



Webinar CLIMATE COOPERATION

26.10.2020

'We can do something about climate change, but we need cooperation to save the planet.'

Climate change is an urgent, existential, global problem that can only be tackled by ambition and cooperation. The European Union cannot do it alone, but must lead and show that it is possible without damaging the economy.

We still need to prepare for global warming and look into adaptation measures.

The Benelux member states should share know-how and experiences and look for cooperation especially in the fields not covered by the European Union Emission Trading System.

Benelux countries should also focus on energy, electricity and gas interconnections.

'2021 is to become the renaissance for climate action.'

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The Benelux partnership achieves its goals by practical cooperation.

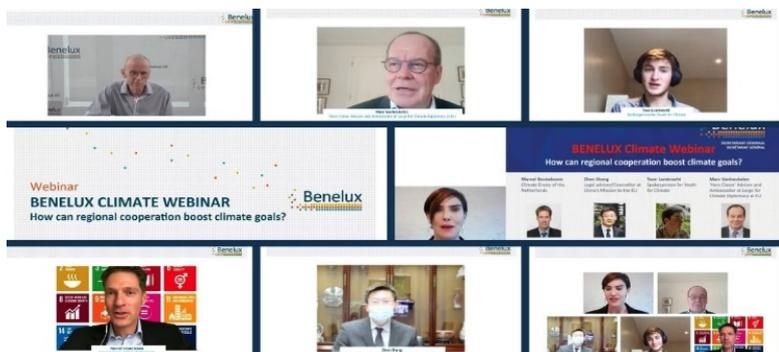
Building back better together: as the Benelux we should jointly work towards a sustainable and resilient recovery regarding the COVID-19 crisis.

'We need commitments from all the partners in the world, as climate action is a shared responsibility'.

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China and EU, as green partners, are working together to carbon neutrality.



'New forms of democracies can create ambitious policies'.

Science describes the urgency of the crisis, and reflects what is about to happen. This has to be listened to, ignoring the available knowledge is risking our future.

We are in a systemic crisis. In order to solve it, we need to think about new forms of politics, involving citizens in the democratic process.

We need to move towards a fair and sustainable system. One in which people are at the heart of the system, not profits.

The Benelux Union is already well on its way with cooperation related to the energy market, offshore wind and hydrogen.

The Benelux has the ambition to bring the same added value of regional cooperation to the climate debate in terms of finding tailor made solutions for challenges that are shared across Benelux borders.

The Benelux Union offers its platform to the Member States as a tool to accelerate the transition, building on the Benelux Talanoa Declaration and the conclusions of this webinar.



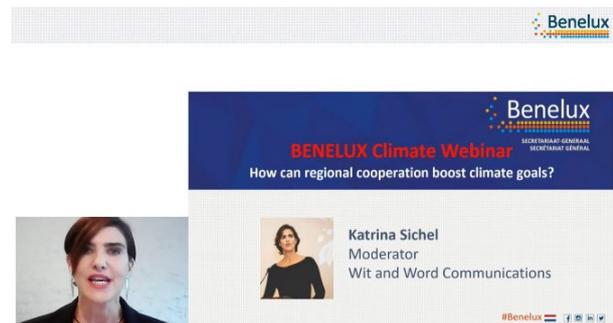
Webinar *CLIMATE COOPERATION*

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Opening

Katrina Sichel

Independent moderator



Welcoming all speakers and viewers.

Setting the scene, mentioning the Green Recovery with the European Green Deal at its heart, within which the Just Transition Fund – to assist Member States in accelerating the transition towards climate neutrality – support to a renovation wave of buildings and infrastructure, to a roll-out of renewable energy projects, to cleaner transport and logistics, and more. In Spring 2020, the Commission presented its Climate Law proposal as a follow up to the European Green Deal and United Nations Climate Action Summit, and strengthened its ambitions with a proposal for a 55% cut in emissions by 2030 to put the European Union on a balanced pathway to reaching climate neutrality by 2050.

