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Belgium and Norway sign energy cooperation: "Important step in forging North Sea coalition"

Today, Prime Minister Alexander De Croo and his Norwegian counterpart Jonas Gahr Støre signed a far-reaching energy cooperation agreement, enabling them to go full steam ahead for renewable energy. Belgium and Norway will cooperate in areas such as offshore wind, hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. The Prime Ministers also discussed the situation in Ukraine and stressed the importance of Western unity.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo: *"This energy agreement is important for our country. Closer cooperation with Norway means better energy supply. We are particularly committed to renewable energy and support each other in meeting the climate targets. This agreement also helps to reduce our energy dependence on third countries."*

Minister of Energy Tinne Van der Straeten: *"This energy agreement paves the way for a climate-neutral future. Today, Norway supplies almost 50% of our natural gas, making it our biggest supplier. Norway is a reliable partner, helping to ensure supplies to Belgium and Europe today and in the years to come. In light of meeting the climate targets, the ambition is to phase out fossil energy and switch to renewable energy and hydrogen. This energy agreement paves the way for this."*

Renewable Energy

The agreement aims to ensure a better exchange of knowledge and technology. Both in terms of renewable energy, hydrogen and the capture and storage of CO². It also wants to better connect the two countries' electricity grids.

De Croo: *"The production of renewable energy constantly fluctuates, depending on the amount of wind and sun. But that is not a bad thing if our countries are connected. The energy surplus of one country provides energy to the other country. It is a matter of efficiency."*

We continue to invest in such connections. After our offshore link with the United Kingdom and the planned link with Denmark, Norway could become our third crucial offshore interconnector. Norway also has every interest in being connected to the European grid and our country is taking the initiative. This is an important step in building a North Sea energy coalition."

Van der Straeten: *"Leading the way is the most profitable solution. This is evidenced by Belgium's offshore power production, which is breaking all records this month. The next step is to turn the North Sea into one big renewable energy plant thanks to the first ever energy island in the North Sea and interconnections such as the undersea cable with Denmark. With this agreement, Belgium is once again taking the lead, together with Norway in the green transition."*

Wind power and hydrogen

Norway and Belgium are perfectly complementary on the energy front. Belgium has developed plenty of offshore wind capacity, while Norway still has a huge untapped wind power potential. *"Our country is investing a lot in hydrogen for its chemical and steel cluster, Norway is doing the same with hydrogen for*

its shipping industry," said Prime Minister De Croo.

Norway is also investing in developing the capture and storage of CO² emissions from various industrial processes. According to the Belgian Prime Minister, this is an important opportunity for our country: *"This energy agreement provides the perfect framework for knowledge exchanges. We don't have to reinvent the wheel every time and we can just copy what works well from each other."*

On 29 October 2021, the federal government approved the first-ever federal hydrogen strategy through which it intends to make Belgium an import and transit hub for green hydrogen and strengthen Belgium's role as a pioneer in hydrogen technology. Van der Straeten: *"To ensure that renewable hydrogen makes a real contribution by 2030, we must start now. Signing this Memorandum of Understanding between Belgium and Norway fits into this strategy."*

United front with shared values

Both prime ministers also spoke about the situation in Ukraine. *"The Russian incursion into Ukraine shows that we need to form a united front with the West more than ever. On the military front, within NATO. But the importance of shared values has also been proven in the field of energy. Shared values mean reliability. We must hold Europe firmly together in the coming years and be well aware that we depend on each other. If we work together in Europe, we are resilient and can handle a lot. The long-term goal for Norway and Belgium is the same: a secure Europe with low energy prices and stable supplies. We know we can count on each other."*

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