Cooperation in the Meuse River Basin

The sharing of the water between the Netherlands and Belgium

Poland, Miedzyzdroje, 21-24 April 2002

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Maastricht, The Netherlands
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Meuse source of prosperity

An increase:
• in demand for Meuse water for shipping, industry, recreation, water supply, etc.
• in awareness for a sustainable and reliable river system

To maintain the prosperity for future generations:
• Only by international cooperation
Meuse River Basin
The River Basin

- The catchment area is 32,000 km²
- 5 countries; 3 language zones
- Common Meuse

- River with a pluvial regime
  - A highly variable discharge
  - Minimum 25 m³/s
  - Maximum 3000 m³/s
Decade discharge at Monsin

- Black line: 1976
- Blue dashed line: Average
- Red line: 1993

Discharge m3/s

January | February | March | April | May | June | July | August | September | October | November | December

Graph showing discharge variations from January to December for different years.
The river basin

France:
• Delaying of the excess rainfall-runoff

Belgium:
• Rapid transport of the excess rainfall-runoff
• Important contribution during periods of flood

The Netherlands:
• The Common Meuse: low sloping landscape
• Important tributary: the Rur River
International policy (1)

Intern. Com. for the protection the Meuse (ICPM):
  – Water Quality,
  – Emissions
  – Cross border Waterways Cooperation

Important projects:
• Monitoring water quality from source to outlet
• A Warning and Alarm System for water supply
• A breakdown of the affluents is presented
International policy (2)

Action Plan against Meuse River Flooding
Important measures:

- Augmentation of flow capacity
- Installation of retention basins
- Greater community awareness of flooding
- A reliable flood warning system
The sharing of the Meuse water

A long hot summer can be viewed by different groups in very different ways:

• Recreational viewpoint: it can be highly valued
• Political viewpoint: it can be associated with riots
• in the field of water management: water shortages can pose problems for shipping etc.
The sharing of the Meuse water

- Historical background
- The Treaty of 1863
- The never signed Treaty of 1975
- The Meuse Discharge Treaty of 1995
Historical background

The aim: a shipping connection between Schelde, Meuse and Rhine Rivers

By construction of:
• Zuid-Willemsvaart Canal in 1825
• Bocholt-Herentals Canal in 1845
• Liege-Maastricht Canal in 1850

An important connection between Liege via Maastricht to Antwerp and to the harbours in the west of the Netherlands
The Treaty of 1863 (1)

The extension of the canals caused the need for more water

The treaty:

• Construction of inlet culvert at Maastricht
• A supply of 10 m$^3$/s to the Zuid-Willemsvaart Canal by the Netherlands
• Improvement of the river for shipping
After the Treaty of 1863 (2)

 Negotiations to make the river more navigable were broken off at the onset of World War One

• Events of World War One hindered post-war negotiations

• Decision to solve their problems independently:
  – in the Netherlands: Juliana Canal
  – in Belgium: Albert Canal

• The International Court of Justice
The never signed treaty of 1975 (1)

Negotiations started in 1963 and resulted in 1975 in three design treaties

The design treaty of the Meuse:
- Belgium was assured 50 m$^3$/s at all times
- The construction of large reservoirs
The never designed treaty of 1975 (2)

The failing of the negotiations:
• The resistance to more reservoirs
• The stipulation of 50 m$^3$/s was impossible
• The unwillingness of the Netherlands to handle the treaties separately
• The federalisation of Belgium in 1980 into two autonomous regions: Flanders and Wallonia
The Meuse discharge treaty of 1995

Negotiations between the Netherlands and The Flanders Region resulted in the treaty:

• An equal division of the water during periods of low flow
• The increasing of the water supply to the Zuid-Willemsvaart canal
• Cooperation in the development of the Common Meuse
<table>
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<th>Discharge [m³/s]</th>
<th>Days a year</th>
<th>Common Meuse [m³/s]</th>
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The results until now (1)

The Zuid-Willemsvaart canal
• The augmentation of the culverts at Bocholt and Lozen from 5 to 10 m$^3$/s by Flanders; the cost is for the Netherlands
• The installation of turbines for the generation of energy, the cost is for Flanders

An economy plan to limit the water use
• Flanders builds pumps and turbines at the sluices on the Albert canal before 2005
The results until now (2)

Common Information System
• For the water managers an information system will be installed this summer

The development of the Common Meuse
• Provisions will be made for a more natural river system
• It is planned to devise a joint management system to assist in this development
Conclusions

• The treaty of 1995 is an important step forward in the cooperation between the 2 countries
• The consultations have proceeded in a friendly and amicable way
• There is a good appreciation for the position of the other party