

**Statement by the Belgian ministers for the environment:**

**Bruno Touback, Federal government**

**Kris Peeters, Flemish region**

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**Convention on Long Range Transboundary Air Pollution – a happy 25th anniversary**

During the sixties and seventies it was demonstrated that air pollution is not a regional problem, that it does not stop at country borders, that it knows no political senses and does not differentiate between East and West. Obviously, this demanded for international co-operation on the abatement of air pollution, the foundations of which were laid by the signing and adopting of the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution 25 years ago.

Not only did the convention make both the public at large and politicians aware of the problem, it also created a forum for the exchange of scientific information and discussions on how to deal with the problem, by creating different working groups. It facilitated the exchange of all kinds of information among experts from member states and guaranteed a close interaction between scientists and policy makers. By keeping track of scientific developments, the Protocols of the Convention are in agreement with the state of the technology at that time.

In its eight Protocols, the Convention tackles all important aspects of air pollution including eutrophication, heavy metals, ground-level ozone, persistent organic pollutants and acidification. While the first Protocols dealt with one pollutant only and simply aimed at technically achievable emission reductions, the last Protocol covers multiple pollutants and starts from a cost-efficient approach, a development that can only be encouraged. And while the first Protocols aimed at reduction percentages for each member state, now the goal is set by critical load oriented emission reductions which may differ between member states.

Belgium is a small country with a central position in Western Europe and therefore transboundary air pollution is a major source of pollution. Almost half of the acidifying emissions are produced outside the Belgian borders. In its efforts to improve the air quality, Belgium depends on the efforts done not only in its neighbouring countries, but in the whole of Europe as well and therefore of the initiatives taken within the UN/ECE and the Convention.

Since Belgium is a member state of the European Union, most of its legislative incentives come from the European Commission, but this does not make the Convention of minor importance. The larger geographical covered by the Convention, both to the east and to the west, makes it a necessary body for the improvement of the quality of the air and of the environment.

Although the Convention has achieved remarkable results and although it has lead to a drastic emission reduction for the different kinds of emissions, a lot of work still lies ahead of us. The emission ceilings in the Gothenburg Protocol and the related EU NEC Directive will lead to a further abatement of acidification, eutrophication and ground-level ozone, but even after 2010 the problem will remain and more work has to be done. Moreover, health effects caused by emissions of particulates are showing up and will become a focus of attention in the near future. And last but not least, it does not suffice to make sure that future depositions are below the critical level; we do not only have to try to prevent the situation from getting worse, we have to aim at making it better. In this respect, the dynamic modelling discussed in the Working Group on Effects will be of the uttermost importance.

In the federated state of Belgium, procedures for international agreements, such as the ratification of a protocol, are not always easy. However, the ratification of the Gothenburg Protocol is a high priority for Belgium. Nevertheless, we do hope that at least 16 parties will have ratified the Gothenburg Protocol by the end this year, so it can enter into force.

We would like to congratulate the Convention on its 25th birthday. Over the past 25 years, during which the world has changed drastically, the Convention succeeded in continuing to do very valuable work, leading to promising results. Hopefully, it will continue to do so for at least 25 more years.