Questions explored during this webinar:

- With this renewed vigour and enhanced goals, within the context of the pandemic what unique shape does climate diplomacy take?
- What role for collaboration at all levels – local, regional, national and international – to accelerate the transition, and for the Benelux itself?
- Can the Benelux become the home of regional climate cooperation?

Words of welcome



Rudy Huygelen

Deputy Secretary General of the Benelux Union

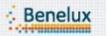


Equally welcoming all speakers and viewers.

It is clear that the impact of climate change and extreme weather conditions does not stop at the borders. We have seen this year alone catastrophic wildfires in Australia and the USA, but ironically these countries' political leaders are not convinced about the urgency to tackle climate change. This is a global problem that also confronts the Benelux – and Europe. The Benelux countries largely share the same DNA; they are densely populated, urbanized and industrialized countries, with connected infrastructure and high mobility, that struggle with increasing sea levels, draughts inland, air pollution in cities and decreasing biodiversity.

The Benelux Prime Ministers recently (7 October 2020) called for ambitious national recovery and resilience plans that use the opportunities to transform into a sustainable, climate-neutral and circular economy, against the backdrop of the European Relaunch and Green Recovery.

Keynote



Marc Vanheukelen

'Hors Classe' Adviser and Ambassador at Large for Climate Diplomacy at the European Union



Climate change is an urgent, existential, global problem that can only tackled by ambition and cooperation. The world is not on track to reach the Paris objectives, but recent announcements by the EU, China, Japan and several other smaller emitters give rise to more optimism. Hopefully, many others will join in stepping up ambition, not least the US. If those countries subscribe to the goal we are in for a game changing moment.

However, setting firm goals for 2030 and 2050 or 2060 is one thing, delivering them is another. The next decade 2020 – 2030 is decisive to get to neutrality, as moving the economy through a profound transformation, moving out of fossil fuels, will take time. We are pushing the Green Recovery. The Covid-19 pandemic created an economic slump and now the public sector has to lead by massive investments. The positive side is the recognition that this needs to underpin the economy of the future and not of the past. We need to invest massively in energy efficiency and renewable energy. A lot has already been done and for example solar and wind energy have become cost competitive.

‘We have to walk the talk, now, as climate change is a disaster in slow motion.’

It does not only make sense on an environmental level, but also an economic level. The Green Deal is about climate, but also about a new economic growth strategy. But in many parts of the worlds, we go through populist times, there is a climate fatigue, people are uncertain about the future and their jobs and incomes.

‘Climate change is for real and the costs of non-action are much bigger.’

The EU is responsible for 7,5% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the world, so it is absolutely essential that others cut theirs further and faster. But we must lead and show that it is not only feasible but also at little or no aggregate economic costs, thanks to technological progress and the advantages of deployment at scale. On 11 December 2020 the European Council will decide if reduction will go from 40 to the proposed 55%. After that: 2021 is an important year, with the COP26 in Glasgow, with countries having to indicate their climate neutrality targets for a certain date and upgrade their targets for 2030. It is important to reach out in the next 12 months to ensure we have a good scorecard to show in November 2021.



Global warming will continue for a good while regardless of emission cuts, given the inertia of nature. Preparing for the consequences of global warming remains therefore imperative. Adaptation is to be done at local level, but know-how can be shared and poorer countries and regions aided, looking into how we respond in terms of cooling our cities, keeping our water, making sure we maximise and use the power of the sunlight.

The Benelux member states can benefit from the sharing of know-how and experiences, in particular with regard to efforts at cutting emissions in sector not covered by the EU Emission Trading System, the areas where the responsibility lay with the member states, such as road transport, buildings (heating), waste, agriculture, ... and those sectors still represent 65% of the greenhouse gas emissions. Member states also have a role to play with subsidies, taxation and local communities can for example promote local public transport. They should also coordinate research, development and pilot projects with regard to new technologies that will be essential for the hard to abate sectors.

