

Speech Circular Economy Hotspot Belgium

Ladies and Gentlemen, Welcome to you all.

As Deputy Mayor of Economics, Trade, Sports and Port, I am very proud and happy that the City of Ghent was invited to be part of the Circular Economy Hotspot Belgium event.

I like to thank all the organizing partners; the public partners at the Federal and Flemish government level such as the Federal Public Service on Health and Environment, The Federal Service on Economy, the Federal Service for sustainable Development, OVAM, Circular Flanders & Flanders Investment and Trade. And the private partners with company representatives such as Essenscia, Agoria & the Federation of Enterprises in Belgium.

I also like to thank our innovative local organizations, companies and research institutes who presented an interesting program today: Ghent university with Capture and Durabuild, Arcelor Mittal and all the companies involved in their projects, Bio Base Europe Pilot plant and North Sea Port. They are part of the cleantech ecosystem in our city, which is growing at a rapid pace towards its full potential.

Last but not least, I also like to thank the international companies and research institutions who are here today.

You are all driven by the vision that scarce resources should be used in the most optimal way and off course professionally interested in the valorization potential of the circular economy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Governing a city is only possible by making clear choices. These choices need to be future-oriented and prepare our city for a changing world.

We have started this new legislature with a strong commitment: **we will govern our city with ambition and boldness**. We therefore gave our coalition agreement the title: 'An ambitious and bold deal for Ghent'.

Ambitious, because we absolutely want our city to take the lead, blaze a trail and do pioneering work.

Bold, because we want to make courageous decisions to address the challenges ahead.

We have translated this ambition and boldness into a mission for our city, and last week we made several clear budgetary choices on this basis.

Let me explain our mission in greater detail, since it says a lot about what we want to achieve with our city:

“Ghent is a proud city where people like living, working and relaxing. A city that breathes and allows people to breathe. Everyone is equally different and equally a Ghent resident. Children are given room to grow. People get the opportunity to develop their talents. Ghent is a city of entrepreneurship and experimentation that is open to the world, and we share the ambition to create a city where future generations can lead a happy life as well.”

Various elements in this mission are applicable today:

- Ghent as a breeding ground for entrepreneurship and experimentation;
- Ghent as a city that is resolutely open to the world;
- Ghent as a place where talent and knowledge can reach their full potential;

- Ghent as a city where we opt for cooperation;
- Ghent as a city where we consider the future generations at all times.

The budgetary choices we have made reflect the direction we want our city to take. Ghent is a city in transition and is currently undergoing major changes. We must not be afraid of this change, but should instead embrace this reality to advance our city further.

This way, we don't have to catch up with progress but are always one step ahead.

It is good to see so many of you here, in the City of Ghent, since we find it important to invest in 'the economy of the future', in which Clean Technology and the development of the circular economy play a key role. This ambition is clearly stated in our coalition agreement.

A few weeks ago, we earmarked over **4 million euros** within the budget for a hedge fund to develop the economy of the future together with partners from the Ghent Economic Board and to reinforce future-oriented sectors such as Clean Technology and circular economy. We want to use these means to attract multiple Flemish and European subsidies and private financing. We will analyse societal challenges and we will launch mobilising flagship projects in order to find solutions with impact.

Investing in technology, clean technology and in circular economy means a lot.

It proves that we invest in the economy of the future.

It proves that we know how to work together in Ghent.

It proves that we are serious about becoming the capital of technology.

Dear guests,

Our current decisions are rooted in the past and the results we obtained by working together. I think we did a good job 3 years ago –our current Mayor Mathias De Clercq was Deputy Mayor of Economics and Port at the time– in establishing the **Ghent Regional Cleantech Cluster**: a partnership between the city’s Economy and Environment department, North Sea Port, Ghent University, the Province of East Flanders, the Provincial Development Agency (POM) of East Flanders and Cleantech Flanders, now part of VITO.

The Ghent Regional Cleantech Cluster’s ambition is to excel as an active Cleantech ecosystem by 2030 in response to the challenges in terms of energy, materials, water and mobility. How do we intend to achieve our goal? By proactively promoting and supporting the development and implementation of clean technology in the urban and economic fabric, as well as the advancement of the circular economy.

Three years ago, all partners signed a commitment declaration aimed at realising said ambition by focusing on **5 concrete objectives**:

1. the promotion of demand-driven knowledge development,
2. the conversion of knowledge into business cases,
3. the improvement of the framework conditions space, funding and talent,
4. the development of a dynamic Cleantech Community and
5. making the Ghent region known as a prime Cleantech location at an international level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Several successful results have been obtained so far. In this case, co-creation is not a buzzword but genuine collaboration between governments, universities and companies. We cooperate by jointly conducting studies, implementing projects (more than 30 by now) and exchanging best practices. Together, we are also in a stronger position to attract public and private funds.

I would like to use this opportunity to thank everyone who has already invested in Cleantech. The projects & partnerships you visited today, were made possible by the strong vision & willingness of our local organisations. They were also made possible by important Flemish, Belgian and European funding.

Being able to rely on such a performant local network, on the excellent knowledge within our research institutes, on the development of technologies and existing circular business models within our companies, we have one goal for the future, which is 'Upscaling and creating more impact'.

We invite you to exchange ideas with us and to set up collaboration on upcoming new circular materials, value chains & business models. Together with all partners, let us continue to play a leading role in the economy of the future.

What was 'science fiction' yesterday, is 'science' today and won't be 'rocket science' tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope you will enjoy the rest of the evening in our lovely city.

Now I would like to give the floor to Lieze Cloots. Lieze is head international Policy at OVAM, the Public Waste Agency of Flanders.

She will tell us a bit more about the history of OVAM and Circular Flanders, where Flanders stands today with the transition to a circular economy, and where we aim for in the near future.