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WASTE, SOIL AND SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS POLICIES
FOR PROFESSIONALS

JULY 2024 - N° 47

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OVAM MILESTONES DURING THE BELGIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EU

From 1 January to 30 June 2024, Belgium held the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In that role, Belgium acted as an honest broker in the Council's decision-making process, represented the European Union at international meetings and organised numerous events to showcase Belgian policy and expertise and promote debate on the forthcoming European term. Notably, Flanders' Public Waste Agency (OVAM) played an active role in shaping policies in key areas. Below is an overview of all the important dates pertaining to OVAM's involvement, along with the corresponding pages for more details.

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TACKLING PFAS & KIS LAUNCH EVENT

On 1 and 2 February, the Flemish Environment Department organised an international exchange on tackling PFAS.

In recent years, Flanders has developed an action plan to tackle PFAS contamination and prevent new cases of contamination. This plan covers the entire life cycle of PFAS, encompassing prevention, substitution, monitoring, enforcement, remediation and even the recycling of PFAS-containing products. These components were also discussed during the two-day event where international experts from governments, knowledge institutions, NGOs and industry, gathered to share their experiences and insights on PFAS management.

Some key themes covered during the event:

- **Prevention is more important than cure:** the main goal is to phase out PFAS as much and as quickly as possible. During the sessions, it became clear that good and affordable substitutes already exist for many applications.
- **Cooperation is crucial:** PFAS are widely spread in and across different countries. Knowledge exchange on risk assessment and remediation options prevent every country from having to reinvent the wheel.
- **Risks in recycling:** many products containing PFAS circulate in our society and sooner or later end up in the waste chain. To avoid PFAS causing risks again via recycling, we need innovative techniques to remove these substances from the chain permanently.
- **Polluter pays:** PFAS pollution remediation comes at a high price and is too often paid for by governments. Measures to maximise the polluter pays principle are needed, ideally at European level.



During the event, KIS, the knowledge centre for innovative remediation techniques, was also formally launched. Within KIS, governments, knowledge institutes and industry come together to develop solutions and present them to an international audience.

Janneke Van Veen, policy advisor at the Flemish Environment Department, coordinated the event and concluded: "Our goal was to exchange knowledge, establish new connections, and formulate recommendations for the Council conclusions during the Belgian Presidency. That's why we are delighted with the strong presence of Commission representatives, ensuring they receive this information first-hand. In total, we welcomed 300 participants from home and abroad, with an additional 300 people on the waiting list, highlighting the sense of urgency among our target audience. The participants appreciated the event's robust content. For those unable to attend, we have made the conference conclusions and reports available online."

→ Read the reports of the workshops and presentations of the PFAS event [here](#).

→ Visit the KIS website [here](#).



"The participants appreciated the event's robust content"

Janneke Van Veen, Flemish Environment Department

BELGIAN SOIL WEEK: INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE XXL

From 11 to 15 March, Belgian Soil Week provided a platform for policymakers, experts and private actors to exchange expertise and look ahead to address soil contamination in the future.

The Belgian EU Council Presidency provided an ideal opportunity to convene key stakeholders involved in soil contamination and management across Europe to Brussels. The event brought together three major stakeholders. The week began with European policymakers attending their six-monthly COMMON FORUM on Contaminated Land. On Wednesday, private sector stakeholders from the Network for Industrially Contaminated Land in Europe (NICOLE) joined the discussions. OVAM concluded the week with the fifth edition of ENSOr, a conference by EmConSoil, the international network established by OVAM focusing on new substances of concern.

“We chose this format very deliberately,” said **Johan Ceenaeme, soil management staff member at OVAM**. “It was an excellent opportunity to bring together policymakers, government administrations, scientists and industry professionals for an entire week. We opted for formats that encouraged knowledge sharing and discussions in varying compositions, creating a special dynamic and different perspectives. This format led to many fruitful contacts and a lot of positive feedback.”

COMMON FORUM and NICOLE

The start of Soil Week focused on circularity and a comprehensive vision of soil health. Presentations by representatives from the three Belgian regions highlighted special initiatives related to their soil policies. OVAM discussed Flanders’ brownfield operations and the reuse of soil materials, while the European Environment Agency (EEA) provided the broader European perspective.



“We have been working on soil remediation for 25 years now, but now we can see a lot of new challenges”

Johan Ceenaeme, OVAM

A panel discussion followed, concluding the morning session, before the spring COMMON FORUM meeting got underway, where representatives from several countries shared their experiences and engaged in discussions.

“Events like these are necessary to build international contacts and networks so that we can face the new challenges together. We have been working on soil remediation for 25 years now, but now we can see a lot of new challenges which will have a huge impact on both public and private actors. These were, in fact, the key themes for the joint workshop with NICOLE members: emerging contaminants such as PFAS and the new, broader perspective on soil health, including aspects such as biodiversity and soil structure. Based on the presentations and discussions, we managed to formulate a joint vision of how NICOLE and COMMON FORUM see the further development of soil remediation in light of these new challenges. That text will appear on both websites and will be shared with the European Commission.”



