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## THE PYRENEES: DEATH OF A BORDER, BIRTH OF A HINGE?

**Abstract:** At the end of the 1950s the Pyrenean Mountain Range still represented a physical barrier with rare entry and exit points. From the Treaty of the Pyrenees (1659) to the Franco dictatorship, this inescapable element was reinforced by the almost mutual indifference of two states turned back to back. From the 1960s, the touristic rush of citizens from the European Community burst this double lock to progressively secure the Iberian Peninsula to the rest of Europe.

**Key words:** political geography, European integration, border regions.

### 1. THE ACCELERATION OF MOVEMENTS AND GRAVITATIONAL CHANGES

This radical mutation of Transpyrenean relations in a European context rapidly generated new pendular flows and movements which reach their maximum during the summer period. From 1962–1964, the Spanish regime engaged in an about-turn, releasing an economic boom without precedent. A power increase in the Spanish economy led to an intensification of imports and exports. The decade of the 1970s saw the appearance of waves of transcontinental heavy goods vehicles (HGV's), adding to the troops of tourist cars.

The democratisation of Spain from 1975 to 1978 produced an in-draught which seemed to reinforce this double flow. However, a speeding up of developments from 1986 led the two Iberian countries into the European Community. The institution of the single European Market on the 1st of January

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1993 and the subsequent abolition of frontier barriers immediately raised the principal intrinsic problem of the chain, **how to improve internal and external relationships?**

Indeed, within the road and motorway networks of the European Union, the Iberian Peninsula is only linked by two motorways at the two extremities of the mountain range: the Basque country motorway (Hendaye–Irun) and the Perthus motorway (Le Boulou–La Jonquera). These two entry points capture 80% of the traffic. Strictly speaking, from the circulatory point of view, on a European scale, such a situation is unhealthy, even more so, given the increased intensification of traffic flows.

Each year on average 80 million people in 13 million vehicles pass across the Pyrenees. In the heart of the massif, Andorra the micro-state is not left aside; in 1986 it received 10 million visitors in 3 million vehicles. This breathtaking rise coupled with the low number of entry points has not escaped the attention of the European Union Commission. This is why the challenge today is to secure the best possible circulation, in order to weld the Iberian Peninsula to the rest of Europe. This has become a major priority of the European Union authorities, which by means of the ERDF and diverse aids, contributing to all types of large public works with the objective to eliminate or alleviate physical barriers on frontiers between member states (bridges, tunnels, motorways...).

In the policy of securing circulations between member states, the Pyrenees cannot be considered as a uniform entity, even if from a physical point of view, the massif appears as such. Moreover, the Pyrenees breathe external influences. The chain is the receptacle or driving-force of actions more or less voluntarist, more or less co-ordinated, from which it is neither alienated nor insensitive. The underscoring of the Pyrenees 'frontier condition' is distinguished by bottlenecks resulting from necessity tied to the territorial homogenisation of the European Union.

Finally, to consider the Pyrenees as a territory in a Europe without frontiers and a single market introduces another level of intervention: the European Union with its specific instruments of regional policies. This clearly means for the Pyrenees that henceforth other agents and other forms of territorial intervention will exist beside those between Spain and France. However in the perspective of an absolute disparition of frontiers, the obstacles of the Pyrenean Frontier barrier are alleviated, but the opening towards the new Europe necessitates the consideration of the whole Pyrenean Mountain Range and its two sides. This implies the development of a dialogue and co-ordination between all administrative levels (Europe, States, Regions, *Comunidades, Départements, Provincias, Communes, Municipios, Comarcas...*).

## 2. ROAD AND TUNNEL STRATEGIES

Taking into account the general framework set out above the Pyrenees are the scene of major road and tunnel strategies, created jointly by Brussels, Madrid and Paris. The Estuaries Road, Hamburg – La Coruna is wanted by the European Union as a reequilibrium strategy since 85% of transcontinental heavy goods vehicles (HGV's) surge towards the North and Mediterranean Seas. The Aquitaine is the extension, and the branch of the Spanish exit.

