Citizens First

Volt's Policy Programme for the Belgian Federal Elections

Volt

Belgium is a country with unparalleled opportunity and potential. It is at the crossroads of an ambitious political project, the largest single economic market, and some of the world's most skilled talent. Yet that potential is strapped by outdated structures and approaches. As Volt we want to shock the system back to life, ensuring that Belgian institutions and policies become assertively citizen-centric. As Volt Belgium, we pursue a dynamic shift focusing on Belgian citizens, placing citizens first and creating genuine dialogue, to address the real issues of affecting people, and inspire creative solutions through active participation.

Belgium is de facto the heart of Europe, connecting Member States, and fostering solidarity through a grand European narrative. Yet today, we find a conflicted Europe, burdened with outdated structures and approaches, that has so far tethered the project. We set out to create a systemic shock, at all levels: the European, National, Regional and Local levels.

The Belgian state should work for its citizens and their ambitions and support their ability to create a better future. We want to empower citizens, and ensure that they have all the necessary skills, tools and resources to make the best use of their potential. Underpinning these citizen-centric efforts is the imperative need to make the Belgian state structure as a whole more reactive, innovative, and efficient whilst simultaneously improving the Belgian, European and global environment.

At a European level, Volt has proposed strengthening the Union on the basis of 5+1 challenges to ensure lasting reforms benefiting citizens. In Belgium, we also want to put forward 5+1 challenges to achieve the greatest coherence across governance levels:

1. **Citizens first**: the Belgian state and its institutions must empower its citizens and ensure that its policies are citizen-centric while enabling citizens to make their voices heard and influence policies. We are champions of digital citizen platforms using technology to embed deliberative democracy, shape and execute public policies whilst combatting the declining trust in our institutions.

2. **Silicon**: the future economic champions of the world will be countries that master the digital transition and enable their businesses to quickly become digital proponents in a hyper-competitive environment. We promote entrepreneurship, and will deploy the necessary investments whilst cutting red-tape that prevents these champions from emerging in Belgium.

3. **Social**: unemployment remains stubbornly high in Belgium. On one hand citizens need highly transferable skills, on the other the cost of employment in Belgium is exceedingly high for the employers whilst the employees themselves are heavily

taxed. <u>We are champions of inclusive employment and will seek to drive down the labour cost for employers and put forward legislation to foster inclusivity</u>.

4. **Savvy:** empowered citizens need to be able to make the most of their talent and potential. To achieve this, we propose placing a strong focus on lifelong learning and revolutionising the education culture in Belgium. This is necessary as to bring it closer to the skills needs of the evolving economy. <u>We are champions of education reform, we will update education standards, means of teaching, and the Belgian curriculum to today and tomorrow's economy.</u>

5. **Evergreen:** the transition to a sustainable economy and society is an absolute must, we have to take urgent and radical steps to reduce our carbon footprint and safeguard the future of our ecosystem for generations to come. From mobility to air quality, from energy to waste management, the challenge is societal and requires each and everyone of us. <u>We are champions of the circular economy, and will deploy a partnership model to ensure that all stakeholders work in collaboration to achieve lasting change to save our environment</u>.

+1. Smart: achieving the 5 challenges requires smart leadership. Leadership that inspires, leadership that listens to its citizens, leadership that drives innovation forward and leadership that nurtures leadership within its people. We must reform the Belgian state itself unleashing the potential of its civil service, questioning the partocracy and conflicts of interest that prevent the State from acting in the citizens' interest. As a first step we will deploy eGovernance to drive up efficiency, transparency, and direct citizen participation. <u>We are champions of effective, proactive and responsive authorities that waste less resources with internal matters at the expense of solving the issues faced by the citizens.</u>

Citizen Empowerment

Belgium is particularly lacking in levels of citizen participation compared to other established democracies. Marked as a "flawed democracy" and occupying only the 31ˢᵗ place globally and the fifth to last place in Western Europe, Belgian democracy is not in an excellent condition. Indeed, trust in government is low (only 39%)[1].

We want to rebuild that trust by creating the channels for citizens to engage with their public administration and their representatives not only to hold them accountable, but also to rebuild their trust in political and administrative institutions.