Ceenaeme stated, "ENSOR is really about exchanging new scientific insights on soil management and presenting them to policymakers and the soil sector. We were very pleased with the large turnout, particularly the mix of around 40 people who attended throughout the week and 160 newcomers specifically for ENSOR. The event featured a diverse range of content, showcasing our progress in Flanders and incorporating international input from many European countries. The variety of perspectives on such a critical and timely topic as soil contamination and soil care was immensely enriching."

"A fine example, in my opinion, presented by the French delegation was 'neosoils', a technique for creating in an accelerated way new soil on old industrial sites using existing materials. There's more to it than just mixing sand and organic materials. Healthy soil is a complex interplay of factors that build structure and biodiversity over decades. Neosoil is a nature-based technique to accelerate this process with the available materials, reflecting the key themes of Soil Week: the reuse of space and materials and a new, broad vision of soil health and soil care."

The ENSOR5 programme featured presentations and pitches from various stakeholders and boards, complemented by five interactive workshops. These workshops covered topics such as circular approaches for excavated soil and strategies for engaging and sensitising stakeholders. One workshop tackled the challenges of investigating and remediating diffuse soil contamination, concluding that such contamination is challenging to manage due to the involvement of multiple stakeholders and high costs. A multidisciplinary approach involving scientists, environmental engineers, regulatory experts and community representatives working together, is crucial. While remediation is often not feasible, pollution mapping for risk communication is essential to inform citizens about environmental risks. Prevention, source management, knowledge sharing and risk management are key to a sustainable solution.

→ Access all ENSOR5 presentations and read the conclusions of the various workshops [here](#).



- One conclusion was that soil care will influence the way remediation is carried out, both in the way risk assessments are conducted and remediation options and techniques are chosen. For risk assessments, 'good quality soil' could be considered a receptor. For remediation options, this will lead to more nature-based solutions that minimise damage and promote soil restoration.

ENSOR5

To conclude Belgian Soil Week, OVAM itself organised ENSOR5, dedicated to emerging contaminants. The specific topic for this edition was diffuse contamination: substances of concern that we find everywhere in soil and not only near local sources.

SOIL MONITORING LAW READY FOR FINAL NEGOTIATIONS

As part of the EU soil strategy, the Commission proposed a directive to monitor, protect and restore soils in all Member States. The Council reached a general approach on the proposal, which aims to make monitoring obligatory, provides guidance for sustainable management and addresses contamination.

Currently over 60 % of European soils are not in a good condition. The Commission's Soil Monitoring Law proposal is meant to offer soil the same protections afforded to water and air, in order to restore all soils in the EU to a healthy condition by 2050. OVAM was part of the negotiating team during the Belgian Presidency. Member States agreed on a general approach during the June Council which shares the Commission's main ambitions.

The general approach requires Member States to assess and monitor the health of all soils in their territory, using a common methodology. This will incorporate descriptors that cover physical, chemical and biological parameters, though Member States are afforded some flexibility to use existing data and monitoring systems. Member States will need to define sustainable soil management practices. These need to be in line with general principles set out in the law, such as: avoiding bare soil and minimising physical disturbance.

Also included are principles to tackle soil sealing and destruction, to be taken into account in Member States' land use planning. The Council maintained the aspirational goal of having no net land take by 2050. The general approach requires Member States to map all potentially contaminated sites in an online public register, but allows

for risk-based prioritization of measures to address any concerns for human health and the environment.

Negotiations with the European Parliament to finalise the text are expected to start under the new legislative cycle.

OVAM colleague involved in this milestone:
Victor Dries (international policy unit, OVAM)





UNEA-6: THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS

From 26 February to 1 March, representatives of 193 countries convened in Nairobi for the Sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) to address the interlinked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. One of UNEA-6's main goals was to harmonise the efforts of various international organisations and treaties to create synergies.

As President of the Council of the European Union, Belgium represented the European position at this UNEA. With a focus on circularity, OVAM was part of the Belgian delegation. **Kris Van Looy, European and international projects coordinator at OVAM**, praised the Belgian team's robustness and thorough preparation, for which they received positive feedback.

"The European Union proposed a resolution to accelerate the transition to the circular economy," Van Looy says. "Unfortunately, this proposal received insufficient support due to concerns related to the varying regional conditions and needs for this transition. It appears that many countries are not yet ready to embrace principles and instruments such as Extended Producer

"The resolutions on circularity and international cooperation provide a basis to build on"

Kris Van Looy, OVAM

Responsibility or the cascading principle for a circular bioeconomy. The proposal was ultimately redrawn since issues of global free trade were brought into the discussions."

Two resolutions from the southern hemisphere focusing on the circular economy did get accepted. This is hopeful for the further stepping up of the circular economy transition globally. At our demand, India broadened the scope of its proposed resolution on sustainable lifestyles to include policies targeting society as a whole, encompassing governments, local authorities and industry, to foster awareness and acceptance of sustainable practices. This initiative aligns with the sustainable development goal of promoting sustainable consumption and production by 2030.

