



Organisation for Economic  
Co-operation and Development

PRESS STATEMENT  
Brussels, 26 March 2007

## Launch of the Environmental Performance Review of Belgium

By Mr. Lorents Lorentsen, Environment Director

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- ◇ On behalf of the OECD, it is a great pleasure to present, here in Brussels, the second OECD Environmental Performance Review of Belgium, focusing on the country's environmental achievements and challenges. It examines the environmental performance of Belgium as a whole, due to the combined efforts of its governments, including federal and regional governments represented here, as well as civil society, such as enterprises and environmental NGOs.
- ◇ Ministers, the report reviews the period since 1998 and shows that efforts to reduce pollution, protect nature and biodiversity, and also promote sustainable development are clearly bearing fruit. But further environmental progress is needed, and this will increasingly depend upon greening of the economy, particularly in the agriculture, energy and transport sectors and fiscal policies.

### THE REVIEW OF BELGIUM

- ◇ This report examines the environmental results achieved, with respect to Belgium's domestic and international commitments. It is an evidence-based report, building on data and facts. The assessments presented here are built on the policy experience of OECD, having conducted some 56 country environmental performance reviews;

- ◇ An earlier draft of this report was the basis for a formal examination, which took place for a full day in September 2006 in Brussels, where representatives from all OECD countries posed questions to the Belgium delegation. The report includes 47 recommendations, which were approved by all OECD countries including Belgium itself.
- ◇ The review of policies and country performance is a core function of the OECD. Our aim is to promote policy dialogue and exchange of best practices among member countries. We have also reviewed environmental performance of key non member countries such as China and Russia. Other OECD country review programmes address other policy areas. For instance, the Economic review of Belgium was published two weeks ago.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS**

Belgium has made significant environmental achievements on several fronts. I will only mention a few of them here:

- ◇ The country has reduced emissions of several traditional air pollutants. For instance sulphur oxides (SOx) emissions, a typical pollutant from power plants and industrial activity, decreased by more than 30% since 1998, compounding to a decrease of over 60% since 1990.
- ◇ In the area of water services, good progress has been made in investments in waste water treatment infrastructure, but still some way to go to reach EU targets. Belgium is among the few leading examples in the world to reflect social concerns in the price of water, by putting into practice “access to water for all”, or in other terms access to water as a human right;
- ◇ In the area of nature and biodiversity, Belgium has established a network of protected areas and connecting corridors. For example, 13% of Belgium’s territory is part of the

Natura 2000 European network. This is quite remarkable in a country with one of the highest density of population and economic activity in the world;

- ◇ Belgium has remarkable institutions and strategy for promoting sustainable development at federal level;
- ◇ Also, Belgium has a very proactive attitude concerning international environmental issues. With a very open economy (with both imports and exports reaching over 80% of its GDP) and with its strategic location, Belgium has many geographical and economic interdependencies with its European partners and beyond.

All these achievements of Belgium are built on its stable environmental institutions as well as EU environmental legislation; on its active co-operation and partnerships with civil society, and advanced environmental policies. Pollution abatement and control expenditure of 1.7% of GDP have translated into concrete results. Also, Belgium has now a good track record with ratification of international environmental agreements.

## **CHALLENGES**

However, the report provides 47 recommendations for further improvements. Let me particularly stress the need to integrate environmental concerns into economic sectors such as agriculture, energy, transport and in fiscal policies. Better policy coherence and more rational use of market forces in these areas will contribute to greening of the Belgian economy. Let me mention a few areas that need further improvements.

- ◇ Additional efforts are needed in the agriculture sector to address pollution due to pesticides and nitrates from manure and commercial fertilizers. Belgium ranks number three among OECD countries in the amount of commercial nitrogenous fertilizers and pesticides used per unit of GDP;
- ◇ The transport sector needs to do more to reduce emissions of fine particulates, nitrogen oxides (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) which are harmful to

human health, as well as emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs). Belgium has high incidence of ground-level ozone pollution. We recommend a national transport plan.

- ◇ Adoption and implementation of a National Climate Plan, (building on the remarkable national burden-sharing agreement) will require effective policies to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions in the agriculture, energy and transport sectors. In particular, Belgium should improve energy efficiency, which would bring multiple benefits—this would not only help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but also cut traditional air pollution and dependency on energy imports, and improve economic efficiency. OECD indicators show that Belgium's energy intensity, that is supply of energy per unit of GDP, is 0.2. This is higher compared to France and Germany (0.17) and Japan (0.15), and only slightly behind the USA (0.21).
- ◇ Finally, the report recommends Belgium to establish a green tax Commission

## **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our two key messages.

- ◇ Belgium has extended much of the environmental progress noted in the first OECD review in 1998. Since then, the country has made further remarkable environmental progress as presented in this second OECD review;
- ◇ Greening of the Belgian economy will be critical to further environmental progress.

Ministers, let me thank all of you, and through you, the many talented and committed officials and experts who have contributed to this review in a spirit of openness and transparency.