‘Climate change is doing well from doing good.’

Benelux countries should exploit to the full the Energy Union and electricity and gas interconnections. It does not matter where the electricity comes from as long as it is there and green. By making sure there is an interconnection, the strong points of the member states can be exploited and green electricity can be created at an affordable pricing. A number of things still need to be put in place such as hydrogen, carbon capture and we need to look at the hard-to-change sectors such as steel and cement.

Additionally we could set up an alliance with other countries, such as China, Japan and Korea to stop coal finance projects in third countries, stimulate green finance and look into what banks and insurance companies should invest to be green and lean on oil and gas exporters to stop the leakages in their pipes.

‘We can do something about climate change, but we need cooperation to save the planet.’

Key messages:

- Climate change is an urgent, existential, global problem that can only tackled by ambition and cooperation.
- The European Union cannot do it alone, but must lead and show that it is possible without damaging the economy.
- We still need to prepare for global warming and look into adaptation measures.
- The Benelux member states should share know-how and experiences and look for cooperation especially in the fields not covered by the European Union Emission Trading System.
- Benelux countries should also focus on energy, electricity and gas interconnections.

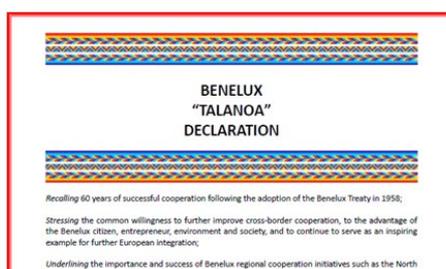
Marcel Beukeboom

Climate Envoy of the Netherlands



The Benelux member states have a good history of cooperation and have the last few years also shared a pavilion at the UN Climate Summits (COP), which we intend to continue at the COP26 in Glasgow. Practical cooperation allows us to get to know each other better, creating a basis to also tackle more difficult issues, and the Benelux Union is a vehicle to do so.

September 2018 the Benelux organised its own Talanoa Dialogue (the dialogues were an initiative of then chairman Fiji to keep momentum in climate negotiations). This Dialogue led to a joint Declaration of the three member states, which was presented at the COP24 in Katowice, in the presence of all competent ministers to underscore the Declaration that was drafted together.



The Declaration of the three Prime Ministers of 7 October 2020 also spoke about sustainable recovery and cooperation, but also laid out a few practical examples where the Benelux could cooperate. As ultimately you have to get into delivery mode. The Benelux Union is a practical union and can be a living laboratory for climate action. We can reap the benefits of having shared borders and having a history of cooperation. In addition the Benelux cooperation can go further than the European Union or national governments can do, as is stipulated in the founding documents. Back then there was no talk of climate change, but this can now be used to our advantage.

We should look at the strengths of the Benelux Union and focus on what works, on the common interest and complement each other. For example with topics as mobility/transport, logistics, buildings, waste, digitalisation, hydrogen – as green hydrogen contributes directly to a cleaner and greener economy -, We need to develop those topics and look into the next steps we can take together. For the Benelux cooperation we should look into areas that are less developed in other alliances or unions to create a cross border cooperation with an added value.

‘The strengths of the Benelux Union should be optimized, looking for common pathways and complementarity.’

Sometimes progress is helped by focusing on specific areas, without using – for some countries – politically or ideologically loaded terms, and engage the cooperation at a lower level, such as regions, provinces or cities. Often these levels take a more practical approach, stay closer to the public and look at the economical sustainability as well. For a long time the dominant view was that you either choose for the economy or you choose for the climate. But a different vision in which economic growth and climate action can go hand in hand, grew. The European Union has also illustrated this by decoupling growth and emissions in 1990. The donut economy shows us that we cannot grow eternally if we go beyond our boundaries of our ecosystem and our social system, or we will be damaging our economy in the long run.

‘Bold climate actions do not exclude economic growth.’