Cuba's resolution for a circular sugarcane agro-industry includes EU-proposed environmental criteria and precautionary principles to protect forests and biodiversity in biomass production, which are crucial for a sustainable circular bioeconomy in the future. This broadens the resolution's focus on circular bioeconomy. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) will be coordinating the proposed actions, adding an extra layer of environmental focus and safeguard.

The resolution on environmental aspects of extraction and management of minerals and metals seeks to promote sustainable management, consumption and production across the full life cycle of minerals and metals. This includes establishing a centre of excellence to share best practices.



Other key elements of our policy can be found in the resolution for the sound management of chemicals and waste, which outlines measures for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to support the activities of the 'Global Chemicals Partnership' (GCF). Also within this resolution, initiatives will be launched targeting lead, cadmium, arsenic and organotin compounds. Resolutions were also negotiated during UNEA-6 on protecting the oceans, joining forces against air pollution, sustainable water management and the use of chemicals and pesticides, land degradation and ensuring a just transition.

Van Looy acknowledged, "We have not achieved everything we hoped for. In multilateral negotiations, where decisions are made by consensus, progress comes in small steps. However, the resolutions on circularity and international cooperation provide a basis to build on. UNEP will now implement these mandates from UNEA-6, allowing ideas to develop until we reconvene for UNEA-7 in December 2025."

→ For more details on the outcomes of UNEA-6, visit the [UNEP website](#).

CIRCULAR ECONOMY EVENTS: ready to scale up



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The circular economy is facing a significant juncture, transitioning from an experimental phase to broader implementation. Key to this advancement is the collaboration and exchange of knowledge across all levels, from local to regional and from public to private sectors. This ethos was also at the heart of numerous events dedicated to circular economy during Belgium's Presidency.

Mayors' Conference: the link between climate and circular economy

On 15 March, the Government of Flanders hosted a conference, inviting 550 signatories of the Covenant of Mayors to discuss the translation of the EU Green Deal into local initiatives. Circular Flanders spoke on the importance of the circular economy in climate policy, focusing on sustainable materials management and public-private partnerships as two key concepts.

Sustainable materials management

Even though about 60 % of our carbon footprint is attributed to the way we handle resources, this aspect often remains underexposed when it comes to climate action. Circular Flanders illustrated this with a case from their Circular Construction Strategic Agenda. We are sometimes so focused on the energy consumption of an existing building that we would sooner demolish it than renovate it to the best of our ability. In reality, the mining, processing, and transportation of new raw materials, along with the disposal of used materials, all have a significant impact.

Public-private partnership

The importance of partnerships with different actors from the social pentagon is a central theme in the narrative of Circular Flanders. The social-circular hubs of [Circular Work\(s\)](#) are a fine example of collaboration between the mainstream and social economy on the one hand and local authorities on the other. In this process,

bespoke companies, for example, address the demand for manual labour and craftsmanship among many SMEs. Local authorities can strategically support this through levers, such as their procurement policies.

Brigitte Mouligneau, transition manager at Circular Flanders: "Our session at the conference was well attended. There was good momentum, and the audience asked some bold questions. I was delighted to see that mayors of leading cities, such as Freiburg and Aalborg, showed so much enthusiasm. This illustrates that young politicians from major cities are genuinely committed to climate adaptation and the circular economy, even making it their trademark."



► Flanders Technology & Innovation: Circular State of the Union

The Hasselt edition of the FTI festival turned its attention to the role of local authorities in issues such as climate, agriculture, nature and circular economy. On 16 March, for instance, visitors were invited to swap clothes during a 'swishing' workshop and children got

involved in a customised Repair Café. On 18 March, Circular Flanders and the VVSG (Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities) joined forces to host a session on circular economy, with a wealth of real-life examples. On 21 March, Circular Flanders's State of the Union was scheduled at the Faculty of Law of the University of Hasselt.

That location was not chosen randomly, as that law faculty, together with the one from KU Leuven, is one of the partners on legal matters within the

CE CONFERENCE FLEMISH PARLIAMENT

On 18 March, the Flemish Parliament organised a conference on circular economy for parliamentarians from the different European Member States, members of the European Parliament and the candidate countries. As many as 24 different delegations attended a morning presentation by Circular Flanders on what such a circular economy could look like in practice. This was illustrated using real-life cases, such as Out of Use, JuuNoo, Watt4Ever and HERW!N. In the afternoon, attendees engaged in debates about the future of the circular economy on the basis of prepared propositions on the need for European targets, building a network of circular hubs, fostering awareness and circular skills, and promoting more conscious handling of materials to facilitate raw material reuse.

Brigitte Mouligneau, transition manager at Circular Flanders: "It was obvious from that debate that everyone is still very much figuring things out

for themselves. What is feasible? How do we achieve this? What do we do ourselves, what should be done at European level? This also applies to us. Flanders is in the lead now, but how can we maintain that lead tomorrow? It was very important to be able to reflect together on those issues. In fact, on the back of this debate, the Flemish Parliament approved a resolution on circular economy which includes, inter alia, recommendations for the Flemish and federal governments and the EU, because to accomplish the transition, all those levels will need to be involved."

