <li>- Introduce a European identity card and passport; freedom of movement of funds (with safeguards, of course) and facilities for living and working in Europe.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very interesting aspect with respect to ITEM's work on impact assessment: ITEM would certainly support the idea of an obligation to assess the effects of the reintroduction of border controls</li> <li>- A European identity card could be related to administrative simplifications in cross-border regions.</li> </ul>
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a mechanism for the recognition of diplomas and qualifications common to the countries of the European Union.</li> <li>- Facilitate the mobility of students and workers and encourage the circulation of skills and talent throughout the EU.</li> <li>- Develop cross-border cooperation in education and training.</li> <li>- Promote European and cross-border media, such as ARTE.</li> <li>- Develop a genuine language policy by promoting multilingualism from primary school onwards through language exchanges in each regional area and towards Europe.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abstract support, no mentioning whether this should be a revision of the existing EU legislation</li> <li>- ITEM research for the Euregio Meuse-Rhine has shown that there are structural problems with respect to the cooperation in education, that are for instance not to overcome with ad-hoc Interreg projects</li> <li>- Cross-border media could be especially important in border regions. The success of the attempts to strengthen cross-border coverage for instance at the German-Dutch border are modest.</li> <li>- Extra EU policy and funding could help border regions with respect to the stimulation of neighbouring languages.</li> </ul>
<i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-</li> </ul>

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Innovation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Defend the mission of Cohesion Policy to ensure that it is not jeopardised by the redirection of funds to crisis management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This seems to be also a support for future Interreg funding in border regions</li> </ul>
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implement the BRIDGE-EU (Border Regency Initiative for Development and Growth in Europe) programme and promote macro-regions.</li> <li>- Establish a statute for European cross-border associations.</li> <li>- Strengthen the role of the European Union in areas such as health, education and energy</li> <li>- Introduce an emergency clause to authorise the European Union to act with extraordinary powers in a major crisis.</li>   <li>- Facilitate the participation of European citizens residing in another Member State by enabling them to vote and/or stand in their country's regional or national elections.</li> <li>- Include transnational lists in European Parliament elections.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The only party manifesto that explicitly mentions the EP resolution that led to the new EU proposal on a cross-border mechanism.</li> <li>- A short ITEM analysis has shown that this would be an interesting element in the cross-border toolbox</li> <li>- ITEM research has shown that bilateral coordination in these sectors has so far not reduced the obstacles. Especially, in the field of energy national objectives are hindered by non-coordination.</li> <li>- ITEM research has shown that Member States for instance in the Corona crisis fell back to national top down steering which has been a major problem in border regions. European steering could have helped.</li> <li>- Voting rights in the residence country would be certainly a positive element in border regions where citizens pay taxes</li> <li>- Citizens in border regions have often not only one affiliation to one Member State. They could be interested in transnational lists.</li> </ul>

### Brief Reflection

The EDP manifesto is by far the most explicit programme with respect to aspects related to border regions. In the first place, it supports the objective of the ongoing negotiation on a European Cross-border mechanism (now facilitation tool) that was relaunched by the European Commission. ITEM has organised several events on this and is positive about the effects in border regions. Very concrete is also the support for the proposal on a statute for cross-border associations that is also under negotiation in Council and Parliament. Since ITEM has developed instruments in the field of cross-border impact assessment, the EDP proposal on an impact assessment of the reestablishment of border controls in the Schengen area is considered as very interesting. The Member States should have the obligation to better assess the effect on border regions. It would be from an ITEM point of view also interesting to do research on the potential effects of some of the proposals. What could a European identity card mean for citizens in border regions, what would be the

advantage of European lists for the EP elections. ITEM has also done extensive research on cross-border crisis management. The question is what could be the effect of more European steering for the border regions.

## The Manifesto of the European Greens Party: Courage to change

The European Greens (EGP) are established as a European Party. According to their self-description, they bring together national parties from across the European continent that share the same green values and political priorities: the climate and environment, social justice, wellbeing, peace and democracy.<sup>10</sup> They form a political group in the European Parliament with EFA, Pirate and Independent MEPs, together they are 72 Members. The party has formulated 11 top priorities for the EU elections ranging from climate change action to affordable housing.

### General information on Manifesto of EGP

- The Manifesto has 46 pages.

#### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 16 times in the context of European Ticketing Platform, fair mobility across borders, criminalization of migration, enlargement, cross-border associations, crisis management and Schengen border controls.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
Labour market & Economy	- Europe must enable and protect fair mobility of workers across borders, so no one falls through the cracks of nationally fragmented social systems. To avoid social dumping, social rights and access to the labour market must be ensured. Administrative tasks should be possible in different languages, social services should be open to mobile workers, and social coordination on	- Clear priorities to do away with border obstacles that are very often discussed in border regions. Fair Mobility as a need for transnational and Euregion cross-border labour.

