The Temporary Reintroduction of Border Controls Inside the Schengen Area: Towards a Spatial Perspective

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ABSTRACT
Following the terrorist attacks in Paris (November 2015) and Brussels (March 2016), several EU Member States have decided to re-establish border controls or to build walls inside the Schengen Area. Although these decisions are temporary and legally framed by the Schengen code, their extent disrupts the free movement within the Schengen Area, in particular in border areas. While lawyers and economists have analyzed the impacts of this situation, the spatial perspective has remained rather neglected. This exploratory contribution aims to address this gap in the literature by outlining the spatial significance of reintroduced controls for border areas inside the Schengen Area. This contribution firstly undertakes a literature review of the different conceptual tools at hand. These are then compared with a set of exploratory empirical materials. The article focuses more precisely on the Greater Region where France and Germany have reintroduced border controls, thus disrupting in particular daily cross-border flows with Luxembourg and Belgium. The analysis demonstrates that the border acts as a filter, disrupting cross-border flows and cooperation. Also, it sheds some light on the important role played by the ideational perception of the border for practitioners and decision-makers. This contribution concludes by suggesting several paths for a future research agenda.

1. Setting the scene

The Schengen Agreement is considered to be one of the greatest achievements of the European Union (Avramopoulos 2016). It allows the free movement of people on the territory of signatory states, while border controls are exercised at the external borders. Thirty years after the signing of this agreement, Europe faces the “most severe refugee crisis since the Second World War” (EC 2016a). The terrorist attacks in Paris (November 2015) and Brussels (March 2016) have prompted several countries to re-establish border controls or even to build walls within the Schengen Area. Even though several Member States have used the safeguarding mechanism foreseen in the Schengen Agreement in the past (DG Home 2016), the geographical and temporal scale of the restriction of the movement of people as it is currently established is unique. Some analysts have therefore portrayed this
recent evolution as the “dislocation,” the “dismantling” or even the “death” of the Schen- gen Area (Sénat 2016, 3). The geopolitical situation on an international level (e.g. the civil war in Syria and Iraq, smuggling of human beings through the Mediterranean and Balkan routes) and on a European level (e.g. management of the Schengen Area) partially explains the complexity of the situation. Since July 2015, several Member States have unilaterally decided to enforce exceptions foreseen in the Schengen Borders Code (European Parliament and Council 2006a, mainly article 26). Even though these decisions are temporary, limited to several months, and used exclusively as safeguarding mechanisms to stabilize the Schengen system, there are discussions about allowing the reintroduction of border controls for up to 2 years (European Council 2015). This situation is new in terms of its spatial extent, although the safeguarding mechanisms of the Schengen Agreement had been activated in the past.

This temporary reintroduction of border controls within the Schengen Area has crucial impacts on the daily functioning of border regions. Whether the reintroduction of borders is temporary or permanent, several recent studies have estimated the economic consequences to amount to several billions of euros (Bölmer et al. 2016, 7–14; Aussiloux and Le Hir 2016, 1–5). Associations representing cross-border areas (such as MOT or AEBR) have raised their voices to inform public authorities and citizens of the costs for border areas. This situation is particularly pressing in border areas where functional flows are important (e.g. cross-border commuters) and cross-border cooperation has long been established (Zilmer et al. 2017, 21; e.g. the Greater Region, see: CESGR 2016). In addition, the European Parliament has adopted a common position on this topic (EP 2016). The Commission proposed a “Roadmap for restoring a fully functioning Schengen system” to facilitate a repeal by Member States by the end of 2016 (EC 2016b). The Commission then adopted a proposition for a binding decision of the Council, ordering the recommendation concerning the “tempo rary internal border control in exceptional circumstances putting the overall functioning of the Schengen area at risk” (EC 2016c).

In several disciplines, studies have been conducted against the backdrop of this ever-changing political context. Lawyers regard “the legal challenges inherent to police checks within the internal border areas as having an equivalent effect to border checks” (Guild et al. 2015, 1). Despite the reintroduction of such controls in many Member States, they emphasize that these are “in full compliance with the EU rule of law” (Guild et al. 2015, 1). According to this interpretation, this situation demonstrates the capacity of the Schengen system to adapt to the situation, thus demonstrating that it “is here to stay” (Guild et al. 2015, 1). In parallel, several economic studies provide initial assessments of the immediate, medium and long-term economic costs and agree that the impact on national economies is not to be underestimated (Bölmer et al. 2016; Aussiloux and Le Hir 2016). For geographers interested in border studies, this situation questions our conceptualization of borders which, since the 1990s, have been partially framed through the prism of the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. Both the common market and the Schengen regulations provide the legal framework for borders to act as an interface. The literature scrutinizes cross-border exchanges fostered by structural differences (e.g. fiscal differences, labor force costs). The unpredictable character of the reintroduction of border controls contradicts the certainty of the border interface. Suddenly, border crossing is made less easy. Users (e.g. commuters, companies, students) are not able to define a pattern for how systematically and extensively the border
controls will be implemented. The process of cross-border integration is *de facto* temporarily disrupted.