The resolution calls for action at the Flemish, federal and European levels in 40 points. One of the resolution's key demands is for the circular economy to be more integrated into climate policy because of the considerable CO₂ gains that are possible through, for example, reuse, recovery and circular business models.



"It was obvious from that debate that everyone is still very much figuring things out for themselves"

Brigitte Mouligneau, Circular Flanders



CE Center (the Circular Flanders research centre, where researchers from KU Leuven, UGent, UAntwerp, UHasselt and VITO come together to conduct policy-relevant research in the context of the circular economy). Moreover, the Faculty of Law is now located in Hasselt's old prison, and thus a great example of reuse.

Memorandum and fashion show

During the State of the Union, Circular Flanders outlined the achievements over the past two years, highlighting progress within the six strategic agendas and leveraging efforts. This presentation was followed by a panel debate where various partners reflected on what is needed to achieve a fully circular future, such as the development of KPIs to measure circularity and setting attainable goals. Circular Flanders also unveiled its memorandum for the next government. Based on a comprehensive evaluation of past achievements, the memorandum assesses the current state and pace of progress, advising on significant investment areas for the upcoming legislature to roll out what we have learned to a wider group of companies and to get citizens on board with the sharing economy. Some examples include introducing circular criteria into government procurement and a greater focus on 'craftsmanship' in training.

The event also featured a whole host of workshops led by real circular enthusiasts and the try-out of a fashion show, showcasing circular solutions in fashion and textiles. Highlights included reusable yarn, HNST jeans, apple leather and recycled glasses produced with a 3D printer.

→ [View](#) the full Circular State of the Union. ►



► World Circular Economy Forum and Circular Economy Forum

On 15 and 16 April, about 1300 people from around the world gathered in Brussels for the World Circular Economy Forum (WCEF). Among others, a Chinese and African delegation came to present examples from their practices. For the European offering, Circular Flanders collaborated with the Commission's Directorate-General for Environment and the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform. The Belgian Presidency took advantage of the international presence by organising the [Circular Economy Forum](#) (CEF) the day after, on 17 April.

Veerle Labeeuw, circular economy facilitator at Circular Flanders: "The sessions at the WCEF gave us the opportunity to showcase some great Flemish examples to an international audience. But it also allowed us to draw attention to implementation on the ground. Lawmakers are working on all kinds of legislation around the circular economy, but the proof of the pudding is very much in the eating in this case. How will we prepare companies and organisations for the practical roll-out? So during our event, we also focused on a systemic approach, where the focus is on public-private partnerships, local and regional hubs, developing partnerships and sharing knowledge quickly."

Beyond the experiment

The Circular Economy Forum opened with a presentation of the [Global Resources Outlook 2024](#), launched at UNEA-6 by the International Resource Panel (IRP), to highlight the important link between resource use and



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"We announced a new leadership group from within the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, which will focus specifically on developing circular hubs in Europe"

Veerle Labeeuw, Circular Flanders



the triple planetary crisis, along with the urgent need for action. This was followed by a panel discussion featuring representatives from the European Environmental Agency, the Directorate General for the Environment and the CE Center. Afterwards, attendees were treated to a veritable [Circular Fashion show with live music](#) and [a film on the Circular Economy in Belgium](#), themed around Belgian cultural icons, including beer, fashion, Adolf Sax and Victor Horta. In the afternoon, there was time for company visits and sessions showcasing real-life examples from Brussels, Wallonia and Flanders, featuring speakers from both Belgian and international backgrounds. [Conclusions from these sessions can be found on the event page of Circular Flanders](#). Meanwhile, the federal government organised a closed session at the CEF with representatives from EU Member States to prepare the [Council conclusion on the circular economy](#). This allowed the representatives to attend the plenary sessions first and gain a broader perspective.

Labeeuw: "Promoting a wide range of partnerships is essential for progress, encouraging cooperation across various domains and sectors. This is why during the CEF, we announced a new leadership group from within the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform, which will focus specifically on developing circular hubs in Europe, ranging from small social hubs to large circular valleys. Also, the organisation of the CEF itself exemplified effective collaboration between the three regions and the federal level. It is crucial to establish strong connections and reach agreements, as solutions to circular challenges exist at every level. These three days have provided an excellent opportunity for teamwork and building stronger relationships."

INTERNATIONAL TREATY TO TACKLE PLASTIC POLLUTION: INC-4 in Canada sets the stage for Busan Conference (Korea)

From 23 to 29 April, Ottawa, Canada, hosted the fourth Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-4) on plastic pollution. UN member states convened to advance a future treaty covering the entire plastic life cycle, from raw materials to microplastics.