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://europeangreens.eu/programmes-and-networks/>.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
	<p>EU level should be fostered. The recognition of professional qualifications should be made easier.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The European institutions should act to reverse the steady re-emergence and illegally unlimited maintenance of border checks within the Schengen area, especially based on the justification of migration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Border checks as in the case of the pandemic or recently re-established at several German borders are a hindrance for a well-functioning cross-border labour market. They disturb indeed cross-border cohesion.</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	-	-
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To promote sustainable long-distance travel, we will invest in night train infrastructure and create a European Ticketing Platform to make booking cross-border journeys on sustainable transport straightforward. Rural areas and poorly connected regions will be prioritized in transport investments, including car-sharing initiatives, ferries and rail freight.</li> <li>- We will introduce a European Climate Ticket framework, so that every part of Europe offers an affordable public transport pass easily used across different modes of public transport. Until then, national flat-rate tickets for local public transport in member states should be mutually recognized.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No specific proposals on transport in border regions but ticketing is an important obstacle, poorly connected regions are often border regions.</li> <li>- The recognition of national flat rate tickets would be a positive measure for instance at the German Dutch border with the German Deutschland ticket.</li> </ul>
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	-	-
<i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Based on the principle of European solidarity, we will create a European Natural Disaster Fund. We will also expand and co-fund the European firefighting fleet, including pooled qualified professional and voluntary personnel, firefighting equipment, assets, and firefighting planes, as well as near-real-time monitoring and an emergency coordination centre. Strengthening civil protection will make Europe more resilient to climate disasters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New financial means for disaster management could also mean more options for cross-border cooperation with respect to emergency services (as in the case of EMRIC in the Euregion Meuse-Rhine). However, cross-border is not explicitly mentioned.</li> </ul>
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	-	-
<i>Innovation</i>	-	-
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Measures to support a regular, meaningful, and structured dialogue with civil society during legislative procedures are essential. We will introduce a statute for European cross-border associations and non-profit organisations. We advocate for an EU-level civil dialogue, modelled on the social dialogue, between CSOs and EU institutions.</li> <li>- EU competences should be expanded to ensure the EU can deliver. This truly transnational democracy must also ensure a residence-based European citizenship.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for a specific legal tool for cross-border cooperation. A next level would be to make better use of cross-border cooperative structures in policies.</li> <li>- It is not quite clear but a residence based European Citizenship could also mean voting rights in the country of residence,</li> </ul>

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating an additional single EU-wide constituency to which citizens elect a large number of MEPs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- meaning voting rights also for national and regional Parliaments.</li> <li>- The idea of an EU wide constituency is for instance attractive for mobile citizens in border regions who have a connection to more than one Member State.</li> </ul>

Brief Reflection

The European Greens are one of the few parties who propose specific governance instruments to overcome cross-border obstacles, as for instance a statute for cross-border associations and non-profit organisation. A proposal that is already made by the European Commission and discussed in Parliament in first reading. They are also supporting the idea of cross-border ticketing for international train travel, the recognition of national flat-rate tickets across the border, an improvement of the recognition of professional qualifications in a cross-border situation, the acceptance of necessary documents for cross-border work in different languages. The border is mentioned a few times with respect to the external border and the border management, demanding an end of illegal practices like pushbacks, etc. However, the border region or cross-border regions are not mentioned as a political or geographical phenomenon. It is also striking that the Greens want to strengthen certain European Funds or add new ones (for Disaster management), however the future of the cohesion funds and Interreg is not mentioned.

## The Manifesto of the European Free Alliance: A Europe for All

According to their own description, the European Free Alliance (EFA) Group in the European Parliament brings together MEPs who advance the cause of Europe's stateless nations, regions and disadvantaged minorities. EFA supports a Europe of the peoples and defend cultural and linguistic diversity in the EU. EFA MEPs are members of the Greens/European Free Alliance Group, forming a common parliamentary group with Europe's Greens since 1999.<sup>11</sup> Today, EFA is represented by 6 Members of the European Parliament in the European Parliament. According to a self-description, EFA draws together political parties fighting for democracy and self-determination for the "stateless nations and regions of Europe". Maylis Roßberg and Raül Romeva are the EFA Spitzenkandidaten.

The manifesto "We seek to build a Europe for all" was approved by the EFA Bureau on 22 September 2023 ratified by the EFA Congress on 13 September 2023.

### General information on Manifesto of the EFA

- The Manifesto has 16 pages.

### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 2 times, in the context of the Schengen Zone, and cultural and economic mobility.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 11 times in the context of border regions, Schengen, cultural and economic mobility, supply chains.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.