This exploratory contribution intends to investigate the spatial significance of reintroduced controls in border areas. To do so, the available conceptual tools addressing the significance of such uncertain and sporadic *re-bordering* processes in border regions are reviewed.¹ By “uncertain,” we mean that controls are temporarily re-established by the authorities for a specific period of time, and then challenge people’s habits and decision-makers’ ability to develop a long-term strategy. By “sporadic,” we mean that the way border controls are implemented by the police is variable in time and space. Typically, checks are mostly conducted on main transit roads at peak hours, less so on minor roads. After outlining the situation in question, this contribution identifies conceptual tools that have been used in the literature. These are then compared with a set of empirical findings collected in Spring 2016, shortly after the refugee flows became particularly important and security measures had been renewed or increased in several countries (e.g. Austria, France, Germany). Perceptions of the situation by experts involved in cross-border cooperation at local, regional, national and European levels within the Schengen Area are presented. They help us to grasp how the reintroduction of border controls is experienced and reflected upon on the ground. These empirical considerations aid our reflections on the usability of conceptual tools, and the identification of avenues for future research in the concluding section.

2. Conceptual tools for analyzing the reintroduction of border controls in the Schengen Area

2.1. The reintroduction of border controls: the dilemma of “managing” mobility and security together

The reintroduction of border controls in the Schengen Area illustrates a 21st century dilemma between, on the one hand, the security requirements of controlling the movement of people in order to prevent terrorist attacks and/or illegal immigration and, on the other hand, spatial mobility as envisaged by the Schengen Agreement.

The production of border spaces in the era of globalization is driven by the demands of quick and dependable spatial mobility on the one hand and tangible societal and personal security on the other. The former has found expression in the “open borders” discourse, while the latter has come to be known as the “border securitization” discourse (Popescu 2012, 67).

This dilemma is especially significant in the European context, as security and mobility are anchored at different levels. The European level—and the Commission in particular—is “responsible for the creation and the regulation of the internal market” which is seen in the present case through the mobility of people and goods, whereas “member states are collectively responsible for an internal security policy (justice and crime) and for external security (foreign defence and policy)” (Hix 2005, 22). State borders are the material manifestation of this dilemma. While in recent years, studies have shown that the security function of physical borders has shifted towards airport terminals (Salter 2008), thus emphasizing the interface role of borders (cross-border governance), the present situation demonstrates that the nation state tends to reinvest the physical border with its separating and closing function when it considers its security—and therefore its sovereignty—to be at

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¹ The definition and usage of the term *re-bordering* is not consistent across the literature. In some cases, it refers to the process of reintroducing border controls, while in others, it can also imply a broader change in the nature of border management. For the purposes of this contribution, *re-bordering* is used to denote the process of reintroducing temporary border controls.
threat. Marked simultaneously by the daily flows of commuters and border controls, border spaces are crossed by divergent, centrifugal and centripetal forces which manifest a friction between national territory and European territoriality. As Kolossov and Scott summarize it, “they reflect the normative power of international organizations, including the EU and the power asymmetry between states in different fields” (2013, 41). To put it more precisely, if integration consists in “connecting, ensuring interrelations, erasing fragmentation and distances between elements which nonetheless retain their existence” (Brunet 1997; authors’ translation from French), how should we interpret the reintroduction of border controls through physical and temporary obstacles in areas where integration has been promoted and encouraged for decades?