In March 2022, the United Nations adopted a resolution aiming to finalise a comprehensive plastic pollution treaty by the end of 2024. The treaty's broad scope is said to include waste management, Extended Producer Responsibility and recycling, reducing the production of primary plastics, improving the treatment of chemicals of concern and phasing out unnecessary plastics and plastics of concern. That broad scope aligns with the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Pieter Vervinckt, international policy advisor at OVAM saw that as one of the big takeaways from this fourth meeting of the negotiating committee. ►



- “Everyone was already aware of the link with climate change because we make plastics from fossil fuels and we had known for some time that plastic pollution results in biodiversity loss. This time, the health link came out strongly. We ingest microplastics through food and drinking water from plastic bottles, and inhale them as well. These microplastics can be found in our organs, even our brains. Many plastics still contain too many chemicals of concern. This is why we need a treaty for plastics, similar to the Paris Agreement for climate.”



“Better waste management is needed, but is not a sustainable solution. We can’t just recycle our way out of this”

Pieter Vervinckt, OVAM

Overcoming international discrepancies

A particular challenge in achieving a successful treaty lies in the significant socio-economic and cultural differences between countries. While some countries, such as those within the European Union, have relatively advanced policies and regulations on plastics, others face more limited resources, infrastructure and regulations. These discrepancies complicate the implementation of uniform measures and necessitate a flexible approach that considers the diverse circumstances and capacities of each country. Flanders happens to boast a comprehensive policy plan (2020-2025 Plastics Implementation Plan) and expertise. At Circular Flanders, public and private partners have united in drawing up a Chemicals/Plastics roadmap. But since the production of plastics and the impact of pollution is global, it is important to have everyone on board. That is why INC-4, for example, explored setting up a fund to finance actions and share expertise between countries.

Vervinckt noted: “As President of the Council of the European Union, Belgium represented the EU and its Member States’ position at INC-4 alongside the European Commission. For the EU, it’s important to address the full life cycle of plastics. Better waste management is needed, but is not a sustainable solution. We can’t just recycle our way out of this; we need to consider prevention, reuse, product policy and design, recyclability and chemical regulation. The EU has joined the High Ambition Coalition - a group of like-minded countries - that seeks to set the bar high.”

“Before the conference, we worked closely with all EU colleagues for weeks to crystallise the European Union’s position and attend the INC meeting with a clear mandate. Our European colleagues expressed high levels of trust, allowing the full Belgian negotiating team to deliver an outstanding performance.”

“INC-4 marked the first step towards meaningful negotiations. Meanwhile, experts continue to work on more technical provisions, as there is still a lot of work ahead of INC-5 in Busan this autumn. This is why the European Union signed the ‘Bridge to Busan: Declaration on Primary Plastic Polymers’ with a view to creating momentum ahead of the next - and possibly final - round of negotiations, for measures to be taken at the start of the plastics life cycle. Bridge to Busan calls for transparency in the production of primary plastics and a sustainable level of production in line with circular economy goals and the 1.5° climate target. Despite the challenges, efforts will continue with a view to reaching an agreement by the end of 2024.”



AMBITIOUS PACKAGING POLICY READY FOR SIGNATURE

During the Belgian Presidency, the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council reached an agreement on a new Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR).

The Commission published its draft for a new packaging regulation at the end of 2022, with coordinated positions being reached between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission during the Belgian Presidency. The regulation is set to be published by the end of the year.

The new PPWR includes measures and targets for prevention, reuse, recyclability and recycling, use of recyclate, collection and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR). Specific provisions cover compostable applications, return deposits, phasing out substances of concern, like PFAS in (food) packaging and harmonising labels and pictograms. There will

also be a ban on certain types and sizes of disposable plastic packaging, such as miniature hotel toiletries.

The European Parliament is expected to adopt the text in September or October, followed by the Council in November or December. As the new regulation is set to replace the existing directive, it will take effect immediately across all European Member States, setting the standard for future packaging policy within the EU.

OVAM will be organising a webinar on this new packaging regulation after the summer.

Outcomes of the international meeting on the Basel Convention (OEWG14)



What is the Basel Convention?

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and Their Disposal, better known as the Basel Convention, is a legally binding international treaty which regulates the transport of hazardous wastes between nations. The Convention is transposed into EU law through the European Waste Shipment Regulation. For this reason, the EU and its Member States seek to be actively involved in any amendments to the Basel Convention.

International meeting from 25 to 29 June 2024 (Open Ended Working Group 14 or OEWG14)

From January to June, the Belgian Presidency was busy preparing for this international meeting. Together with the European Commission, the Belgian Presidency developed an EU position on each agenda item of the OEWG14. This EU position was negotiated with the experts of all EU Member States during five Council Working Party meetings in Brussels, referred to as the WPIEI Basel.

During the OEWG14 in Geneva, the Belgian Presidency conducted the negotiations on behalf of the EU and

its Member States, set up outreach meetings together with the European Commission and organised EU coordination meetings each morning.

