

Speech Hans Blokland

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Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

It is a great honour for me being invited to your conference on Flood Awareness and Prevention Policy in border areas today. Both as Vice Chairman of the Environmental Committee in the European Parliament and as an inhabitant of The Netherlands I am very interested in flood management. Therefore it is a big pleasure for me to give my viewpoint on this policy area and on the just received FLAPP final report. To keep your attention on my presentation, I would like to split it up in a few parts.

Firstly I will explain something about the recently approved EU Flood Directive. I will mention a couple of aspects of this directive which are important in my opinion. After this I will make a connection between the just mentioned Flood Directive and the FLAPP project. Thirdly I will give my opinion on the FLAPP final report, with special attention on the proposed recommendations. I will end by giving some recommendations from my side.

The EU Flood Directive

Last April the European Parliament has adopted the Flood Directive. As you know, Europe suffered many floods, often with disastrous consequences. It seems that in future flood risks will further increase, for several reasons such as the effects of climate change and the increasing population and economic activity in flood risk zones. The objective of the mentioned Flood Directive is to reduce and manage flood-related risks to human health, the environment infrastructure and property. It is an issue of major importance because of its cross-border character. It will ask for a preliminary flood risk assessment, flood

mapping in all areas with a significant flood risk, coordination within shared river basins and production of flood risk management plans through a broad participatory process. The European Parliament successfully tried to emphasize the principle of solidarity. This means that a member state cannot take flood management measures which could increase the flood risk in a neighbour country. A second important issue in the directive is the possibility proposed by the Parliament to include controlled flooding of certain areas (for example wetlands) in the case of a flood event in the flood risk management plans. Beside these two points, the European Parliament focused attention on mentioning the impact of climate change on floods in the directive. If global warming really goes on in future, a higher flood risk is eligible, according to the forecasts. According to the parliament, these effects should be taken in account when creating flood risk management plans.

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By implementing the Flood directive it is up to the member states to undertake concrete measures (within the directive's framework) to prevent themselves for floods, or to minimize the risks. In my opinion this shows the importance of your EU-funded Flood Awareness and Prevention Policy in border areas network. The joint approach of the thirty-five organizations seems a good thing to me. In the first place it is a good example of bottom-up European cooperation between organizations from twelve countries. Bottom-up initiatives are always characterized by the high level of willingness of all parties. This improves the relation between the partners and it is a basis for a fruitful and effective cooperation. In the second place it is a network which operates as a knowledge platform where flood prevention measures can be exchanged and proposed. This will provide a good contribution to the implementation of the EU Flood Directive.

FLAPP recommendations

Your joint suggestions and recommendations could improve the quality of cross border flood policy. I will emphasize a few of your recommendations to the European Union. Firstly your proposal to address the ecological function of floods in flood management. Maybe the EU Flood Directive is focusing its attention more on the harmful effects of floods than on possible opportunities which rise from floods. This is not a strange thing; nevertheless I think floods can have positive effects as well indeed, especially in the field of biodiversity and the protection of valuable areas such as wetlands. When I have a look in my own country, I see a certain level of understanding concerning the positive effects of floods: valuable areas have been created by creating an opportunity for controlled floods, especially in areas influenced by tide. We can connect this to the so called ‘space for the river’ concept, in which strategy rivers get more space to flow . This has several advantages: it supports the recovery of nature, the protection of the natural landscape and it enhances possibilities for recreation. At the same time it is a kind of flood protection. I think we can describe this strategy as a new way of thinking, a way of thinking in which strategy changed from resistance-based into resilience-based policy. This on its turn is linked to your proposal for a guidance document in which the role of wetlands becomes assured. By creating such a document I think you can concrete point out the wetlands role when implementing the EU Flood directive and other EU directives which apply to river basin management.

Further I would like to mention your proposal to promote cross-border cooperation. In my opinion this is a very valuable theme. Neither rivers nor floods halt at the border. This shows the cross-border component. I’m very glad with our successful attempts to ensure the principle of solidarity within the Flood Directive. This could lead to higher level of cooperation between member states.

Finally I would like to mention your proposal to raise an awareness campaign for the European public. Increasing welfare leads to changing land use patterns. This change seems a change from merely low-risk land use to more high-risk land use. At the same time however, people expect the same level of safety as in former times. This is an illusion. Therefore awareness campaigns regarding flood risks and opportunities are useful. Inhabitants should be encouraged to participate in local and regional policy processes on flood risk management and spatial planning in order to get aware of risks and to provide valuable input in the process of decision making.

Final remarks

After having given my opinion on the FLAPP network and final report, linked to the EU Flood Directive, I finally would like to provide you with a couple of recommendations.

Firstly it will be of big importance to go ahead with knowledge exchange among your organizations and member states on flood risk management.

Secondly it will be of big importance for you to remain in contact with each other. You currently know each other and you have built up a network, so it's valuable to maintain or even improve this level of cooperation, despite the fact this project has been finalized yet.

Finally I would like to recommend, clearly connected to the two before-mentioned points, to organize new flood management projects in order to deliver a quality impulse to the implementation of flood related legislation.

Thank you for your attention!