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<sup>11</sup> The description of the political group and the manifesto can be found on <https://www.greens-efa.eu/en/efa>.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Labour market &amp; Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EFA supports “the introduction of an EU competitiveness check and strengthening entire supply chains - which often cross borders. That is a European-level task by default, but will also help to boost local economies.”</li> <li>- We should move away from the centralised model of an economy that primarily serves the interests of large urban areas, and instead make sure that every region is treated according to its needs and capacities. We should improve the local basis of our supply chains, helping the development of regional industry and creating jobs in rural and peripheral areas.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EFA aims at supporting regional and local economies by a competitiveness check of EU legislation.</li> <li>- Since many border regions are peripheral territories, the support for another decentralised economic model could be interesting for many cross-border territories in the EU.</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	-	-
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For example, we want to see all EU member states join the Schengen Zone so long as they meet the (merit-based) conditions, not only because it will facilitate long-distance supply chains and delivery times, but also because border regions and their communities are currently split by the Schengen border, impeding their economic and cultural lives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The political group pledges for Schengen in order to increase mobility (in a broader sense) at the internal EU borders), this has also a strong cultural dimension.</li> </ul>
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	-	-
<i>Safety</i>	-	-
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Renewable energy projects respecting the needs of local communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Could be also supporting the idea of cross-border consultation.</li> </ul>
<i>Innovation</i>	-	-
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- EFA believes in building a strong cross-border cooperation mechanism in the EU and with neighbouring countries.</li> <li>- The EU legislative process must be more transparent and foster greater participation from the bottom up. Reliable impact assessments must take due account of the impact at national and regional level. It is fundamental for EFA that all EU policy must recognise the specific needs of each territory in its implementation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The word cross-border cooperation mechanism sounds like a promotion of the EU Commissions idea of a European Cross-border Mechanism. However, this is not specifically outlined.</li> <li>- This also means that the political group is supporting the idea of a more sophisticated system of territorial impact assessment, that also includes assessing the effects of EU policies on border territories, so-called cross-border impact assessment.</li> </ul>



Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- And within its own borders, the EU must not forget that there are still democratic questions to answer. In EU territories where the people are demanding their right to autonomy or independence (including the overseas territories), the EU should be able to negotiate with stubborn or unwilling member states.</li> <li>- EFA believes that borders in Europe can be changed, but never under any circumstances through coercion or force. We categorically reject the Russian State's claim to be acting on behalf of Russian-speaking peoples: their invasion has caused immense suffering to all of Ukraine's peoples, and their actions have been in clear violation of international law. The so-called 'referendums' held by gunpoint in Russian-occupied territories are in no way a genuine exercise of the right to self-determination.</li> <li>- Instead of the centralised distribution of EU funds, EFA supports a fairer system of distributing funding: one where every region of Europe can determine its own needs, not have decisions imposed on it from above. EU solidarity must result in reform and sustainable growth on the ground. At the same time, many needs that are cross-border in nature can be addressed through establishing new economic and cultural macroregions for areas facing common challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The EFA manifesto emphasizes also democratic deficits within Member States and the political will within regions for autonomy. This is especially also a sensitive question with respect to cross-border identities, languages, cultural cohesion.</li> <li>- EFA supports the possibility to change borders within the EU (probably with respect to new independent states) but is not supporting the Russian referenda in Ukraine and the forceful change of borders.</li> <li>- EFA is supporting a more regional approach of cohesion funds where the regions have more say in the allocation of money. Cross-border needs should be stimulated by the establishing new economic and cultural macro-regions. Here it is important that the cross-border region is really involved.</li> </ul>

### Brief Reflection

The manifesto of EFA is very much related to the idea of regional self-determination. That is no surprise given the fact that the Member Parties of EFA are mostly regional parties who stand for more autonomy within the Member State. This is also reflected in the view on cross-border territories, where there is also the understanding that a more place-based policy is needed respecting the cultural cohesion on different sides of the border. In fact, EFA believes in "building a strong cross border cooperation mechanism in the EU and with neighbouring countries". This can be described as a unique objective that is not reflected in any other manifestos.

## The Manifesto of the European Left: Our moment

The European Left (ELG) is a European Party and association of over 40 national parties. To its own description, ELG is bringing together the left and progressive forces in Europe. In the European Parliament, the party is presented in the group The Left. The Left has currently 37 MEPs in the European Parliament. The *Spitzenkandidat* is Walter Baier and the manifesto was published on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 2024.

### General information on Manifesto of ELG

- The Manifesto has 28 pages.

#### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 3 times in the context of externalization of borders and Frontex.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Labour market &amp; Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A European Basic Income Directive that obliges Member States to legally guarantee everyone a minimum income that covers the basic needs for a decent life.</li> <li>- An EU regulation guaranteeing the legal right to permanent contracts and full-time work and banning unpaid internships.</li> <li>- Social rights and labour rights must be fully enforced in platform work and telework.</li> <li>- Migrant workers should be welcomed on equal terms and working conditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Minimum Wage Directive was once already proposed. A Directive might be implemented differently, causing differences between border regions.</li> <li>- Paid internships across borders might cause social security and taxation implications without changes.</li> <li>- Tax conditions for cross-border teleworkers are still missing.</li> <li>- Migrant workers often do not enjoy free mobility rights, that is limiting work in cross-border regions.</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- An EU Directive requiring EU Member States to provide access to antenatal and maternal health services, voluntary family planning and free, safe and legal abortion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A Directive might have different implementations, where differences already exist between countries.</li> </ul>
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	-	-
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	-	-
<i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- We demand the abrogation of all agreements and declarations on migration and refugees that violate these fundamental rights, including agreements on the externalisation of European borders, and their replacement with a common reception system in the European Union based on criteria of inter-territorial solidarity and respect for the rights of migrants and refugees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It is not made clear how this could effect cross-border cooperation or border regions, as border controls could be put in place in reaction.</li> </ul>
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	-	-
<i>Innovation</i>	-	-
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	-	-

Brief Reflection

The manifesto of ELG is very much a call for action for rights for workers, women, migrants and inclusivity. The dimension of cross-border cooperation and border regions in the manifesto is not that prominent. There are not really concrete plans or proposals for border regions, as well as the future of Cohesion Policy or related themes. While for example the rights of workers are put in front, above that of the companies, the specific situation of intra-EU mobile or cross-border workers is not addressed.

## The Manifesto of Volt Europa: Electoral Moonshot Programme

Volt is the pan-European party that stands for the same policies across Europe. According to their own website, Volt brings together knowledge and perspectives of thousands of people across Europe developing evidence-based policies. Currently, the party is already active in certain Member States and has two MEPs that are part of the political groups the Greens/EFA and Renew. Nevertheless, it is aiming for an independent political force in the European Parliament. It has a transnational list with candidates from 20 European countries and MEPs Damian Boeselager and Sophie in 't Veld as lead candidates.

### General information on Manifesto of Volt Europa

- The Manifesto has 146 pages.

#### Cross-border dimension in the Manifesto:

- ✓ **'Border region'** is mentioned 0 times.
- ✓ **'Border'** is mentioned 22 times in the context of cross-border rail infrastructure, innovation teams, an EU minimum wage, Frontex and border management, asylum procedures, enforcement of EU regulation, strengthening cross-border collaboration, electricity market and circular economy.
- ✓ **'euregio'/'euroregion'** is mentioned 5 times in the context of focused attention and awareness, more transparent funding and coherent approach.
- ✓ The cooperation with **neighbouring countries** at European internal borders is mentioned 0 times.

### Explanation:

Each party programme is screened against the listed themes. Elements that may be relevant to any cross-border issue are listed in the table below. A plan or intention in the party programme may specifically mention cross-border cooperation or focus on a border region, but this is not necessarily the case. Plans or intentions that may affect (positively or negatively) a particular cross-border theme or where the cross-border dimension is missed are also included. These elements have been copied (briefly) from the party programme and highlighted in the 'relevance' column. N.B. This is a screening exercise and therefore does not aim to be exhaustive; in addition, themes may be left blank if the cross-border relevance is not considered present.

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
<i>Labour market &amp; Economy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a European Basic Income (EBI), modelled after a negative tax system, where people earning below a certain income threshold receive payments instead of paying taxes.</li> <li>- Align social systems across the EU by harmonising systems of pensions, sick leave, unemployment insurance, and childcare benefits.</li> <li>- Ensure universal childcare, shared parental leave, and transferable pension rights.</li> <li>- Update regulations so that it becomes legally and fiscally simple to work remotely from anywhere in the EU.</li> <li>- Allow asylum seekers to work from day one.</li> <li>- Grant visa holders the freedom to move across the EU to unify the European labour market for third-country nationals. Harmonise intra-EU mobility right across various directives.</li> <li>- Mobility: flexible single EU-wide mobility scheme for highly skilled migrants who wish to move to a job in another EU country, to retain highly skilled workers in the EU.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unclear how this would work in cross-border situations, for example in the framework of tax treaties.</li> <li>- Ambitious aim as social systems vary greatly. In cross-border situations, this could help the coordination of social benefits.</li> <li>- Tax arrangements for cross-border remote working has still to be made, e.g. via <i>deminimis</i> clause.</li> <li>- Non-EU citizens do not have the right to be mobile, that is a limitation in cross-border regions.</li> <li>- Intra-EU mobility rights for migrants is beneficial for cross-border labour market integration. Yet limited to highly skilled.</li> </ul>
<i>Health &amp; Wellbeing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harmonise prevention programmes and public health systems through the European Health Union.</li> <li>- Implement EU-wide solutions for capacity, costs and reimbursement to ensure that all European residents have access to first-rate public healthcare.</li> <li>- Support the creation of a strong network of European public broadcasters, building on experiences from corporations like EBU, ARTE and 3sat, functioning as forums for all European public broadcasters to share information and best practices, while also facilitating the exchange of national content.</li> <li>- Abolish geo-blocking.</li> <li>- Establish a mandatory and harmonised labelling system for the nutritional value of food products.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- While not all regions are similar, cross-border cooperation in health care must be promoted. ITEM research indeed showed chances for sharing capacities.</li> <li>- Ambition to foster cross-border patient mobility rights, that is not fulfilled in the EU framework.</li> <li>- For cross-border cohesion it is good to facilitate media exchanges across borders and stop geo-blocking that is still allowed under EU law.</li> <li>- This could benefit both entrepreneurs as consumers across borders.</li> </ul>
<i>Mobility &amp; Infrastructure</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prioritise investment in critical Pan-European infrastructure projects, including a renewed commitment to the Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) by doubling the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) funding instrument.</li> <li>- Create a European Transport Authority (ETA), with consultative legislative authority and financial resources, to shift responsibilities to the European</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transnational projects are not by definition also beneficial for border regions, ITEM research has shown. In this respect, attention should be given to the border regions specifically.</li> </ul>

