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Toespraak van

JOKE SCHAUVLIEGE

VLAAMS MINISTER VAN LEEFMILIEU, NATUUR EN CULTUUR

Interparliamentary conference on SMM – OVAM

Honoured guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

If we care about the Earth, we have to change our current pattern of production and consumption.

The reason is clear: it endangers our natural resources, and thus the viability of our economy.

Moreover, the way in which we handle materials is causing environmental problems, and notably contributes to climate change and loss of biodiversity.

Because the consumption of natural resources in Europe **exceeds** the availability, Europe's dependence on natural resources from elsewhere is increasing. And while Europe imports natural resources, it risks exporting environmental pressures.

The EU has achieved a relative improvement in resource efficiency. However, absolute levels of resource use continue to grow as we are producing and consuming ever-increasing amounts of services and goods.

These challenges require a new policy approach. **We need to use materials more smartly.**

It is necessary to consider the life-cycle in its **entirety** and to close material chains from '**cradle to cradle**'.

It doesn't make sense to set up infrastructure for the recycling of waste if products placed on the market are not recyclable.

And it doesn't make sense either to place eco-friendly products on the market if consumers do not use them correctly.

The shift from a waste into a materials policy is one of the **key** environmental objectives in the Flemish coalition agreement and in my policy. A new legal framework is currently being developed. It will transform the Flemish waste Decree into a comprehensive **Decree on the sustainable management of material cycles**.

I am convinced Flanders has something to offer in this field. That's why I have seized the Belgian EU Presidency to highlight the theme 'Sustainable Materials Management' (SMM) at the European level.

SMM is an integrated policy approach. It seeks to reduce natural resources use and environmental pressures throughout the life-cycle of materials. That means: from the extraction or harvesting of resources, over production, distribution and consumption, to recycling and final treatment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It's essential to promote SMM **at EU level**.

With 7.7 percent of the world population the European Union is responsible for 16 percent of the global footprint, more than twice as much the capacity of our European ecosystems.

Stimulating SMM is crucial because Europe represents a large share of the worldwide environmental impact, and because European-wide measures are necessary to ensure an equal level playing field for our businesses.

Our Informal Council in July in Ghent showed to be very fruitful. The Environment ministers of the 27 EU member states, Commissioner Potocnik and members of the European Parliament discussed which steps the EU should take towards SMM and how SMM can contribute to the resource efficient Europe aimed at in the 2020 Strategy.

The Belgian Presidency strongly urges the Commission to prepare a coherent resource efficiency strategy based on the concept of SMM.

Indeed, SMM and resource efficiency are closely linked. Handling the materials we use on a daily basis in a sustainable way is indispensable for decoupling economic growth from the use of resources.

At the Informal Council, I firstly stressed the need for an integrated life-cycle approach.

The EU already addresses many of the environmental challenges related to materials use. This happens for instance through:

the Waste Framework Directive;

the Thematic Strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources;

the sustainable consumption and production Action Plan;

and the Raw Materials Initiative.

But the EU and its member states urgently **need a comprehensive approach.**

The life-cycle perspective can also help the EU to reconcile requirements of energy efficiency and material efficiency. It will help

identify whether the largest ecological potential of material flows lies in incineration for energy production or in material recovery.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Managing materials in a sustainable way, is a **shared responsibility**. It requires **reinforced cooperation** between policy makers in different policy fields, such as environment, energy, agriculture, transport, industry, climate, innovation, education, finance and trade.

The design of products was identified as one of **the key elements** in closing the loop and in obtaining products that have a minimal environmental and health impact across all stages of the life-cycle.

Therefore, I argued that EU product legislation should pay **more attention to ecodesign**. Energy, water or material efficiency standards, maximum concentrations for hazardous substances and sustainability criteria should be **incorporated into product rules**.

The idea to introduce **tradable recycling certificates**, similar to green electricity certificates, was also raised. Such recycling certificates

could stimulate producers to place recyclable products on the market or use recycled materials. They also could financially reward CO₂ reduction by means of recycling.

Taxation forms that better reflect the environmental cost of products were also addressed. The European Commission has a role to fulfil in facilitating cooperation between Member States that want to realise a shift from labour to resource taxation. A stronger European framework for green taxation can help to avoid market distortions due to different taxation regimes.

Secondly, I made a plea for more innovation at the Informal Council.

We **need** technological innovation to improve specific production processes or creating better products. In addition, **systemic**

innovation is required to make our materials use more sustainable.

Product-service-systems, leasing concepts, and industrial symbiosis

are examples of innovative ways of cooperation between actors in a material chain that merit further elaboration. The EU should provide

adequate **financial means** for nourishing green innovations, both technological and non-technological.

Last but not least, I called on my colleague policy makers **to agree** on a **challenging vision** for a Europe that manages materials sustainably.

We need to give serious thought to what we want to achieve and how to do so.

In concreto: long-term strategic objectives for sustainable materials use **need to be formulated**. Transition pathways towards a sustainable economy **have to be identified**. And quantifiable targets, such as resource efficiency and sustainability limit targets, **ought to be set**.

I proposed to establish a **multi-actor transition platform** on sustainable materials management bringing together industry, policy makers, research institutes, consumers and ngo's.

As been said before, a strong vision **needs to** be backed up by strong indicators and strong data. These are fundamental for sound decision-making and for measuring policy progress.

Therefore, the Presidency called upon the European Commission to develop a comprehensive set of indicators on European materials use and the environmental and social impacts across the life-cycle, as well as improving data gathering on material flows and related life-cycle impacts.

Following the productive discussions on SMM during the Informal Environment Council, what's next?

The Belgian Presidency hopes to consolidate the outcomes of the Informal Council in formal Council Conclusions, to be presented to all member states for approval at the December 2010 Environment Council.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Flanders, both the Parliament and the Government strongly support the shift from waste policy to sustainable materials management. I hope that you also will support this transition and will defend this in your own country (and region). Because the state of the Earth is now in our hands.

(Thank you for your attention)

Joke Schauvliege

Flemish minister of Environment, Nature & Culture