2.2. Borders as a power relationship

Popescu, in his book dedicated to the process of bordering in the 21st century, is enlightening (Popescu 2012). For him, borders reflect the social, economic and political realities of the 19th century, which differ from those of the 21st century (Popescu 2012, 69). Beside their essentially national functions, borders became progressively “denationalised” under the effect of globalization in order to open towards the outside, to serve as an interface and to rapidly become permeable to cross-border exchange (Sassen 2006 and Newman 2006 cited in Popescu 2012, 71). Thus, the aim is to “establish how much the grasp of international limits nowadays exceeds the binary concept with which it was previously grasped, namely in terms of opening/closing.. “One has to learn how to manage borders that on the one hand open and close simultaneously, and on the other hand disperse their reality on our territories within and beyond the lines drawn on maps” (Amilhat Szary 2016, 153, authors’ own translation).

The call to “make our peace” with the ambivalence of borders invites us to consider the processes which contribute to modifying border functions and effects in space. This requires an examination of power relationships. Often, a border reflects the will of a group (for instance a state, religion, club) representing a collective, to differentiate and separate itself from outside influence (Newman 2011, 35). By constituting a tool for separation, borders also represent a tool for construction in relation to external influence. They result from power relationships and express power in space. Assessing established power relations reveals why they are (re)assigned specific functions. The simultaneous and ambivalent character of this renegotiation process can be highlighted via the concepts of de/re-territorialization and de/re-bordering as “mutually reinforcing” (Sparke 2005). In this respect, the expression “zone frontière” is a useful tool allowing us to investigate how neighbors handle a “border area” during and after a crisis (be it a war, security issue, public order, or ideological demarcation). It helps us to reflect on a process of co-construction by antagonist sovereign countries (Dullin 2014, 387). If borders express power relationships, how then do they manifest themselves in space, and how do reintroduced border controls work?

2.3. Border controls: implementing “selective permeability” and transforming borders into “filters” or “membranes”

The increased securitization of borders challenges us to transcend the binary frame of the opening-closing prism (Amilhat Szary 2016, 153) and to provide conceptual tools enabling
us to grasp the ambivalence of borders. In this respect, several expressions have been coined. Studying the re-bordering process in North America and Europe, Andreas writes: “Borders are supposed to function more or less like filters that separate out the unwanted from the wanted cross-border flows” (Andreas 2000, 4). Bialasiewicz summarizes it thus: “Borders are increasingly discriminatory and designed to allow easy passage for some while forming a barrier to the movements of others (refugees, ‘terrorists’, and traffickers) has given rise to the idea of borders as ‘asymmetric membranes’ (Hedetoft 2003)” (Bialasiewicz et al. 2009, 85). The notion of “selective permeability” (Popescu 2012, 68) expresses well the contingency of border crossings that results from normative decisions that vary over time. Bernes uses the word “plasticity” to describe the functioning of bordering processes that enable legal and illegal flows to cross borders simultaneously (Bernes 2014). She suggests focusing on the social mechanisms shaping the permeability of borders, to go beyond the assessment of the intensity of border controls. She then demonstrates that the border region of the Ceuta enclave is a “fragmented and transitional space of control, which conflicts with the clear-cut division projected by the fence” (Bernes 2014, 20).

**2.4. The legitimacy of borders**

Understanding the normative and social mechanisms prompts us to question the legitimacy of such practices (Popescu 2012, 69). Legitimacy is expressed in different terms. Firstly, in relation to the recipient: who is considered “legitimate” or “desirable” to cross borders (Bernes 2014)? And the person who is considered legitimate today might not be tomorrow. So who decides what constitutes legitimate traffic (Popescu 2012, 69)? In this case, borders work as filters for the separation of groups of people. Borders are a tool of the state, which thus uses one of its principal attributes (in Weber’s sense), “the monopoly of legitimate violence” (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012, 783). By reinvesting borders, the state aims to reaffirm—internally and externally—that it is the only depository of legitimate violence. However, as Rumford observes, “national borders, as with national sovereignty, rely upon the acknowledgement of others in order to become legitimate” (Rumford 2012, 890). Therefore, if “border disputes may occasion war,” borders “also denote consensus” (Rumford 2012, 890). To function, borders “need to be recognised by all parties as borders” in terms of their existence, localization and shape (Rumford 2012, 890).

Faced with the complexity and the variety of borders (e.g. the single market, Fortress Europe, securitization of border crossings), observers suggest going beyond the classical opening/closing dichotomy, thus highlighting the procedural character of borders. A border “is never simply ‘present’, nor fully established, nor obviously accessible. Rather, it is manifold and in a constant state of becoming” (Parker and Vaughan-Williams 2012, 728).