But this attraction to Spain costs dearly because Bordeaux does not want to identify itself with Toulouse. One therefore searches for the development of a macro-regional road system because for the moment the Atlantic façade is a sub-space. Indeed, the most important port activities of the European Union are elsewhere, and not on the Atlantic façade. Amongst the strategies is to set up a rapid link Bordeaux–Valencia secured by the Somport Tunnel to generate economic effects. In fact this link-up would benefit the Aquitaine and the west Mid-Pyrenees, at the same time contributing to a certain circulatory reconstruction of the larger south-west France and a better integration with the Iberian Peninsula.

Via the Somport Tunnel, Pau will be at 2 hr 30 min. from Zaragoza, and not at 4 hr 30 min. Besides, the capital of Aragon would seem henceforth to be in a strategic position at the crossroads of three axes:

- a) Seville–Madrid–Zaragoza;
- b) Bordeaux–Zaragoza–Valencia;
- c) Bilbao–Zaragoza–Barcelona.

All these circulatory changes will lead to a lacing-up of the major axes of south-west Europe between the Atlantic Arc and the Mediterranean Arc (cf. figure 1).

The construction and opening of Transpyrenean tunnels represent the anchor-points of these circulatory changes. At the end of 1994, the direct link Toulouse–Barcelona by the Cadi Tunnel (opened in 1985) and the Puymorens Tunnel (opened in September 1994) will rapidly become the third entrance in the Iberian Peninsula. The Cadi Tunnel pierced under the Sierra del Cadi, directly connects Upper Catalonia to Cerdagne, while the Puymorens Tunnel, under the Col of the same name, links Cerdagne to upper Ariège.

In order not to be left out, or to suffer traffic diversions, Andorra is pushing-on with the Envalira Tunnel project with a double-edged aim:

- a) to assure, over the winter season, the regular flow of skiers towards Andorran ski-stations localised on the Mediterranean side;
- b) to attract a part of the flow from the Cadi–Puymorens tunnels, to reinforce the duty-free activities of the co-principality.

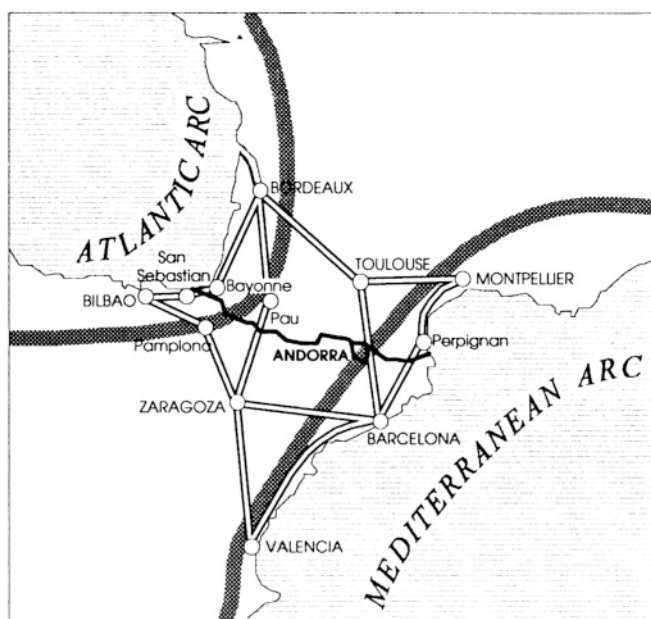


Fig. 1. The Pyrenees and the major axes lacing up between Atlantic Arc and Mediterranean Arc

The Somport Tunnel, the master-plan of the system Bordeaux–Zaragoza–Valencia will be open in 1996. As with the financing of the Puymorens Tunnel, the ERDF made a major contribution here. But contrary to its counterpart Puymorens, the Somport Tunnel has been the object of a vigorous ecological battle. More precisely, it is part of the four important projects with a European dimension localised in France, and contested by the ecologist milieu: the Mediterranean high speed train (TGV) Valence–Montpellier, the A16 motorway Boulogne–Amiens, the A51 motorway Sisteron–Grenoble. A wrestling match authorities/ecologists between 1990–1993 even blocked work on the Somport Tunnel.