Outcome of the OEWG14

After four days of UN meetings, the outcome of the OEWG14 was good and as anticipated. The negotiations on a new Strategic Framework and on a draft report on how to improve the Prior Informed Consent procedure at Basel will hopefully lead to the adoption of these documents at the next international meeting (COP17) and next steps can be taken. Discussion also took place regarding the revision of Basel technical guidelines on how certain waste streams should be managed, such as those on batteries and tyres. Discussion on this topic will need to continue during COP17. After difficult negotiations on the review of the Annexes, parties agreed that more discussion is needed. It is currently unclear whether a review of Annex IV is ready to be adopted at COP17. To conclude, after six months of hard work and intense negotiations, the Belgian Presidency is happy with the outcome of the OEWG14.

OVAM colleagues involved in this milestone: Ann De Jonghe and Linde Moons (international policy unit, OVAM)

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE 8TH ENVIRONMENT ACTION PROGRAMME MIDTERM REVIEW



On the 17th of June 2024 the 27 Member States of the EU adopted Council conclusions on the 8th Environment Action Programme (8th EAP), focused on several priority themes, including circular economy.

- In 2022, the Council and the European Parliament adopted the 8th EAP as a framework for action on environment and climate policy. It outlines six priority themes for 2030 and a long-term priority for 2050, namely 'living well, within planetary boundaries'. The European Commission carried out the 8th EAP midterm review in March 2024. The Belgian Presidency decided to react to this review in the form of Council conclusions: 'The 8th Environment Action Programme Midterm Review - The way forward to a green, just and inclusive transition for a sustainable Europe.'

The Council conclusions, drafted by the Belgian Presidency, address the six priority themes of the 8th EAP by demanding specific action in the following areas:

- climate change mitigation,
- risk preparedness and climate resilience,
- circular economy and sustainable resource management,
- zero pollution for a toxin-free environment,
- nature, and biodiversity protection, conservation and restoration,
- enabling conditions.

Our federal colleagues took the lead in coordinating this initiative before and during the Belgian Presidency. OVAM provided the necessary back-up with content-related contributions and helped with outreach to other Member States to ensure that everyone would eventually sing from the same hymn sheet at the Council

in Luxembourg. After all, Council conclusions must be adopted by consensus. The circular economy component of the Council conclusions can be divided into three pillars:

- Broaden and reposition the concept of circular economy;
- Consolidate & ensure the strong implementation of strategic priorities of the EU Green Deal and the circular economy action plan (CEAP) related to sustainable resources management;
- Process to build a future EU governance framework on sustainable resource management.

The first pillar identifies the link between unsustainable resource use and the triple planetary crisis, and reiterates that the circular economy is an important tool to decouple growth from resource use and to reduce our material and consumption footprint to a sustainable level, within planetary boundaries. Addressing the demand side will require, for instance, new business models.

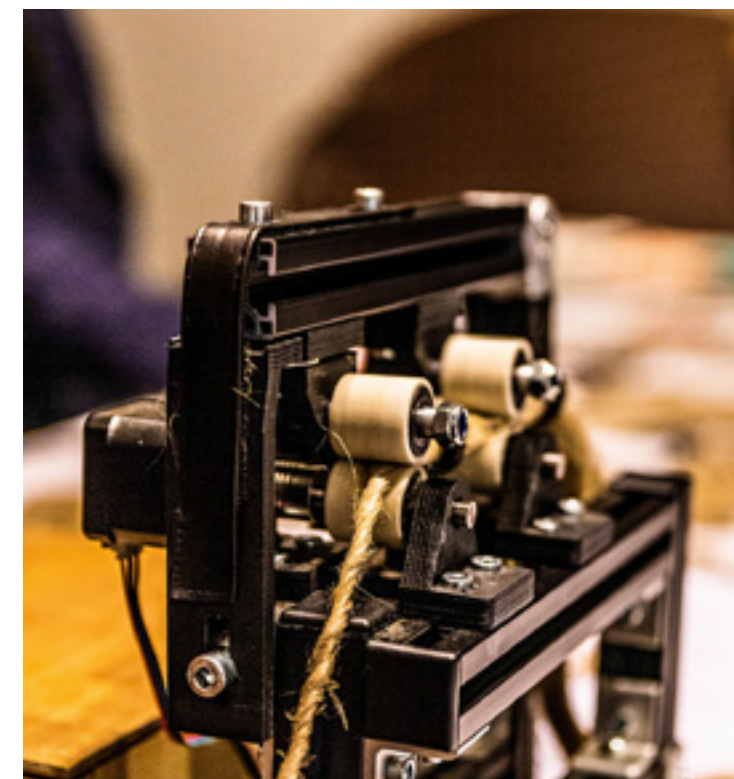
The second pillar calls for, among other things, a working plan for the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) and a new EU Strategic Plan for Circular Economy. Moreover, the Council conclusions invite the European Commission to undertake a number of concrete actions, such as discussing measures on waste prevention, enhancing uniform market surveillance, expanding producer responsibility schemes, ensuring the efficient functioning of a high-quality secondary raw material market, scaling up circular production and consumption models, ensure effective stakeholder involvement and support the development of a network of circular hubs, integrate the circular economy in upcoming climate policies and consider working towards an international agreement on natural resources management.

