

Dear Mrs Bracke
Dear participants in the Belgian Circular Hotspot,
Ladies and gentlemen

Thank you for having me,

- I want to share with you in the next 10 minutes or so, a bit of history on how we evolved to where we stand today in Flanders on circular economy, what actions we are undertaking today and what we are heading for in the future. I do this as head of international policy at OVAM, but also as member of the European CE Stakeholderplatform, which allows me to link the local and regional levels also to some reflections from the EU perspective.
- My organization, the Public Waste Agency of Flanders, was established in 1981, that's almost 40 years ago, as one of the first Public Agencies of the Flanders Region, at the time a new region in the freshly federalized State of Belgium. OVAM has full competence on waste, sustainable materials and soil policy in Flanders.
- Since the mid '90 we put in place a mix of regulatory, economic and social instruments on waste and materials management, in close cooperation with our partners at the local level. We established a landfill and incineration ban and fees, PAYT schemes, we introduced mandatory separate collection for several waste streams, invested considerably in recycling parks and in reuse centres, we introduced a reuse target of 7kg per inhabitant, brokered EPR schemes for 7 streams, and last but not least, put a lot of effort in public awareness campaigns.
- Over the next 10 years statistics showed that these instruments had a significant impact. By the year 2005 we had reduced the landfill of household waste to nearly 1% and increased separate collection and recycling of our household waste to around 70%. With these statistics Flanders became an international frontrunner in waste management.
- At the same time we noticed that the statistics showed a stagnation in waste reduction. Although we managed it better, we kept generating the same amounts of waste. We realized that policy instruments focusing only at the end of life phase will not help us manage the valuable resources more efficiently let alone, use less of them.
- So it was time to make a drastic change in our political thinking about waste management: we should no longer think about waste, but about the sustainable management of resources, about using less materials and about closing resource loops. As a consequence we put sustainable materials management high on the European agenda as President of the EU council in 2010, we implemented the revised European Waste Framework Directive in a new Flemish Materials Decree and established in 2012 the Flemish Materials Program, that later became Circular Flanders.
- In 2016, the Government of Flanders confirmed in its Long Term Vision 2050, that circular economy is one of the seven priority transitions in Flanders. The aim is to make Flanders a circular society by 2050. Circular Flanders, who is embedded in

the OVAM is the engine for this transition. It is broad public private partnership of regional and local government agencies, companies, civil society, universities and research centers. Around 20 organizations in this quintuple helix form the core of this partnership. Circular Flanders operates under the supervision of the Ministers of Environment and Economy and Innovation. We have a team of 10 FTE who support, inspire and facilitate the activities of the partnership.

- So what kind of actions does the Circular Flanders partnership undertake? Since 2012 a great diversity of initiatives was rolled out. I'm just picking out a few:
- Together with some other partners Circular Flanders set up a 'Green Deal on Circular Purchasing' in 2017. To walk the talk on circular purchasing, over 100 organizations committed to set up two circular purchasing projects. City of Gent was one of them. 55 supporting organizations made their expertise available. Together with manufacturers and suppliers they formed a learning network. For anyone who is interested: on Thursday 21st of November we organise the closing session of this greendeal. with a last buyer meets supplier matchmaking session in Brussels. After that, we will go on and share the expertise from this greendeal with other European partners in a new Interreg project called ProCirc.
- In February 2019 Circular Flanders, the OVAM and the Belgian Building Confederation signed a new Green Deal on Circular Building, with 320 organizations who commit to do at least one circular building project in the next 3 years. New here is the cooperation with research centers, who will do in parallel to the pilot projects, research in order to learn fast from all these experiments.
- Between 2017 and 2019 Flanders has spent around 16 million euro on innovative demonstration projects in circular economy. We selected all together 185 small and larger projects who cover the whole value chain, preferably with unusual alliances between companies, local governments, knowledge centres and NGO's.
- Green deals, experiments and demonstration projects are no doubt necessary and should be ongoing. But it is also time to move on and make these circular production and consumption niches competitive to linear models and simply the norm. To make a real transition we need courageous political decisions, out of the box thinking, creativity and imagination on how our systems can look differently from the past. 3 elements should be kept in mind:
 - o First: innovation is crucial, but the big challenge is not technological innovation, it is finding new ways of cooperating and exchanging information along the value chains, both in public institutions as well as in companies and organizations.
 - o Secondly: a systems change can only succeed when it is fair and inclusive. Taking on board the majority of citizens and making them feel involved is a necessary precondition.
 - o Thirdly: to make a transition to circular economy, we have to get the prices right. New systems should value natural capital properly.
- Rethinking existing instruments and systems should be done at all levels. To finish, I would like to share with you some of our thinking on where we can go on this journey:

- First, at the local level, which is the perfect breeding ground for experiment, as we saw today here in Gent. A range of instruments can be looked at here: Local authorities can for instance use the untapped potential of circular public procurement, they can look into the rules on temporary use of empty building to allow for circular pilots/projects, they can stimulate local repair and sharing initiatives, attract economic activities that close loops locally to the benefit of local entrepreneurs and citizens, use building permits to stimulate circular buildings and reuse of resource streams (symbiosis), adapt their own governance structures, make more use of EU financial support, find inspiration in other good practices. The EU CE stakeholder platform and the European Urban Agenda, provide toolkits and portals with relevant information.
- At the Regional and national level we are also in the middle of rethinking our instruments. For instance re-inventing producer responsibility so to have it also apply as a basis for product-as-a-service systems, using circular procurement criteria, defining targets on reducing our material footprint, identifying and lifting regulatory and financial barriers, prohibiting certain products (such as single use cups) or putting product requirements (such as 100% recycled content for waste bags), looking for new ways of stakeholder engagement,
- At the EU level, finally, we see a lot of promising developments, with recently the decision of the EIB to reorient its support away from the fossil economy and inject yearly a 100 billion Euro in climate investments. We are in full expectation of the European Green Deal and the new Action Plan on Circular economy. To us crucial steps to take at the EU level are:
 - o Linking circular economy much closer to climate and biodiversity, industrial policy and bio-economy via data collection, regulatory frameworks, institutional frameworks
 - o Establishing European resource efficiency targets, such as reuse targets or material footprint targets
 - o creating a good functioning market for secondary raw materials, looking both at the supply and demand side, with quality standards, mandatory circular procurement criteria, financial injections in recycling capacity,
 - o developing a coherent product policy, including eco-design requirements on circularity, including also looking at the broader systems where these products have to move and not only the products themselves (retail, service providers, transport,...)
 - o strengthening consumer protection rules and assuring correct and transparent consumer information
 - o taking sectoral approaches as was done for plastics, with a focus on construction or textiles
 - o last but not least, engaging in global talks on sustainable international trade and exploring the potential of an international treaty on resource efficiency

With this international note, I would like to stop. I thank you for your attention and wish you a fruitful inspiring and pleasant continuation of your visit to Belgium.