

## **Strasbourg-Kehl – Day-to-day cooperation on the Rhine**

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Strasbourg-Kehl is an extraordinary European location. Its two components, the city of Strasbourg in France and the city of Kehl in Germany, aim to become a place of shared living, a single location symbolising the success of a Europe without borders and of Franco-German reconciliation. It's both a model of European integration – cross-border mobility having become an everyday reality – and of Franco-German friendship – the 1963 Élysée Treaty being concretely implemented here, at the local level, on the border between the two countries.

### **From a dividing line to a place of contact**

Indeed, the two cities are located on either side of the Rhine, and are of different sizes: the EU metropolis of Strasbourg numbers more than 505 000 inhabitants over a surface area of 334 km<sup>2</sup>, whereas Kehl only numbers 37 000 inhabitants over 75 km<sup>2</sup>. In 1922, Ernest Hemingway was already describing this border as a source of national affirmation for the French, but after the Second World War, in 1945, it became a veritable dividing line, a scar of history reflecting the suffering caused by the Franco-German wars. Creating a shared location in Strasbourg-Kehl meant converting this dividing line into a place of contact for the border populations.

### **A place of concrete cooperation**

Cross-border cooperation in the Upper Rhine region began in 1963 around Basel, in Switzerland. It expanded to the entire Franco-German border in the 1970s, but the Strasbourg-Kehl site was still not very dynamic. It was only when the European Commission introduced the Interreg programme in 1990 that Strasbourg-Kehl became a place of experimentation for a Europe without borders. This led to the implementation of cross-border structures in Kehl: an information and advisory centre for citizens (*Infobest*), a consumer protection organisation (*Euro-Info-Consommateur*) and a cross-border institute for continued education (*Euro-Institut*). Gradually, Strasbourg-Kehl became the seat of many Interreg projects centred on mobility, health, bilingualism, culture and citizen participation: the Jardin des deux Rives park created on both sides of the Rhine for residents' leisure activities, and a new bridge over the Rhine for pedestrians and cyclists in 2004; a Franco-German fireboat on the Rhine in 2007; and the cross-border tram which began operating in 2017.

### **Difficult beginnings**

Franco-German reconciliation in Strasbourg-Kehl took some time. Overcoming the memory of the painful border had already been one of the goals of Europe's founding fathers. The idea of a Eurodistrict had been the focus of discussions in Strasbourg in the 1950s, as a part of the negotiations around the seat of the European Community's institutions. But the trauma of the past was still too present: Strasbourg had been liberated from the Nazis in 1945, and Kehl had then been occupied by the French until 1951. Mutual distrust and resentment were still very strong. In the early 1990s, a second attempt made by a cross-border association within the Council of Europe was inconclusive, Kehl having blocked the project for fear of becoming a colony of Strasbourg.

### **The breakthrough in 2003**

It was during the festivities on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Élysée Treaty, on 22 January 2003 in Strasbourg and Kehl, that German chancellor Gerhard Schröder and French president Jacques Chirac made a joint declaration on the creation of the Eurodistrict. They wished to establish a cross-border agglomeration, but also a symbol of bilateral

reconciliation at the local level. The new bridge for pedestrians and cyclists inaugurated in 2004 was named the Friendship Bridge. In front of the bridge, on the German side, a statue of a couple embracing was installed to symbolise reconciliation.

### **The institutionalisation of cooperation**

Formally, on 5 July 2005, the respective mayors of Strasbourg and Kehl, Fabienne Keller and Günther Petry, signed the agreement establishing the Eurodistrict, which went beyond the strict geographical limits of Strasbourg-Kehl. In order to rebalance in favour of the German partners, the territory on the right bank was expanded around Kehl. The Eurodistrict therefore contains the Euro-metropolis of Strasbourg as well as the Ortenau district (*Ortenaukreis*). It was also given a legal structure in 2010, which took the shape of a European grouping of territorial cooperation. This allowed it to organise itself as a true Franco-German municipality, with a city council bringing together political representatives, partner communities and a joint secretariat set up in the facilities facing the villa Rehfus, in Kehl, where the main bodies of cross-border cooperation were gathered.