The problem gravitated around ten bears in the Pyrenees National Park and the fact that the tunnel entrance on the French side was situated at 200 metres inside the Parks limits. Moreover, it is untrue to pretend that the Somport Tunnel will generate the circulation of 4,000 wagons a day in the Aspe Valley, when one knows that the Mont Blanc Tunnel has only 2,800 vehicles a day! By mimicry a true tunnel-mania has taken hold of the Pyrenees.

Three projects have already taken shape. On the one hand, the Benasque Tunnel would permit north-east Upper-Aragon to link up with Luchon. On the Aragon side the road is already completed as far as the foot of the line of ridges. On the other hand, the Bonaigua Tunnel would allow the long-term

connection of the Aran Valley to Catalonia in the extreme north-west, being of the *langue d'oc*.

Finally, different actions are seeking to promote the opening of the Salau Tunnel, which would permit a direct link between the Alto Pallars and south Ariège.

### 3. RAILWAY AND PIGGYBACK (RAIL) STRATEGIES

Transpyrenean policies tied to this form of transport show less concern than with the road and tunnel strategies, since more often than not it's a question of making new the old. As far as the old is concerned several projects are under study:

a) to put into operation lightweight articulated trains (TALGO) on the Toulouse/Barcelona axis via Puymorens;

b) to reopen a fourth Transpyrenean railway Oloron/Canfranc Estacion and the Somport rail-tunnel, closed since the 27th of March 1970; this will be a steep-sloping single-line with numerous helical tunnels;

c) the implementation of piggyback on all Transpyrenean lines.

If, certainly, the piggyback system is thinkable on double-track railways such as Cerdère–Port Bou and Hendaye–Irun (flat wagons with removable bogies for different widths and gauges), this new form of transport seems certainly more problematic for the Puymorens and the Somport, considering the single-track with a difficult profile.

The newest aspect of the rail question in the Pyrenees consists of the integration of high speed trains (TGV) into the Iberian Peninsula. This integration must pass the junction between the French (TGV) high speed train network at its Spanish counterpart (AVE). At present the Spanish high speed train is better known by the term AVE (Alta Velocidad Española) linking Séville to Madrid. The AVE must be pushed as far as Zaragoza. Here lies the problem from Y to Zaragoza. Must one open a high speed train line Zaragoza–Paris by Hendaye–Irun and Bordeaux or a line Zaragoza–Paris via Montpellier, or even both at the same time?

To the north, on the French-side, the high speed train (TGV) Mediterranean Lyon–Valence–Montpellier will be opened in 1999. Next, it rests, just to extend the line as far as Perthuis. Besides, the Association for a Trans-European High Speed Train is pushing hard for the emergence of a high speed train (TGV) Rhine–Rhône–Mediterranean.

#### **4. THE END OF THE CUSTOMS AND THE LOCAL EFFECTS OF THE WIDER EUROPEAN MARKET**

In 1991, 18 million customs clearance operations originating from the intra-European Union were carried out in France. Almost two million of them concerned the Pyrenees of which 25.2% were of extra-European Union origin. The disappearance of this type of activity on January 1st 1993 generated, in terms of jobs, two disaster areas: Hendaye-Irun and Boulou. The autoport at Hendaye saw 200 jobs disappear and Irun – 1,100. But Hendaye (11,500 inhabitants) and Boulou (5,000 inhabitants) lived from their border functions.