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
	<p>level. The ETA will oversee investments in cross-border and high-speed rail infrastructure across Europe, closing existing gaps in rail connectivity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish a unified rail ticketing platform where any railway user can input two stations in Europe, get a route and book a ticket.</li> <li>- Harmonise infrastructure across Europe, in particular about the European Train Control System (ETCS), platform height, track gauge and the approval of railway vehicles.</li> <li>- Establish a comprehensive high-speed rail network connecting all EU cities with populations exceeding 100,000 residents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentioning of closing gaps, that are also to be found in border regions in many occasions.</li> <li>- Good initiative for promoting cross-border rail use.</li> <li>- This might give an impulse in the development of cross-border rail connections, as national differences may make exploitation to expensive and difficult.</li> <li>- There is evidence that high-speed rail networks can be detrimental for smaller cross-border connections in border regions.</li> </ul>
<i>Education &amp; Culture</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set up cross-border innovation teams, create a central “EU IT Traineeship Initiative” and introduce EU-sponsored skills certifications, boosting inter-EU collaboration and elevating the digital prowess of public sector employees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cross-border educational programmes or courses should be fostered between neighbouring countries in order to promote cross-border cohesion.</li> </ul>
<i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adopt a Comprehensive Pandemic Accord, implementing a robust pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response framework with a mandate for comprehensive information gathering.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not clear whether all the lessons learnt from the COVID-crisis for border regions are included. ITEM research confirms the need for better EU coordination.</li> </ul>
<i>Energy transition &amp; Climate</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support local, national and effective cross-border deposit and lending systems for reusable packaging, bottles and cans that are eventually recognised across Europe.</li> <li>- Promote functional and efficient renewable energy systems by counteracting the increased volatility on the generation side caused by these fundamental changes to the energy supply mix. Promote smart planning and operation of infrastructure for improving the connectivity between generation and consumption hubs, thus leveraging the flexibility of a large interconnected system.</li> <li>- Remove intricate regulatory hurdles in the process of obtaining permits for new lowcarbon emitting energy plants. Streamline and harmonise administrative procedures and reduce bureaucratic complexities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- As an example, there is much to win for cross-border circular activities for border regions.</li> <li>- The possibilities for cross-border coordination of supply and demand for border regions is not mentioned. ITEM research showed that there are opportunities, but still many obstacles exist.</li> <li>- ITEM research has shown that regarding infrastructural projects across borders issues as permitting, subsidy schemes should be addressed.</li> </ul>

Dossier/Theme	Description	Relevance Cross-border Cooperation
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Harmonise national regulations that empower consumers to actively engage in all energy markets, either individually or as part of citizen energy communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- For border regions, engagement and participation should also be promoted across borders.</li> </ul>
<i>Innovation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase efforts in European institutions to coordinate data collection and usage for the creation of more sustainable economic indicators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Indeed, there is a need for better cross-border data.</li> </ul>
<i>Euregional governance &amp; cooperation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Volt suggests a Treaty change to make Public and Human Health and Education shared legislative competencies, allowing the European Union to introduce common standards by law.</li> <li>- In the meantime, ensure the ability to make decisions through Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) instead of unanimity.</li> <li>- Establish independent authorities at the European Level that support the interpretation of core concepts and the harmonious application of the EU normative corpus. Oversee the application and cross-border enforcement of the regulation, adopt opinions to ensure the consistency of application of the regulation by the national supervisory authorities and act as a dispute resolution body.</li> <li>- Give full voting rights (universal suffrage) to EU mobile citizens. Following the principle of “No taxation without representation”, grant a 5th freedom to the European single market: the right to choose to vote in all elections in the country of residence.</li> <li>- Strengthen Euroregions across the EU. Place focused attention to bring Euroregions closer to the national and regional governments.</li> <li>- Develop policies that make the organisation of funding of these regions more transparent. Allow citizens to actively participate in the decision-making process for Euroregions. Promote a coherent policy approach across the EU.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ITEM research to the COVID-crisis has shown that there were three handicaps, including on the EU level. A better mandate for coordination is needed on EU level.</li> <li>- Border obstacles also arise in fields where national competencies are bigger. In this field, QMV might ease EU policies that improve cross-border coordination in these fields.</li> <li>- Border obstacles can also arise from EU law and its implementation, it is very relevant to look also to the cross-border impact and coordination.</li> <li>- This might promote euregional cohesion, as it would include e.g. other nationals in border regions to vote.</li> <li>- One of the only parties explicitly mentioning euroregions. Positive that attention is placed, but without concrete proposals.</li> <li>- Interesting to make euroregions more democratic in this sense, that could promote euregional cohesion.</li> </ul>