There are many climate alliances, some political and some thematical, who are making concrete progress. This kind of cooperation helps us to reach the Paris goals. There are encouraging examples.

Participation matters and the voice of the youth was being heard and is still being heard by the leaders. The leaders do get that the undercurrent in the society is increasingly becoming greener. We are moving into a new phase and are crafting a new policy. About 60/70% of the public thinks climate action is needed.

‘2021 is to become the renaissance for climate action.’

Key messages:

- The Benelux partnership is a fruitful cooperation as we closely collaborate within the Benelux Union, the EU and as part of the EU in the wider world.
- The Benelux partnership achieves its goals by practical cooperation.
- Building back better together: as the Benelux we should jointly work towards a sustainable and resilient recovery regarding the COVID-19 crisis.

Zhen Shang

legal advisor/counselor at China's Mission to the EU



On 22 September 2020 during the United Nations General Assembly, the Chinese President Xi Jinping announced that China's carbon emissions will peak before 2030 and China will then achieve climate neutrality by 2060. China called on all states to pursue coordinated green development and a green recovery in the post covid19 year. China has entered discussions on what to do next and the next national development plan is due to be adopted in March 2021.



Vox.com

Josep Borell has recently published an article titled: [China carbon neutrality in 2060: a possible game changer for climate](#), focusing on the pathways to get to net zero emissions and proposing that some prominent topics should be mentioned: such as the phasing out of coal, carbon pricing and hydrogen.

Having a dialogue and looking for mutual interests prepares a ground for what China could do, the European Union could do, and other international partners. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation is important for action. All the participants of the Paris Agreement have an obligation. And hopefully those who have not yet joined or pulled out will join (again), most notably the United States of America, as the second largest emitter and biggest economy in the world.

'We need commitments from all the partners in the world, as climate action is a shared responsibility'.

China is looking at :

1. Increasing energy efficiency and changing the energy structure; the use of fossil fuel for energy consumption has already decreased with 8% and the commitments made in Copenhagen with targets for 2020 were already implemented in 2019.
2. Forest conservation and tree planting; to facilitate carbon capture, removal and absorption. China aims to increase its forest coverage to 23% of the total land by end of 2020.
3. Introducing 80% clean energy public vehicles to combat high concentration of air pollution.
4. Other policy initiatives, such as promoting the national carbon emissions method and increasing financial support to green bonds.

‘Technology break-throughs will support lower emissions and we should share technology and experiences.’

China also sees some young climate activists nowadays, who are promoting action on climate change and organizing events to talk about climate change. Reaching climate neutrality is a painful process especially for developing countries and young people can call on the governments to move faster.

‘We are working for the future generations.’

Key messages:

- China would strive to become carbon neutral by 2060.
- China’s road to net-zero emissions, as a developing country, is a very tough job.
- China and EU, as green partners, are working together to carbon neutrality.

Toon Lambrecht

Spokesperson for Youth for Climate



Cooperation starts with addressing the urgency of the problem and that should happen in all the different regions of the Benelux.

‘We have a big problem, we don’t have a lot of time, things are already changing.’

We do not only need political cooperation, but we also need a systemic change, as the political system is failing. There are a lot of political commitments, but the time has come to talk with the citizens. And we need to think about how we can bring citizens from different countries together to think about possible solutions on climate change in the Benelux. The urgency of climate change does not allow for inaction and citizens have an interest in creating a better future together. Like France, the Benelux could think about organising a citizen panel on climate change and the measures that could be taken in the Benelux. It would mean not telling people what to do for climate, but engaging them in the policy making itself. Bringing people together also diminishes polarisation.

‘We should start involving citizens in the political system’.



Equally we have to work on climate adaptation, such as water shortage, and how the different member states can do that together and take the right measures. These cross border opportunities do exist.

We should not only put profits central, but put people central, to work towards a sustainable, carbon neutral and fair future.

Actions should be science-based and should also be adapted to the possibilities that the region offers.

‘New forms of democracies can create ambitious policies’.

