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Flanders, the Netherlands, and North Rhine-Westphalia Strengthen Cooperation on Circular Economy

During the Circular Valley Forum in Wuppertal, the responsible ministers of Flanders, the Netherlands, and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) are signing a Joint Declaration of Intent (JDOI) today to deepen their cooperation on the circular economy. The Circular Valley Forum is an annual event in Wuppertal that brings together companies, researchers, and policymakers around circular innovation. The signing of the renewed Joint Declaration of Intent is a highlight of the 2025 edition and marks an important step in European cooperation for a sustainable and resilient economy. The three regions aim to leverage their strong industrial base and shared policy ambitions to develop the cross-border area between Flanders, the Netherlands, and NRW into a leading European transregional hub for the circular economy.

FROM YOUNG BILATERAL TO MATURE TRILATERAL PARTNERSHIP

The cooperation between Flanders and NRW began in 2023, with the signing of a first declaration of intent during a previous edition of the Circular Valley Forum. That bilateral commitment is now being expanded to include the Netherlands, which was already mentioned as a logical partner from the start.

The new trilateral declaration builds on the existing cooperation between Vlaanderen Circulair and Circular Valley, but strengthens the policy foundation by structurally involving the three governments—including OVAM.

The agreement provides for, among other things:

- the establishment of a Strategic Consultation Committee in which representatives of the three governments (environment, economy, and foreign affairs) exchange views;
- the further development of three thematic working groups on batteries, green chemistry, and circular construction;
- and a series of joint objectives, including developing joint positions towards the European Commission and creating concrete demonstration projects.

FOCUS ON CIRCULAR CONSTRUCTION, CHEMISTRY, AND BATTERIES

Three thematic working groups form the substantive core of the cooperation. Each brings together companies, knowledge institutions, policymakers, and network organizations.

On the construction theme, Vlaanderen Circulair, Circular Valley, and Cirkelstad (Netherlands) are working together to set up concrete projects, supported by research institutions such as VITO, Fraunhofer, and TU Delft.

Press Release

The three regions also want to make their voice heard more strongly towards Europe. The JDOI provides for joint positions on European regulations. In addition, there is an exploration of how trilateral projects can be included in European Interreg and ERDF programmes.

Flemish Minister for the Environment Jo Brouns: “*The circular economy is where climate, industry, and innovation policy come together for Flanders. We want to strengthen our competitiveness, reduce our dependence on primary raw materials, and lower our emissions. Flanders, the Netherlands, and North Rhine-Westphalia not only share borders but also challenges and opportunities. This cooperation makes us stronger in Europe—and brings the circular transition from vision to action.*”

Werner Annaert, Director-General of OVAM: "What makes this cooperation interesting is that it is concrete and practice-oriented. We build on years of experience in Flanders, for example through the Green Deal Circular Construction, in which more than 370 organizations work together on new solutions. We are now bringing that knowledge into a European network. Our three regions each have a strong industrial base—if we connect them, we can really accelerate the circular transition."

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