### Brief Reflection

Volt is the pro-European party that promotes a united, federal Europe. In this sense, the manifesto has concrete proposals for a European Government, where the European Commission is replaced, as well as the Commission's President by an EU Prime Minister. The manifesto furthermore provide detailed plans for legislative amendments and legislative initiatives that could be made in the European Parliament. In this respect, the manifesto is very concrete and detailed compared to some of the other manifestos. Characterizing for Volt is the drive to bring competencies at the EU level and harmonise various aspects across Member States. National systems may come to a 'clash' at the border, resulting in border obstacles.<sup>12</sup> Also, the COVID-pandemic and the problems it caused in cross-border regions also highlight the need for better coordination and arrangements across borders. Here not only handicaps on the EU level were found, but also on national and regional level. While one would assume that more harmonisation at European level would be beneficial for cross-border regions, this is not always per definition the case. For example, European integration has not always led to a better situation at the border in euregions. In this respect, it is very positive that the position of Euroregions is explicitly mentioned in the manifesto, as maybe the only political party in this analysis. Nevertheless, Euroregions do not only need a focussed attention at national and regional level but could also be better promoted to make Euroregions stronger and adequately fit for future in terms of finances and competencies<sup>13</sup>. Interestingly in this regard, the future of Interreg or Better Regulation and territorial or cross-border impact assessments are not mentioned.

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<sup>12</sup> So-called type 2 obstacle in Pucher, J., Stumm, T., & Schneidewind, p. (2017). *Easing Legal and Administrative Obstacles in EU Border Regions*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

<sup>13</sup> In this respect, the term 'horizontal subsidiarity' can be mentioned, that means that euroregions might be better fit to address certain issues that at national or European level.

## Conclusions

### Cohesion funds and in particular the future of Interreg hardly discussed

It comes certainly as a surprise: the manifestos do hardly mention proposals or ideas for the future reform of the existing cohesion funds, meaning in particular also no proposals for the future of Interreg and the stimulation of cross-border cohesion. That is the most surprising result of the screening: the future of the Funds for Regional Development and Cohesion is not an issue despite its important share of the overall budget of the EU. Parties do support in general cohesion policy. The PES manifesto as a case in point briefly mentions the support for today's structural and cohesion funds in general without going into details. In accordance, the EPP mentions it briefly, but it is unknown whether the parties support the current shape and dimension of Interreg programmes and the respective budget. The European Green Party proposes a Green and Social Transition Fund equivalent to at the very least 1% of EU GDP per year, funding green infrastructure projects such as public transport and rail freight, renewables, and energy grid connections. However, there is no mention how this will relate to the existing funds and whether there are special financial means for border regions.

ITEM research and participation in Interreg projects have shown that Interreg is today still the most important funding instrument for cross-border cooperation projects throughout the EU.<sup>14</sup>

The lack of concrete proposals with respect to the further funding of cross-border projects is also remarkable since the future of cohesion policy and the question of border regions in light of territorial cohesion (Art. 174 TFEU) is at crossroads. The Cohesion Policy post-2027 has to be discussed and agreed upon during the next Parliamentary term. From our research, we know that the current status quo is not sufficient with respect to the real stimulation of vital border regions (see for instance Interreg Project Crossquality). Also, the Commission addressed the need for improvements in order to come to place-based policies and legislation. ITEM's research has shown that there is a particular need to invest in structural improvements of cross-border cooperation, meaning enabling the establishment of stable and sustainable networks in different policy fields. In this respect, the silence on the question of future structural and cohesion funds and especially Interreg funding is not really a positive signal.

### Border regions not understood as a special type of territory

The terms Euroregion, Eurodistrict or cross-border region are not explicitly mentioned or addressed in the European party manifestos, with Volt Europa as an exemption. Neither are governance systems mentioned as the Benelux or the Nordic Council where Member States try to go beyond EU cooperation. Consequently, the border regions or cross-border territories are not described as a specific category as it is the case for the outermost regions or rural areas. For instance, the EPP supports a special plan for rural areas, outermost regions and regions with external borders hit by the Russian aggression. No party has mentioned a special plan for internal border regions.

