

German officials apologize after French citizens insulted and spat on in border town



Berlin, April 14 (RHC)-- The coronavirus pandemic has become a tough test of the EU's unity, and a small German border town is actively failing it. Officials have sounded the alarm over a spike in aggression from the locals towards visitors from France.

The people of Gersheim have been living side by side with the French for over two decades, crossing the symbolic border between the two European Union member-states without even noticing it.

But in mid-March this border became real, as Germany shut itself off from its neighbors in an attempt to stem the spread of COVID-19. The only exceptions made were for goods deliveries, and foreigners who lived abroad but had daily jobs inside Germany.

However, the so-called cross-border commuters weren't welcome in Gersheim anymore. Health concerns swiftly outweighed friendship for the locals, who learned from the news that they had the worst coronavirus-hit region in France for a next-door neighbor. Grand Est has already seen more than 2,000 fatalities due to the disease, while the death toll in the adjacent German state of Saarland stands at just above 40.

Things got so bad that Gersheim's Mayor Michael Clivot was forced to record a video address on Thursday to somehow try and bring his people to their senses. He also told the website T-Online that "our French friends" have been insulted in the streets, supermarkets and pharmacies. Some were spat on and had eggs tossed at them, while one visitor was urged to "go back to your corona-ridden country."

The French consul in Saarland, Catherine Robinet, confirmed the aggressive outbursts against her countrymen, saying that "there is a tense atmosphere in some places near the border." Even long-time French employees of German firms had been harassed at their workplaces, she said.

But Clivot doesn't just blame the folks in Gersheim for what has been happening; he also blames the federal government in Berlin. The mayor insists that closing the border was a mistake, as "what we needed was joint action with France."

He was backed by Saarland's Economy Minister Anke Rehlinger, who wrote on Twitter that "our hearts are bleeding over the closed borders with France and Luxembourg."

Meanwhile, the federal government is apologizing to France – for the German citizens, of course, not the closed borders. German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas pointed out on Twitter that "the coronavirus knows nothing of nationality. It's the same for human dignity."

The behavior of those who gave in to COVID-19 panic and insulted the French visitors was "completely unacceptable," Maas wrote over the weekend, adding: "We're all in the same boat."

<https://www.radiohc.cu/index.php/en/noticias/internacionales/219713-german-officials-apologize-after-french-citizens-insulted-and-spat-on-in-border-town>



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