This relatively synthetic literature review shows the utility of notions such as filter, membrane and selective permeability to grasp the spatial and temporal complexity when considering the re-introduction of border controls. Furthermore, assessing the legitimacy of practices which are associated with the reaffirmation of borders enables us to highlight how these are instituted and more generally accepted internally and externally.
We now propose to apply this review of the literature to the present situation of temporary reintroduction of border controls in the Schengen Area.

3. Methodology

In our endeavor to understand the spatial significance of the reintroduction of border controls for border areas, the exploratory empirical material shows (1) how they are materialized on the ground i.e. how they operate, and (2) how they are viewed by stakeholders. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the empirical material covers a diverse set of materials, representative of the complexity of the issue.

Firstly, a semi-directed expert interview was conducted with a chief economist from the Chamber of Commerce in Luxembourg in March 2016. This expert interview aims to grasp how this phenomenon is understood and dealt with in a country where open borders are deeply anchored in both the economic and societal models. Given the significant number of cross-border commuters in Luxembourg (163,912 workers in 2014; STATEC 2015), the Luxembourg economy is particularly affected by the reintroduction of border controls. Its economic, social and cultural exchanges are equally challenged. On the political scene, Luxembourg is a member of the Greater Region, a cross-border cooperation area established in the 1970s and involving Lorraine, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saarland and Wallonia (Evrard 2013). Approximately 90% of its industrial products are exported, 80% of them to EU countries (expert interview, Chamber of Commerce). The Greater Region is the cross-border area in Europe in which we find the greatest concentration of commuters in the EU (ESPON/University of Luxembourg 2010). In his position, the interviewed expert works in close connection with both the public sector (e.g. Ministry of Economy and several working groups from the Greater Region) and the private sector (small and large firms). This interview therefore provides a rather comprehensive understanding of the wide range of impacts that the reintroduction of border controls can have in a country highly connected to the Single Market.

Secondly, the transcription of the discussions held at the annual meeting of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)² platform has enabled us to gather analyses by several local and regional representatives, civil servants active at the EU level and experts with a pan-European perspective. The conference took place in Brussels on April 20, 2016 (see represented institutions, Table 1). These cross-border entities—currently about 60, spread all over Europe (MOT 2017; Evrard 2017)—are directly affected by the reintroduction of border controls. Some of the areas they represent have seen the reintroduction of border controls without necessarily having been consulted, even though their objective is to enable cross-border cooperation. The annual meeting was dedicated to the “Impact of the Schengen Crisis on Cross-border Cooperation.” Attending this meeting and observing the participants helped us to understand the changing role of borders, and how they are perceived and managed at different levels.

Thirdly, this analysis relies on the EGTC monitoring report 2016 delivered by a team of independent consultants that, commissioned by the Committee of the Regions, contacted every member of the EGTC and asked them to report on the impact of the reintroduction of border controls in “their” respective cross-border area.
Even though these data may be limited, they provide a fairly wide range of information, from the very local level to the European level. The collected empirical data help to outline the most prominent spatial effects in relation to the reintroduction of border controls.

4. Between physical and mental barriers: how do cross-border areas address the reintroduction of border controls?

4.1. The reintroduction of border controls in the Greater Region: questioning the concept of “filter”

According to the Schengen Regulation, border controls can be temporarily reintroduced in a set of different situations. One should differentiate between, on the one hand, the case of “foreseeable events” (European Parliament and European Council 2016a, article 24) (e.g. COP21 in Winter 2015, or for example an international sports competition) and, on the other hand, “a serious threat to public policy or internal security” (European Parliament and European Council 2016a, article 23), or when Member States report “cases requiring urgent actions” (European Parliament and European Council 2016a, article 25). In all cases, Member States must inform the other EU Member States as well as the Commission about their intention. They are nonetheless not required to implement the resulting consultations. A difference also emerges regarding the information that Member States must provide. In the first case, Member States have to inform their counterparts on “the scope of the proposed reintroduction, specifying where border control is to be reintroduced; the names of the authorised crossing-points” (European Parliament and European Council 2016b, article 24 (1)). In the other cases, Member States do not have to provide such detailed information. This introduces a level of uncertainty, whose impact on cross-border flows is difficult to measure. If no additional information is provided, it leaves the neighboring authorities with a rather unclear picture of the extent to which border crossing may be affected. More specifically, if Member State A decides to temporarily reintroduce border controls by applying articles 23 and 25 of the Schengen Code, it means that Member State A conducts border controls on incoming and/or outgoing flows and decides on which sections of the frontier the border controls shall be applied. Member State B faces
disrupted freedom of movement for people, goods and services (e.g. traffic congestion, disrupted workforce commuting patterns) (Figure 1). Controls usually occur in an unannounced and occasional manner. They are operated by police and customs services on the most frequented border crossing transit points as well as at railway stations.