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<sup>14</sup> ITEM, together with RWTH Aachen, University of Hasselt, University of Liege and the Euregio Meuse Rhine, did research on the impact of the Interreg programme on the quality of cross-border cooperation. See: Mertens, P. & Unfried, M. (2022), The quality of cross-border cooperation and effects of the INTERREG Programme: Application of the impact assessment methodology to the quality of cross-border cooperation, [https://crossborderitem.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/finalreport\\_web.pdf](https://crossborderitem.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/finalreport_web.pdf).

Accordingly, there are only a few policy proposals related to a functioning cross-border labour market, a cross-border health space or cross-border energy regions. The dimension of “horizontal integration” at the internal borders of Member States is hardly discussed, the same goes for instruments and funds like Interreg to stimulate horizontal cooperation across the border. Exemptions are the EDF and the European Greens manifestos that support the idea of an EU statute for cross-border associations (Greens and EDP) or the specific instrument European Cross-border mechanism (EDP). The EDP manifesto also discusses the need for an impact assessment of for Member states who want to introduce controls at internal borders. The EPP manifesto promotes the idea of an improved subsidiarity check system, where also territorial aspects should be better taken into account. Besides the few proposals, the general attention for border regions and cross-border territories is surprisingly low. This is remarkable since the European Commission, DG Regio, has presented reports and strategic documents during the last couple of years as a follow-up to its communication in 2017 (Boosting Growth and Cohesion in Border Regions, 2017). It is also remarkable since the corona crisis has shown how vulnerable cross-border cohesion is and that even established structures and cooperation networks do not necessarily function during emergencies. Also, the last European Commission Cohesion report emphasized the need for stronger cross-border governance, for instance a stronger cross-border cooperation of municipalities.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, there is also a concrete proposal on the table, namely the Regulation on Facilitating Cross-Border Solutions.

## Internal market without attention of specific needs of functioning cross-border markets

Most of the manifestos emphasize the need for a functioning internal market. In this respect, obstacles to free trade and cross-border economic activities are criticised and proposals are made to reduce administrative burden. However, there are little references to functioning regional cross-border labour markets and economic areas. In recent years, ITEM has often concluded that vertical internal market legislation from Brussels does not necessarily support more economic integration in cross-border territories. The reasons are existing legal and administrative obstacles that are often a consequence of national legislation that lead to problems in cross-border situations. The European Commission has estimated that removing 20 % of the border obstacles would generate a gain of 2 % in GDP and over 1 million jobs in border regions.<sup>16</sup> As the High Level Group on Cohesion formulated the challenge to reduce these obstacles: “This requires a Cohesion Policy that adopts a systemic and dynamic approach to development, focusing on growth, equality and opportunities and which also pays special attention to border regions.”<sup>17</sup> This blind spot is related to the aspect earlier described: since the border regions and cross-border territories are not understood as a category in its own right, there is also a lack of understanding that the toolbox for strengthening cross-border economies is not identical with the toolbox of the internal market as such.

One of the few interesting notions related to regional markets is presented by the EFA manifesto. The manifesto describes the recent economic model as centralised that primarily serves the interests of large urban areas. EFA’s conclusion is to make sure that every region is treated according to its needs and capacities. Also the manifesto of Volt Europa emphasises the differentiation in goals,

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<sup>15</sup> See: European Commission (2024): Ninth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report_en).

<sup>16</sup> See: European Commission (2024): Ninth report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report_en).

<sup>17</sup> See: High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy: Forging a sustainable future together: Cohesion Report on the High-Level Group on the Future of Cohesion Policy, February 2024. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c6e97287-cee3-11ee-b9d9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

structures and specific characteristics that the 152 Euroregions have in Europe. Given the figures from the European Commission, one could conclude that this is certainly also necessary with respect to the special needs of border regions. Meaning that European Parties or the Political Groups in the European Parliament should discuss in more detail, what these specific needs are. This conclusion is especially significant, now that for example the so-called Single Market Emergency Instrument has been adopted by the European Parliament, leaving out the specific clauses for border regions. This Single Market Emergency Instrument is a crisis governance framework that aims to preserve the free movement across the EU in times of crises. The European Commission already highlighted that the consequences of the corona measures were disproportionate for border regions.<sup>18</sup> In this respect, ITEM research has shown that the status quo is not enough for cross-border regions and actually a instrument as the Single Market Emergency Instrument could be welcomed.<sup>19</sup> The cross-border governance should be strengthened on regional, national and European level, as well as policies should better take into account the dimension of border regions – both in terms of impact assessments and by introducing specific instruments for border regions.