### **Living cooperation**

It was then that Strasbourg-Kehl truly became a common living space for its citizens. The Eurodistrict launched many activities, organising cross-border festivals, citizens' forums, joint sporting events, and investing in many cross-border projects, including the creation of a Franco-German kindergarten close to the Europe Bridge in 2013, and the extension of the Strasbourg-Kehl tram line in 2019, which connects Strasbourg's place Kleber to Kehl City Hall.

### **A model for cross-border cooperation?**

Today, Strasbourg-Kehl is a model European location. This is quite visible at the border: four bridges connect the two sides of the Rhine, one rail and one road bridge, another for pedestrians and cyclists, and one for the cross-border tram. They symbolise a Europe without borders as well as Franco-German friendship. The Jardin des deux Rives hosts the festivities for the Europe Day on 9 May every year. Finally, this place has a political aspect: the Eurodistrict of Strasbourg-Kehl-Ortenau, which was mentioned as an essential cross-border structure for the future of Franco-German cooperation in the new Franco-German Treaty of Aachen in 2019.

### **Further reading**

Frey, Michael, « Eurodistrikte als neue Form der grenzüberschreitenden Zusammenarbeit am Oberrhein – Grundlagen und Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten », *Verwaltungsblätter für Baden-Württemberg* 12 (2005), p. 449-464.

Ulrich, Peter, Wassenberg, Birte, « Der Eurodistrikt Kehl/Ortenau: Modell für ein „lokales“ Weimarer Dreieck? », in : *30 Jahre Weimarer Dreieck. Idee von gestern oder Konzept für morgen ?*, Genshagen, n° 6, 16.6.2021.

Wassenberg, Birte, « Histoire du projet d'Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Kehl au sein de la dynamique de la coopération transfrontalière du Rhin supérieur », in : Henri de Grossouvre, Eric Maulin (dir.), *Eurodistrict Strasbourg-Ortenau. La construction de l'Europe réelle*, Vevey, 2009, p. 87-97.

## **Crossing to Germany a Way to Make Money**

Ernest Hemingway

*Historic American Journalism*

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Kehl, Germany.-The boy in a Strasbourg motor agency where we went to make some inquiries about crossing the frontier said, "Oh yes. It is easy to get over into Germany. All you have to do is go across the bridge."

"Don't you need any visa?" I said.

"No. Just a permit stamp to go from the French." He took his passport out of his pocket and showed the back covered with rubber stamps. "See? I live there now because it is so much cheaper. It's the way to make money."

It is all right.

It is a three-mile streetcar ride from the center of Strasbourg out to the Rhine and when you get to the end of the line the car stops and everyone piles out to herd into a long picket-fenced pen that leads to the bridge. A French soldier with a fixed bayonet loafs back and forth across the road and watches the girls in the passport pen from under his steel-blue helmet. There is an ugly brick customhouse at the left of the bridge and a wooden shed at the right where the French official sits behind a counter and stamps passports.

The Rhine is swift, yellow and muddy, runs between low, green banks, and swirls and sucks at the concrete abutments of the long, iron bridge. At the other end of the bridge you see the ugly little town of Kehl looking like some dreary section of Dundas [Toronto].

If you are a French citizen with a French passport, the man back of the counter simply stamps your passport "sortie Pont de Kehl" and you go across the bridge into occupied Germany. If you are a citizen of some other of the Allied countries, the official looks at you suspiciously, asks you where you are from, what you are going to Kehl for, how long you are going to stay, and then stamps your passport with the same sortie. If you should happen to be a citizen of Kehl who has been in Strasbourg on business and is returning to dinner-and as Kehl's interests are bound up in Strasbourg's as all suburbs are to the city they are attached to, you would be bound to have to go to Strasbourg on business if you had any kind of business at all-you are held in line for fifteen to twenty minutes, your name is looked up in a card index to see if you have ever spoken against the French regime, your pedigree taken, questions put to you and finally you are given the same old sortie. Everyone can cross the bridge but the French make it very nasty for the Germans.

Once across the muddy Rhine you are in Germany, and the end of the bridge is guarded by a couple of the meekest and most discouraged-looking German soldiers you have ever seen. Two French soldiers with fixed bayonets walk up and clown and the two German soldiers, unarmed, lean against a wall and look on. The French soldiers are in full equipment and steel helmets, but the Germans wear the old loose tunics and high-peaked, peacetime caps.