The last pillar calls for an EU governance framework on sustainable resource management, which ties in nicely with the study Tulip Consulting conducted on behalf of OVAM: The case for an EU Resources Law.

More specifically, this pillar asks the Commission to assess the modalities of a governance framework to support an integrated EU long-term vision on resources. Furthermore, the Commission is asked to investigate the establishment of an EU long-term objective for sustainable resource use and which ambitious and economically feasible science-based targets could be set. Also, the establishment of an overarching EU legal framework should be assessed.

With these Council conclusions, the 27 Member States are sending a clear message about the European policy agenda on the circular economy. It is now up to the European Commission to act on this.

OVAM colleagues involved in this milestone: Elizabeth Czaerck (international policy unit, OVAM) and Brigitte Mouligneau (transition manager at Circular Flanders)



THE EUROPEAN PLAN for microplastics

The European Union is working on policy on microplastics. During the Belgian Presidency, OVAM was closely involved in negotiating measures to prevent losses of plastic pellets into nature.

By 2030, the European Union intends to reduce the release of microplastics into the environment by 30 %. To reach this goal, the Commission has developed a two-pronged approach. A REACH restriction was adopted on 25 September 2023 to limit intentionally added microplastics, such as glitter or microbeads in toothpaste. The second prong is microplastics that are not intentionally released into the environment, the main sources of which are - in this order - paint, tyres, plastic pellets, textiles, geotextiles and detergents. Specifically on plastic pellets (the umbrella term for pellets, flakes and powders), the Commission proposed a regulation on 16 October 2023. During the Belgian Presidency, Member States negotiated that proposal over three Council working groups. In these negotiations, OVAM was involved as an expert to provide substantive input.

Anne-Marie Prins, product chains team, plastics policy at OVAM: "In Flanders, we already have some experience with measures against plastic pellet losses,

for example, through the addition of conditions to the environmental permit. Moreover, VITO (an independent Flemish research organisation for cleantech and sustainable development) is currently conducting a study on the best available techniques to reduce pellet losses. OVAM is following up on this study. Furthermore, OVAM is also involved in the PLASTFLOW project, a follow-up measurement of plastic pollution in the Scheldt river basin. Plastic pellet losses are included in this."

"The Commission's proposal stipulates that measures will be put in place for all carriers inside and outside the EU and European companies handling more than 5 tonnes of plastic pellets per year. European companies and carriers will have to register and train their staff in loss prevention. Companies handling plastic pellets will need to draw up a risk assessment plan for which they can choose concrete measures. Such measures include a wastewater treatment system or equipment provided to clean up spilled pellets. In addition, those companies



must get certified or, in the case of SMEs, prepare a self-declaration of conformity." Carriers must take a series of mandatory measures to prevent losses.

Based on oral and written contributions from delegations during the council working groups and the policy debate held during the Environment Council, the Belgian Presidency presented proposals for revised provisions, as well as policy options to investigate further avenues. For example, there is the issue of whether to include maritime transport in the scope and whether certain measures should become mandatory for companies.

"We are handing the file over to Hungary, which now holds the Presidency of the European Council, but there is every chance that it will not get finalised until the Polish presidency in the first half of 2025."

OVAM colleague involved in this milestone: Anne-Marie Prins (product chains team, OVAM)



"European companies and carriers will have to register and train their staff in loss prevention"

Anne-Marie Prins, OVAM

WASTE FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

The Belgian Presidency has brokered an agreement among the Member States on the European Commission's proposal to overhaul the Waste Framework Directive (WFD). This revision specifically targets the food and textile industries.

In 2008, the Waste Framework Directive outlined the basic principles for waste management in the EU, such as Extended Producer Responsibility, the polluter pays principle and the conditions under which waste can be considered a secondary raw material once again. Over the years, the WFD has been overhauled several times and a proposal for a targeted revision by the European Commission is currently on the table. This deals specifically with two industries that are considered particularly resource-intensive, namely textiles and food.

Marjan Decroos, Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU: "We want to avoid waste at all costs. So for the food industry, this revision seeks to set reduction targets that all Member States have to meet by 2030. Consequently, they will have to adapt their policy programmes to prevent food loss, but they are given flexibility to do so as they see fit, as the overhaul does not impose any specific measures. In addition, at the request of a large number of Member States, we have added to the proposal that the methodology around

measuring food waste should be further elaborated. This particularly concerns measuring the edible component of food waste. So not the stems or leaves that we do not normally eat, but rather surpluses that we discard. That is the avoidable and, therefore, most problematic part."

"For the textile industry, the proposal intends to make producers co-responsible for textile waste through Extended Producer Responsibility. A particular concern was how to demand a higher contribution from fast fashion producers, because their products do not last as long as before and, therefore, generate more waste. During the Belgian Presidency, we led those negotiations in council working groups. In these, OVAM was a member of the negotiating team, together with colleagues from other Belgian authorities. Thanks to good preparation, we managed to broker an agreement between all 27 Member States. That text will form the basis for further negotiations with the European Parliament."