Key messages:

- Science describes the urgency of the crisis, and reflects what is about to happen. This has to be listened to, ignoring the available knowledge is risking our future.
- We are in a systemic crisis. In order to solve it, we need to think about new forms of politics, involving citizens in the democratic process.
- We need to move towards a fair and sustainable system. One in which people are at the heart of the system, not profits.

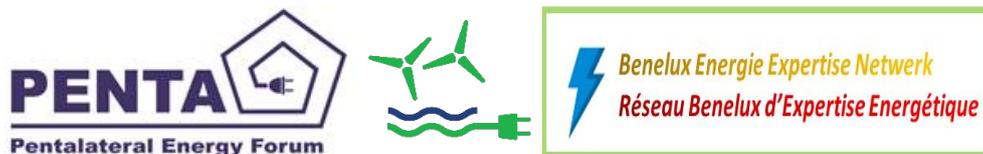
Concluding remarks

Rudy Huygelen

Deputy Secretary General of the Benelux Union

The Benelux Union is already taking action, in the fields where the member states have a national competences: a project is for example set up to create a uniform Benelux certificate for charging stations for electrical cars, or making tickets for public transport valid across the border. On a broader regional level the energy cooperation is already quite developed: inter alia with a north sea countries’ cooperation using the huge potential of the north sea for offshore wind energy. Interconnectors are essential to transport the electricity.

Recently the Benelux, together with France, Germany, Austria and Switzerland (PENTA-countries), signed a hydrogen declaration with the purpose of producing green hydrogen, that is transported across the countries.



The Benelux will work on projects that bring an added value to the European actions and not duplicate those and can also bring in innovation and excellent research.

Thanking all speakers for sharing their expertise and inspiring commitment. The suggestions for cooperation will be further taken up, including the proposal to organize a citizen panel on climate action.

Key messages:

- The Benelux Union is already well on its way with cooperation related to the energy market, offshore wind and hydrogen.
- The Benelux has the ambition to bring the same added value of regional cooperation to the climate debate in terms of finding tailor made solutions for challenges that are shared across Benelux internal and external borders.
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BENELUX CLIMATE

Climate change is no longer an abstract phenomena, but a very present reality, that is leaving its marks. To safeguard our wellbeing, but also our economic welfare, we need to shift to a more climate friendly, neutral and restorative way of living. This touches all aspects of our lives; our homes, transport, work and businesses, spare time,

The Paris Climate Agreement sets the targets for a climate-neutral world and the Benelux Member States have committed themselves to support each other in obtaining these goals.

Against the backdrop of the economic disarray left by the Covid19 pandemic, cooperation between the Member States offers interesting opportunities to efficiently use the means available and combine forces, both related to climate mitigation as adaptation. Especially as the Benelux is a close knit region, with energy intense industries, connected infrastructure and high mobility. These actions realizing the transition should be just and not leave certain groups of people behind.

The Benelux has developed into the home of regional energy cooperation over the last decade and has the ambition to bring the same added value of regional cooperation to the climate debate in terms of finding tailor made solutions for challenges that are shared across Benelux internal and external borders.

BENELUX ACTION IN A NUTSHELL

- Benelux Talanoa Dialogue with relevant stakeholders, concerning transport, energy, mobility and just transition.
- [Benelux Talanoa Declaration 2018](#), as presented to the UN Deputy Secretary General and the EU Commissioner.
- Benelux Pavilion at the UN Summits (COPs) in 2018 and 2019.
- Cross border table top exercises related to climate adaptation and health care, transport and energy.
- Several Pentalateral and North Sea declarations on energy markets, offshore wind cooperation and hydrogen.

BENELUX' STRONG POINTS

- Existing structure for cross border cooperation.
- The Benelux member states can issue **legally binding and political instruments**, committing them to actions.
- The Benelux cooperation can serve as a **testing ground for European ambitions**; testing ideas in pilot projects, trying out and improving those and then sharing their experiences with their European partners.