The autoport at Hendaye (35,000 m<sup>2</sup>) will be converted into a shopping centre; whilst the Boulou autoport will be transformed into a distribution point (warehouses for wagons) following the forecast of a triple increase in wagon traffic in the next few years at Perthus. Since the beginning of the 1990s, especially on the French-side, one has seen the development of policies to attract Spanish clients: policies clearly visible in the landscape, thanks to the publicity boardings of supermakets which accept payment in pesetas, or property developers advertising the sale of properties in Catalan and in French. We have seen this phenomenon in the ski-resorts of Neiges Catalanes (in terms of eight small tightly-knit ski-resorts around Font Romeu) and in the French Basque Country. This phenomenon needs to be quantified, but one can quote the Hendaye example where an investigation was undertaken in 1990: 60% of the requests for accomodation came from the populations of Fontarabia and Irun, second-homes were rapidly converted into main-homes. The central reason invoked was the environmental difference, the life-style between north-west Spain heavily industrialized and overloaded with crowded urban zones and polluted, and south-west France (notably the frontier cities) which is extremely green. It is henceforth certain that the triple devaluation of the peseta (–21% between November 1992 and May 1993) has put the brake on Spanish visitors to France.

This explains the feeble number of visitors to Pyrenean ski-resorts during 1993–1994 season. The new flows and movements due to the disappearance of the frontier can sometimes present unexpected aspects. On the Basque Frontier there is a raging competition between French and Spanish companies, notably since the devaluation of the peseta. Within this competition the building sector is for the moment the worst hit. Elsewhere, many French in the Basque Country buy their car 25% cheaper across the Pyrenees (a Renault Twingo costs 13,000 F less).

## 5. THE NORTH-WEST MEDITERRANEAN EUROREGION

The membership of the Iberian Peninsula to the European Community in 1986 has modified the situation of the Pyrenees in the community space. In concrete terms Catalonia has finally found the possibility of new synergies, not within the Spanish territory but to the north. It was on its initiative that the Euroregion named the 'North-West Mediterranean' saw the light of day on the 16th of February 1989, following a meeting of the three regional presidents (Catalonia, Midi-Pyrénées, Languedoc-Roussillon) at Perpignan.

As clearly indicated in the Atlas of the same name published by GIP Reclus, the essential ground for the existence of this Euroregion is regional co-operation. This interregional and transfrontier structure responds, in fact, to a double strategy:

1. On the one hand, in France, the weakness of economic, demographic and political weight of the regions has pushed them into association. On the 11th of June 1986 the five regions of the south of France grouped together in the Association of the Greater South (l'Association Grand Sud). The five regional capitals are in a position to become secular duopolies therefore decided to treat diverse problems jointly. One must say, however, that this association is more an idea than an organisation, and that its functioning is problematic, since in reality problems are dealt with by two or three regions, but never the five. In this way, Languedoc-Roussillon and the Midi-Pyrénées were brought closer together to jointly treat problems concerning the Pyrenean Chain.

2. On the other hand, in Spain, Barcelona and Catalonia have seen in this structure the possibility of turning towards Europe's dynamic poles, which are, Northern Italy, the Rhone Valley and South Germany.

This Euroregion, astride the Pyrenean Frontier zone is, to our way of thinking, the symbol that one might call the Europe of Regions with an adaptable geometry. Indeed, without doubt, more than an inter-regional policy, this type of structure entitled Euroregion is a **policy between regional metropolis**.

More and more, it seems that the strategies are woven between the metropolis themselves by the draining-off of the regions concerned than by the benefits that such a co-operation could bring. Montpellier's ambition is to give a 'town-image' with its avantgardist urban policy, but its economy falls short of its ambition. Toulouse is a vigorous capital thanks to its leading industries, but finds itself without a truly consistent hinterland, Barcelona functions as an hegemonic capital within Catalonia. It is the true mainspring of the Regional Government of Catalonia and without doubt the driving force of the golden triangle 'Montpellier-Toulouse-Barcelona'.

*De facto* their union forms a **golden-triangle** whose three vertices are metropolis of European size but whose geometrical centre benefits, when all's said and done, very little from the economic spin-offs. Since its creation, or



rather since the declaration of the intention of the three presidents of the regions in 1989, the Euroregion is still searching for an identity.

However, it could find a true working basis and define its structural problems within the Pyrenean Working Community. Created on the 3rd of April 1983 under the aegis of the Council of Europe, this Community groups the Pyrenean regions of France and Spain, that is to say, a much wider framework than the Euroregion. It is typical and representative of what the State hands over to the region regarding territorial construction when it is a matter of frontier spaces. But to obtain tangible results this structure lacks the existence of a legal framework.