The case of the Greater Region (Figure 2) illustrates Figure 1, albeit with several countries involved. As Figure 2 illustrates, only France and Germany have decided to reintroduce sporadic border controls at several periods of time. Luxembourg and Belgium are affected by the decision taken on the German and French sides. The use of borders is asymmetrical. While the French and German authorities use borders as a filter which enables them to differentiate legal flows, such as cross-border work, and illegal flows, such as the flow of migrants and terrorists, Luxembourg and Belgium wish to enable the free movement of people and goods. By introducing reinforced border controls on the German and French sides of the border, the free movement on the Belgian and Luxembourgish sides is *de facto* impaired. In the absence of dialogue between the two neighboring Member States, the “filter border” on one side erases the effects of the “open border” on the other side. The legitimate decision taken on one side of the border contradicts the legitimate decision taken on the other side. Thus, the divergence between national decisions contribute *de facto* to a “duplication” of the border, which is simultaneously permeable and restrictive to crossings.

The interviewed expert expressed both his “deep concern” and his “disbelief” in respect of the situation. For him, the consequences are unpredictable at all levels, be they economic, social, political, cultural or relating to identity. According to him, this situation could even, in the long run, “partially question the country’s prosperity.” For the CESGR, a consultative body composed of representatives from social partners from the Greater Region, this situation has “disastrous consequences” for firms located in this area and for the population. “Each day, tens of thousands of people cross the border to go to work, develop their business, study, attend professional training or go shopping. Closing borders or reintroducing border controls would cause a major break in the

![Figure 1](image-url). Schematic representation of borders and flows when border controls are reintroduced in a member state as part of the Schengen agreement.
economic prosperity of the region. The whole population would quickly be affected” (CESGR 2016, authors’ own translation).

The asymmetric reintroduction of border controls can have important consequences for border regions, especially where cross-border functional interdependencies are important. The concept of a filter is particularly useful, even though it reflects only part of the situation. Focusing on legitimacy emphasizes how several levels of governance can conflict with one another. In the case of a geopolitical border, as soon as there is a contradiction in how two neighboring Member States decide to exercise their territoriality, the border doubles. This raises the question of how stakeholders on the ground handle the situation.

4.2. Between dismay and disbelief: experts’ landmarks are questioned

In this context, stakeholders involved in cross-border cooperation have several views and interpretations of the current situation. It is remarkable that the experts interviewed and observed have all in the first place expressed their subjective perception of the situation, whether they work on a local, regional, national or European level. Only after having reflected on their subjective impressions did they start to share their diagnosis and propositions for the future. The vocabulary used contrasts strongly with the usually normative discourses, which can be explained by the exceptional dimension of the situation. The feelings of dismay and
disbelief dominate. Experts express their “concern” and “fear” in the face of the consequences of this situation for the future of the EU and for other border areas. European integration is judged to be “more fragile than one would have thought.” They qualify the present situation as an “unimaginable backward step” and as “cold shock.” After expressing their personal feelings, actors attempt to draw a diagnosis. The reintroduction of border controls is understood as an “unravelling of the achievements.” Experts identify the Schengen Agreement as a cornerstone of the European construction project. “The Schengen crisis is the crisis of Europe because Schengen is the most visible face of the European dream. Reintroducing borders is going backwards and making a 100-year leap into the past, to the eve of the First World War” (Brussels, 20.02.2016). The closing of borders is perceived as symptomatic of an “inward-looking policy.” This movement is implicitly judged to be opposed to European integration; it is qualified as a “dangerous regression,” a “disaggregation,” a “disintegration.”

