

## **Aquawarness Policy Forum– 22 March 2010**

### **Speech by Evelyne Huytebroeck**

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I would first like to thank the forum's organisers and contributors.

As Brussels' Minister for Water Policy, I am delighted to be welcoming such an initiative to Brussels, our European capital!

After all, it's important for a reminder to come from Europe's heart that water is part of the common heritage of mankind, and that everyone has a right to high-quality drinking water in a sufficient quantity for their dietary, domestic and health needs.

Access to drinking water is a key question which will also be the subject of special attention during Belgium's Presidency of the European Union. The Brussels-Capital Region will be supporting the "Drinking Water Directive revision project, while a Communication from the European Commission is expected, probably in June 2010 (but the impact study may cause a certain amount of delay). Furthermore, on 4-5.11.10, the Walloon Region is organising a "High level meeting on drinking water" on behalf of the Belgian Presidency.

Moreover, if you were to ask me what measures would be needed to achieve the objectives which have been set at this forum, I would reply to you that, as the person responsible for a city & region forming part of the Escaut river basin which passes through or concerns no less than 3 countries and 5 regional authorities, I cannot envisage a water policy without the deployment

of effective tools for cooperation.

These tools are particularly vital for ensuring the permanence of the “water” resource, but also for helping the regions located upstream to take their environmental responsibility.

An example of this cooperation is the International Commission for the Escaut, which was formed several years ago and aims to define shared cross-border objectives with our French, Flemish and Dutch friends. Its most notable results include the joint development of the central themes of the water management plan for our shared river basin.

This management plan covers both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of our water, as well as the joint management of this resource. After all, it is crucial for shared sovereignty to be developed and implemented over the basic necessity that is water.

This form of collaboration permits the definition of cross-region objectives tailored to the river basin, while at the same time allowing the integration of local and regional water policy.

Finally, the cooperation between the members of the Escaut river basin commission has led to the implementation of the “Scaldwin” project which, courtesy of European Union funding, is enabling joint hydrographic work to be carried out within sub-basins under the shared responsibility of different public authorities.

In this regard, I feel it is important that instruments for cooperation between public institutions and civil society groups are equipped with real decision-

making and financial power, as these are the sole gauges of their legitimacy and operational capability.

The aim of my speech is to illustrate the fact that cooperation between states and between local or regional public authorities, and of course in consultation with the business and association sectors, is possible. Indeed, it's already a concrete reality in our regions. That's why I wished to emphasise the importance of putting in place this type of cooperative structure, in accordance with a water-based logic rather than a state-based or political one.

Thank you for your attention.

**Evelyne Huytebroeck**

**Minister for Environment, Energy and Water Policy of the Brussels-Capital Region**