I asked a Frenchman the functions and duties of the German guard. "They stand there," he said.

There were no marks to be had in Strasbourg, the mounting exchange had cleaned the bankers out clays ago, so we changed some French money in the railway station at Kehl.

For ten francs I received 670 marks. Ten francs amounted to about ninety cents in Canadian money. That ninety cents lasted Mrs. Hemingway and me for a day of heavy spending and at the end of the day we had one hundred and twenty marks left!

Our first purchase was from a fruit stand beside the main street of Kehl where an old woman was selling apples, peaches and plums. We picked out five very good-looking apples and gave the old woman a fifty-mark note. She gave us back thirty-eight marks in change. A very nice-looking, white-bearded old gentleman saw us buy the apples and raised his hat.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, rather timidly, in German, "how much were the apples?"

I counted the change and told him twelve marks.

He smiled and shook his head. "I can't pay it. It is too much."

He went up the street walking very much as white-bearded old gentlemen of the old regime walk in all countries, but he had looked very longingly at the apples. I wish I had offered him some. Twelve marks, on that day, amounted to a little under two cents. The old man, whose life savings were probably, as most of the non-profit classes are, invested in German pre-war and war bonds, could not afford a twelve-mark expenditure. He is the type of people whose income does not increase with the falling purchasing value of the mark and the krone.

With marks at 800 to the dollar, or 8 to a cent, we priced articles in the windows of the different Kehl shops. Peas were 18 marks a pound, beans 16 marks a pound, a pound of Kaiser coffee—there are still many "Kaiser" brands in the German republic—could be had for 34 marks. Gersten coffee, which is not coffee at all but roasted grain, sold for 14 marks a pound. Fly paper was 150 marks a package. A scythe blade cost 150 marks, too, or 18-3/4 cents! Beer was 10 marks a stein, or 1-1/4 cents.

Kehl's best hotel, which is a very well-turned-out place, served a five-course table d'hôte meal for 120 marks, which amounts to 15 cents in our money. The same meal could not be duplicated in Strasbourg, three miles away, for a dollar.

Because of the customs regulations, which are very strict on persons returning to Germany, the French cannot come over to Kehl and buy up all the cheap goods they would like to. But they can come over and eat. It is a sight every afternoon to see the mob that storms the German pastry shops and tea place. The Germans make very good pastries, wonderful pastries, in fact, that, at the present tumbling mark rate, the French of Strasbourg can buy for a less amount than the smallest French coin, the one-sou piece. This miracle of exchange makes a swinish spectacle where the youth of the town of Strasbourg crowd into the German pastry shop to eat itself sick and gorged on fluffy, cream-filled slices of German cake at five marks the slice. The contents of a pastry shop are swept clean in half an hour.

In a pastry shop we visited, a man in an apron, wearing blue glasses, appeared to be the proprietor. He was assisted by a typical "boche"-looking German with close-cropped head. The place was jammed with French people of all ages and descriptions, all gorging cakes, while a young girl in a pink dress, silk stockings, a pretty, weak face and pearl earrings in her ears took as many of their orders for fruit and vanilla ices as she could fill. She didn't seem to care very much whether she filled the orders or not. There were soldiers in town and she kept going over to look out the window.

The proprietor and his helper were surly and didn't seem particularly happy when all the cakes were sold. The mark was falling faster than they could bake.

Meanwhile out in the street a funny little train jolted by, carrying the workmen with their dinner pails home to the outskirts of the town, profiteers' motorcars tore by raising a cloud of dust that settled over the trees and the fronts of all the buildings, and inside the pastry shop young French hoodlums swallowed their last cake and French mothers wiped the sticky mouths of their children. It gave you a new aspect on exchange.

As the last of the afternoon tea-ers and pastry eaters went Strasbourg ward across the bridge, the first of the exchange pirates coming over to raid Kehl for cheap dinners began to arrive. The two streams passed each other on the bridge and the two disconsolate-looking German soldiers looked on. As the boy in the motor agency said, "It's the way to make money."

(Source: Dateline: Toronto. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985)

The works of Ernest Hemingway and other American journalists are now freely available at The Archive of American Journalism. Visit our bookstore for single-volume collections--ideal for research, reference use or casual reading.