## Cross-border infrastructure: support for better rail connection but without clear policy proposals

Many manifestos describe the need for better international train connections, high speed or night train connections and in general cross-border public transport. There is very often no distinction made between transnational connection and rail connections in border regions. The ALDE manifesto as one of few mentions the need to tackle the “missing links” meaning the cross-border connections that are needed for cross-border and transnational connection. Nevertheless, there are no proposals how to overcome the current obstacles. The little attention for the missing links is again surprising since the European Commission has presented and discussed a study in 2023 that described these missing links in detail and discussed the reasons for the shortcomings.<sup>20</sup> According to this, most of the small-scale cross-border railway connections do not belong to the TEN-T Core or Comprehensive Network and have previously mostly been disregarded from funding for investments. Meaning, reforms are needed at the EU level with respect to the funding of transnational rail infrastructure, taking smaller connection in cross-border regions into account. It is also interesting that the European Commission showed that gaps in the cross-border passenger rail network are not necessarily caused by missing elements of infrastructure but by a lack of cross-border passenger services. The European Parties, together with their national member parties could in this respect also support and demand that competent authorities of neighbouring Member states play a crucial role for implementing cross-border passenger services on existing lines.

## Energy transition: no mention of obstacles in border regions

Most of the manifestos have dedicated a paragraph concerning the needs of an energy transition and the development of a true energy union. As the EPP concludes: “... a European Energy Union that will lead us into a carbon-neutral and environmentally-friendly future.” There is in most of the manifestos the notion of strengthening the internal market for energy and building cross-border

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<sup>18</sup> See: European Commission (2022): Eight report on economic, social and territorial cohesion. [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/cohesion-report_en)

<sup>19</sup> As summarised in: <https://crossborderitem.eu/en/covid-19-lessons-learned-and-recommendations-for-the-future/>

<sup>20</sup> See: European Commission (2023). Comprehensive analysis of the existing cross-border rail transport connections and missing links on the internal EU borders, Final report.

infrastructure. As in the case of railway connections, no distinction is made between transnational and cross-border challenges, for instance the distinction between the challenges of transmission system operator (TSO) and distribution system operator (DSO). ITEM has done research on the question of cross-border obstacles with respect to cross-border activities in the field of renewable energies and energy grids. Different from the grid question of at a transnational level, cross-border connections at the level of municipalities are hindered by incompatible national legislation with respect to the work of distribution system operator (DSO). In addition, a lack of cross-border spatial planning, permitting and compatible subsidy schemes are essential obstacles. With the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E), the EU has formulated a policy that is focused on linking the energy infrastructure of EU Member States. However, as in the case of railway infrastructure, present European funding is not tailor-made for specific small-scale improvement at a local or regional scale in border regions.

## Schengen: conditions for the reintroduction of border controls

As the corona crisis has shown, one of the most critical threats with respect to the cohesion in border regions is the closure of the border or the reestablishment of different kinds of border controls. The Schengen Borders Code (SBC) provides Member States with the capability of temporarily reintroducing border control at the internal borders in the event of a serious threat to public policy or internal security.<sup>21</sup> Some of the manifestos (EPP, ALDE, PES) emphasize the need to improve the protection of the external borders in order to keep the internal borders open.

It is striking that the reintroduction of border controls at the internal borders is not widely discussed in the manifestos. This is even more true after the experiences during the corona crisis. Various studies have shown the impact of border controls and direct and indirect restrictions to the freedom of mobility as enshrined in EU law. While the effectiveness of border controls could not be proven in the case of for example the Euregio Meuse-Rhine and might even be disproportionate in terms of EU law, it particularly had a significant impact on cross-border regions.<sup>22</sup>

The European Green Party is demanding that the European institutions should act to reverse the steady re-emergence and maintenance of border checks within the Schengen area. The EDP is the only party that discusses explicitly the Schengen Borders Code. In their manifesto, the EDP demands to introduce in the Revision of the Schengen Borders Code the obligation for Member States to carry out and examine impact studies on trade and relations in cross-border areas before taking any decision on the reintroduction of controls. This is an interesting proposal, very much in line with the idea of better territorial impact assessment of policies and legislation. In this case, the addressee would be the Member State that wants to establish border controls. This could also emphasize the notion that the reintroduction of border controls at the internal borders is a last resort measure in exceptional situations, and must respect the principle of proportionality. If the control of borders is more often used as a "normal" instrument, this development can be detrimental for border regions.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For more information on limiting the freedom of movement in the SBC and EU law, we refer to Mertens, P., Sivonen, S., Kortese, L., & Schneider, H. (2021). *Cross-border mobility in times of COVID-19: Assessing COVID-19 Measures and their Effects on Cross-border Regions within the EU*. EU-CITIZEN: Academic Network on European Citizenship Rights. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu-citizen\\_-\\_report\\_on\\_cross-border\\_mobility\\_in\\_times\\_of\\_covid-19.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/eu-citizen_-_report_on_cross-border_mobility_in_times_of_covid-19.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> The full list of recent temporary border controls is extensive and a serious concern for border regions. [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control_en).

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