Indeed, it receives no community or other subsidies, not even having the status of an association. This explains the weakness of its operational budget which constitutes 100,000 F annually paid in by each member region. The lack of results also comes from the fact that community procedures often respect national filters in the elaboration of community policies. Contrary to Alsace or the Alps transfrontier co-operation in the Pyrenees is a completely new experience.

## **6. THE INFLUENCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IN THE IMPENDING EVOLUTION OF THE PYRENEES**

It was under the aegis of the Council of Europe that regional policies found a true development. From 1958 the Permanent Conference of Local and Regional Authorities affirmed the necessity of economic integration of 'natural regions divided by frontiers'. This wish to take into account the problems specific to frontier regions, reaffirmed in 1972, is today supported by Interregional Programmes which benefit the frontier regions as soon as they are eligible for community funds.

The European Union supports as far as possible the setting up of bodies with common aims in transfrontier regions in order that they manage, jointly, community subsidies, which is moreover against the current principle in force by which the subsidies are firstly paid to national governments. One can therefore say that the regions are held in a dynamic supported by the European Union which pushes them to multiply horizontal relationships with their neighbours.

Inside the Pyrenean Union, the Pyrenean mountain-frontier is the object of acknowledged evolutions as demonstrated by this analysis. Since January 1993 and the institution of an important internal market, it is the cultural and political Europe which is gradually being put in place. The Pyrenean Regions need, in



order to have a dynamic cultural basis, be it Catalan or Basque, the maintenance and support of local secular relationships between both sides of the mountain range.

Today this basis serves to spur on the development of transfrontier structures already in existence (cf. figure 2).

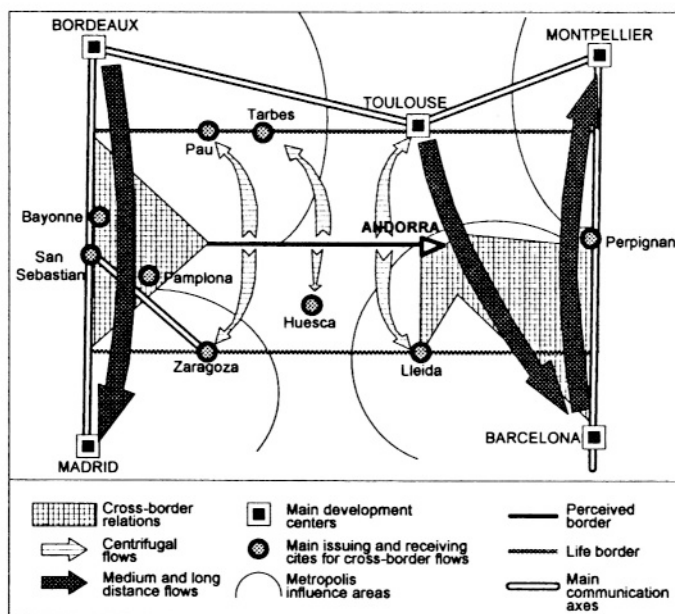


Fig. 2. Present structure within the geography of Pyrenean relations

## 7. CONCLUSION: THE SOUTH'S REVENGE AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The role and specific place of transfrontier regions like those situated on the Pyrenean Chain shows that transfrontier co-operation can and must play an essential role and holds a privileged position in European construction. This will be carried out on both **a vertical level** (a Europe of regions, States and European institutions) as much as on **a horizontal level** (interregional co-operation). The action of the Assembly of European Regions aims, since its foundation in 1985, to strengthen the position of the regions with a view to speed up integration into the European Union.