OVAM colleagues involved in this milestone: Sofie Bouteligier and Linde Moons (international policy unit, OVAM)



"For the food industry, this revision seeks to set reduction targets that all Member States have to meet by 2030"

Marjan Decroos, Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU



WORKSHOP: A FUTUREPROOF WASTE FRAMEWORK DIRECTIVE

On 13 and 14 June, OVAM hosted a workshop on the future of European waste policy.

As the keystone of European waste policy, the Waste Framework Directive will have to evolve along with our goals of producing less waste and using raw materials responsibly. This is the reason why OVAM decided to organise a workshop that involves experts from all Member States, stakeholders and members of the Commission and the European Environment Agency.

The workshop kicked off with a plenary session where Flemish policymakers, as well as members of the Commission's DG Environment and the European Environment Agency took the floor. This was followed by a panel discussion on the views of civil society organisations, business and local authorities on the sustainable management of waste and raw materials. Participants underlined, among other things, the importance of affordable repair services, cooperation between SMEs and local authorities and harmonised European policies. After lunch, there were breakout sessions on waste prevention, the waste hierarchy, waste/non-waste status, bio-waste collection, substances of concern in material cycles and incineration in a circular economy. The purpose of these breakout sessions was to arrive at recommendations on these topics for the next European Commission, also with a view to a possibly more comprehensive revision of the Waste Framework Directive. In the area of prevention, for example, the usefulness of targets and the need for economic incentives for both consumers and companies were highlighted. As regards the session on waste/non-waste, there was a clear need for an EU platform where information on end-of-waste criteria can be pooled. Additionally, the importance of sustainable resource management was stressed across several breakout sessions.

The workshop's key findings were collected in a [summary report](#) and shared with the European Commission as a basis for future actions.



END-OF-LIFE VEHICLES REGULATION

The European Commission's proposal for a new regulation on end-of-life vehicles (ELV) is designed to further develop the circular economy in the automotive sector. The proposal addresses the problem of missing vehicles and takes better account of the entire life cycle of vehicles, from design to their disposal.

During the Belgian Presidency, significant progress was made on several key areas within the broad proposal. The regulation includes a revision of both the ELV Directive and the Type Approval Directive on reusability, recyclability and recoverability. Moreover, the proposal sets out to improve the existing legislation and extend the scope significantly: not only passenger cars and light vans, but also motorcycles, trucks, buses and the like, are included in the scope. The new regulation on end-of-life vehicles represents a significant environmental improvement.

After an initial discussion of the draft regulation as a whole, the negotiators from the Belgian Presidency turned their attention first to the main areas in the European Commission's proposal and then discussed the subsequent chapters. The Belgian Presidency proposed adjustments for a much more extensive and technically sound definition of end-of-life vehicles and the distinction between end-of-life vehicles and used vehicles. To properly address the problem of missing vehicles, the Belgian Presidency also made a strong case for further adjustments to the provisions on collection

“The expertise of our OVAM colleagues was significant, not only for the technical expertise, but also for the practical checks and what competent authorities require to carry out those checks in the field”

Marjan Decroos, Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU

of ELV and export of used vehicles. The new provisions imply that every time there is a transfer of ownership, it is checked whether the vehicle is an ELV and, if so, that it is definitely delivered to authorised treatment facilities, and that only vehicles of sufficient quality are exported outside the EU. Changes were also proposed and discussed for the comprehensive set of treatment provisions for end-of-life vehicles.

Marjan Decroos, Permanent Representation of Belgium to the EU: “Many end-of-life vehicles that should actually be sent to authorised treatment facilities still disappear into the grey circuit, with some being exported outside the EU as second-hand cars, even though they are waste. This is why we have placed strong emphasis on both the definition of ELV, the distinction between ELV and used vehicles, and the provisions on collection of ELV. The expertise of our OVAM colleagues was significant, not only for the technical expertise, but also for the practical checks and what competent authorities require to carry out those checks in the field.”

“Thanks to our well-prepared negotiation team, we were able to hammer out the basics for a compromise on key issues. This was consolidated into an amended version of the Commission proposal, which the next Presidency can build on. Given that this is such a comprehensive proposal, negotiations are likely to run until 2025. We will continue to monitor the negotiations closely and articulate Belgium's position. OVAM will remain important in this process.”

OVAM colleagues involved in this milestone: Lies Verlinden (product chains team) and Elizabeth Czaerck (international policy unit, OVAM)

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OVAM, Adobe Stock, Council of the European Union, Stijn Swinnen

Editing and realisation

www.wearepantarein.be

Legal deposit number

D/2024/5024/17

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In this special edition of the podcast we're looking back on the Belgian Presidency and what we have achieved, particularly for OVAM topics. During the Belgian Presidency, there were European elections, so this is also an opportunity to look ahead to the next political mandate at EU level. We discuss these themes with Werner Annaert, CEO of OVAM, and Janez Potočnik. Mr. Potočnik is co-chairman of the International Resources Panel and former European Commissioner for Environment.

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