4.3. The differentiated consequences of reintroduced border controls

We suggest applying Durand’s definition of cross-border integration to conduct a differentiated analysis of the reintroduction of border controls. Cross-border integration can be understood as being composed of four interacting dimensions. The structural dimension depicts the spatial characteristics of each entity member involved in the cross-border area (e.g. fiscal regime), while the functional dimension refers to cross-border flows (e.g. commuters), the institutional dimension covers the cross-border cooperation initiated between public authorities (e.g. EGTC), and the “shared social and political references, the feeling of belonging to a cross-border living area, or the identification of common images and symbols” are covered by the “ideal dimension” (Durand 2014, 12; applying Hinfray 2010). Several economic studies have reviewed the impact on functional flows (Bölmer et al. 2016; Aussilloux and Le Hir 2016). A study commissioned by the European Parliament summarizes the findings of five different economic studies analyzing the impact of reintroduced border controls in the EU (Europe Economics 2016). It also outlines four scenarios, ranging from a temporary reintroduction of border controls in some countries to an indefinite complete suspension of the Schengen system (Europe Economics 2016). In this report and in most of the others, estimates are based on existing functional flows (e.g. commuters, tourists, imports, and exports). A permanent reintroduction of border controls would indeed mean systematic inspection of commuters’ and vehicles’ documents, which would generate queues for people and goods. Those are used to evaluate the possible impact on GDP growth, thus partially addressing the structural dimension of cross-border integration. All report a negative impact on both the intensity of the flows and GDP growth (functional and structural dimensions). Besides this quantitative analysis, the EGTC Monitoring Report 2016 questioned EGTCs responsible on the impact on their actual work, thus reflecting upon the institutional side of the cooperation. It reports that “although the introduction of border controls across some countries of the Schengen Area has affected the territory of the EGTCs, it did not heavily affect their work (…).” According to this study, “13 EGTCs from areas affected by the reintroduction of border controls confirmed that imposing border controls had an effect on their wider territory. However, most of them stated that this did not affect their everyday work” (Zilmer et al. 2017, 19). This contrasts with other experts’ statements.
For instance, a high-ranking official at the EU Commission emphasizes that:

Crossing between Denmark and Sweden took 30 minutes by the Øresund bridge. The time needed has doubled because of security checks. In the long term, this can have an economic impact on these regions of the two countries, not forgetting people who live on one side and work on the other. (EC 2016d, 10)

For the economist from the Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce who was interviewed, Luxembourgish companies immediately felt the impact of border controls; cross-border employees had to take leave or arrived at work late. He states that limiting the free movement of cross-border workers can lead to a significant drop in productivity. As to the movement of goods, logistics is considered to be the most severely affected sector in Luxembourg. External trade is also affected by the disruption of supplier chains. The economist worries about a “domino effect,” meaning that the present fragmentations of the internal market would be used in order to add barriers such as qualification and double regulations, and that the EU would close in on itself. Two reasons can explain this difference of interpretation. Firstly, the empirical material was collected during what was called at that time “the Schengen Crisis,” while the EGTC monitoring report conducted its survey in 2017. The statements provided during the EGTC annual meeting as well as those from the chief economist at the Chamber of Commerce reflect a momentum. As an expert on French borderlands reported:

In the most crossed border areas (such as France-Germany, France-Belgium, France-Luxembourg, France-Switzerland), borders have suddenly been closed which led to long waiting times on the daily commute. This generates significant problems for commuters, students, deliveries etc. Since these dramatic events, the situation is slowly coming back to normal. Most of the members [of our organisation] report that traffic is congested, that there are more traffic jams than usual, but these areas are often congested anyway. (Brussels, March 29, 2016)

The annual meeting of the EGTC in Brussels was also able to provide a platform to be heard at the EU level, while at the time of the meeting they faced challenging situations locally. A civil servant at the EU Commission reported:

From my experience, I must say that often the solutions that make the difference on the ground have been provided by the local and regional authorities rather than by national authorities. (Brussels, March 29, 2016).

An expert from the French–German border area mentioned that one of his objectives in this respect was to “make sure that the role and responsibilities of local authorities are acknowledged at the highest level of the Member States and of the EU institutions.”

This exploratory empirical material confirms that the functioning of cross-border areas is highly disrupted by reintroduced border controls. They materialize the friction between levels of governance: the single market’s free movement of people and goods (competence held at the European level) and the need to ensure security and public order (one expression of national sovereignty held at national level).

When it comes to the ideal perception of reintroduced border controls, the exploratory empirical material demonstrates that it plays a crucial role in the experts’ interpretation of the situation in question:
Today, one can always cooperate across the border, and one can also cross it in order to go to work or to live on the other side, but the risk is that suddenly, one gets back to having negative expectations: this company that will not respond to a public call for tenders because the border is too complicated, this person who planned to buy a house on the other side of the border and who eventually decides to stay on this side of the agglomeration. (Brussels, March 29, 2016).