This action will be insufficient and incomplete if it does not rest, for a large part, on a serious and complete consideration of transfrontier problems in Europe. Whatever the terms or form, one must underline the irreversibility of

transfrontier co-operation in the Pyrenees. Intra-Pyrenean transfrontier relationships are slowly and gradually creating a **transfrontier fabric based on a frontier seam and not on a frontier division**. These contractual relationships will erase the negative effects introduced by the frontier. By co-operating with each other, the Pyrenean Regions underline the principle of subsidiarity, local partnerships, the effects of synergy and the notion of a living neighbourhood solidarity.

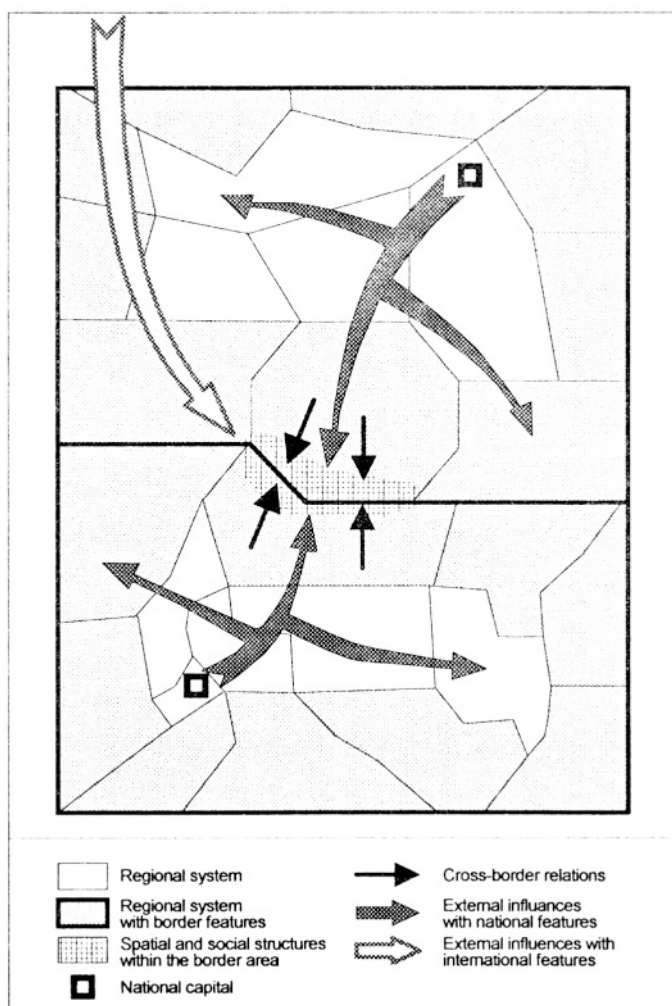


Fig. 3. Cross-border regional system with intranational and international interactions

It is beyond doubt that the interregional initiative will bring about true transfrontier grafts in the Pyrenees.

The death of a frontier and the birth of a hinge in the Pyrenees marks the **revenge of the South**. The South explodes, the South imposes. Men, activities and culture are heading for the South.

Helio-tropism gives a quick but vague explanation. In this revenge something deeper and more complex is happening in the Pyrenees. This something shows in the emergence of a system of regional, intraregional and international interactions.

This leads to three hypotheses:

1. The regional development of the Pyrenean frontier will depend on the transfrontier expansion of regional systems at different levels.
2. The characteristics of the frontier will determine the expansion of these regional systems across the frontier.
3. The regional development of the Pyrenean hinge will depend on the way the local actors in daily systems, and the systems of exterior towns close by adapt to the external stimuli of other regional systems (cf. figure 3).

Finally, the frontier mutations happening along the length of the Pyrenees is a living counter-example of Raffestins Theory of the Social Function of the Frontier.

The abolition of the Pyrenean Frontier is other than a wishful amnesia. European societies are not creating a supplementary crisis by the confusion of limits. The Pyrenean frontier no longer has this weight of violence against which it is difficult to fight, and which the simple citizen is not in a position to resist. The Pyrenean Frontier is fundamentally no longer a regulating mechanism which guarantees existence against danger and chaos.

In a federal construction such as the European Union each part is responsible for the whole. This is the message, the wager, the challenge of the new Pyrenees within the new European territorial order.

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