When citizens are used to working together and this opportunity disappears suddenly, many things will disappear at the same time. The behaviour of individuals will change – be it sports, cultural activities, shopping or work. (Brussels, March 29, 2016)

More generally, the most significant concern amongst the experts relates to the reassessment of “living together,” which cooperation programs have contributed to promoting since their creation.

As a result of the regional elections which ran (at the same time as border controls), we had, on the French as well as on the German side, a quite strong breakthrough by extreme right-wing parties. Besides the physical borders which have been reintroduced, one should look at the borders in people’s heads. (Brussels, March 29, 2016).

After attempting to understand the significance of the impacts on border areas, the experts propose several actions. At a European level, wishing to “recapture the Schengen spirit,” they propose concentrating the control of the external borders of the Schengen Area and helping the states which are the most exposed to migration flows. This recommendation aims to avoid the asymmetry of a policy pursued at a national level which is considered to be “inconsistent” and disadvantageous for border areas. On a trans-frontier level, they propose maintaining cross-border cooperation in accordance with local specificities, and claiming recognition of the strategic character of their cooperation for European social and territorial cohesion.

5. Conclusion

For several decades, European integration has in particular contributed to “connecting, ensuring interrelations, erasing fragmentation and distances” (Brunet 1997 authors’ translation from French) between border areas. The progressive reintroduction of border controls at a national level unbalances this process. The economic, societal and political significance of this process is important; spatial and territorial impacts depend largely on the duration, intensity of control and their predictable character. Although exploratory, the empirical and conceptual data underline several aspects that would require further research.

The study program on European spatial planning defines integration as “a system of links between territories which is the emerging result of concrete social, economic, and cultural relationships” (De Boe, Grasland, and Healy 1999). The proposal to keep four dimensions for analyzing cross-border integration processes (Durand 2014) allows us to structure the empirical analysis and to assess the interactions between institutional, functional, structural and idea-related dimensions. As the empirical study has shown, individual representations of borders can evolve following the reintroduction of border controls. Changing perceptions of borders can influence how individuals live in border areas, thus influencing the other dimensions (functional, institutional, and structural) of spatial
integration. Conceptualizing the dimension of ideas more precisely would enable the investigation of changes caused by the reestablishment of border controls on cross-border integration.

Furthermore, the reintroduction of border controls in many Member States in a relatively short time period shows that borders remain a marker of identity and security which reveals them to be an essential component in the contemporary definition of European states. If the situation under scrutiny in this contribution seems to illustrate the renationalization of security functions for some borders, this situation appears to be transitory given its lack of uniformity. When taken unilaterally, the legitimate decision to reintroduce border controls on one side of the border challenges the legitimate decision to implement free movement on the other side of the border. Both decisions lose their effectiveness. The border “splits into two.” Even if boundary delineation remains uncontested in the EU, border management is revealed to be highly complex. In the long term, it appears essential that Member States agree on where the location and security function of the borders is applied, be it by reinforcing the Schengen Agreement, emphasizing the securitization of the external borders of the Schengen Area, or by the renationalization of national borders. In this case, a more accomplished reflection on the operationalization of the filter concept appears essential in order to limit the impacts on free movement of Community nationals. These considerations illustrate how entangled the cross-border, national and European levels are. A global reflection on the complementarity of levels and their function appears essential, for practitioners as well as for researchers.

Endnotes

1. Since this article aims to address the spatial significance of reintroduced controls in border areas, it focuses on border areas within the Schengen Area and at the Member States’ borders. It does not cover other forms of border control, via registers held on databases of places of residence, during transit, or control practices conducted within countries (e.g. tax inspections).

2. The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is a European legal instrument aiming at facilitating cross-border, transnational or interregional territorial cooperation. The EC European Regulation no. 1082/2006 allows public entities to cooperate within the framework of one entity with legal capacity. After having widely supported the creation of the EGTC tool, the Committee of the Regions established the “EGTC platform” as a platform of exchange for the EGTC. For an analysis of the EGTC instrument and its significance for territorial governance, see Evrard 2016.

3. Given the sensitivity of that matter, the authors have not been able to meet with representatives of the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg’s police.

4. The quotations in this section stem either from the interview with an expert from the Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in March 2016 or from experts having expressed their views at the yearly meeting of the EGTC platform on March 20, 2016. When not expressed in French, these were translated into French by the translators of the Committee of the regions, during the meeting. All these have been translated by the author from French into English.

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