In Volt, we believe in the culture of participation. Participation increases citizens' trust in politics and bridges the gap between citizens and politics. Promoting a more active involvement of all citizens is a key element of the society we want to build, where nobody is left behind and where all parties are truly represented and able to make their voices heard. In line with this key strategic priority, we will empower citizens to be able to communicate and cooperate with their administrations for the common good and to play an active role in the policy making process.

To ensure maximum impact on public interest decisions, we want citizen participation to be institutionalised and to enter politics with a strong legislative support that is built on real citizens' needs. In doing this, we will take advantage of the most innovative tools and technologies to promote inclusiveness to generate innovative ideas.

Volt's threefold approach for citizen empowerment will be based on:

- **Institutionalising participation** – To enable citizens participation, appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks should be put in place. These should be designed according to the different federal, regional and local competences to ensure that the right participatory mechanisms are at work. We want these frameworks to be established at the local and regional level and to provide the right instruments and channels of communication to reinforce the collaboration between administrations and citizens. These would include the setting up of public debates, where citizens can express their opinion on sensitive topics, or through building up local initiatives. To do so, we will build on the lessons learned by similar initiatives, such as the Ostbelgien Model or the Participation law of the Italian region Tuscany. We propose that the regulatory framework could provide compulsory instruments of

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[1] Eurobarometer Spring 2018 fact sheet Belgium

participation based on the best practices of the "citizens assemblies" or the "debat public", in well defined cases.

- **Digital citizen platforms** – We want citizens to be able to communicate with their governments, at all levels, in an effective and transparent way. Digital platforms are an effective solution to encourage communication with administrations and direct citizens involvement, especially when decisions have a tangible impact on citizens' lives, such as in city planning. Volt wants to create an extensive online suggestion platform where citizens can clearly launch their proposals and questions, both at federal and regional level. In this way, citizens will be able to actively contribute to government decisions.

- **Establish participatory budgets at a communal level** – Another instrument to encourage citizens' participation in the policy making process is to offer them the possibility to have a say on how communal taxes are spent. Participatory budgets would allow citizens to allocate small amounts of their tax contributions to projects of public interest that they support based on transparent and democratically expressed preferences[2].

- **Volt wants to reinforce citizenship education** – While citizen education has started to be implemented across Belgium, we need to further strengthen citizens by shaping them into critical persons already at school. This should include critical thinking, knowledge about political processes and institutions and about fundamental values of our society such as human rights, tolerance, democracy and peace. As a result of the growing digitisation of our world and the impact digital platforms have on our understanding and knowledge, we need to strengthen media and digital literacy to allow citizens to distinguish between what is trustworthy and what is fake. Citizenship education should also be provided in a framework of lifelong learning and should thus be a component at all teaching levels.

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[2] http://www.regione.toscana.it/-/legge-sulla-partecipazione

Building A Smart State For All

At the core of our vision is the ambition to build a smart state in Belgium and promote a more accountable and transparent European Union. Belgian and European citizens should have access to better quality public goods and services. Currently, Belgian authorities are unable to effectively deliver due to a complex bureaucracy and outdated administrative procedures. This has resulted in an inefficient and non-transparent administration that no longer corresponds to the needs or expectations of citizens. It is necessary to continue the ongoing efforts to improve efficiency of government services by adapting to the digital age.

Administrative responsibilities often remain unclear to citizens. They are not sure who to engage with and when they do, more often than not, the response is that this particular public service is not responsible for their request. This needs to change, if we want to citizens to believe in our institutions again.

We want to build government authorities that are more efficient and easier for citizens to engage with and thereby make the administrations' work relevant for Belgian citizens. Volt will introduce e-government systems at all levels in Belgium, reforming Belgian government institutions, promoting investment in public services and establish citizen assemblies to take part and discuss political decisions. In addition we want to improve the evaluation systems of public institutions such that public officials are evaluated based on their performance.

Concretely, our goals are:

- **E-Governance** – By learning from other European nations like Estonia, Sweden and Denmark, we aim to build a system that allows for direct interaction with public officials as well as modernising the operation within public administration. We aim for one single portal for all levels (municipality, province, region, community and national), where the system itself would take care of the correct routing. Of course this will be supported by training government employees in the effective use of these new technologies so as to ensure maximum benefit for the citizen.

- **Smart Glass State** – To further empower citizens and make public administration and Parliament transparent, we want to make government expenses more transparent and more accessible for citizens. It is not only about more information, but rather about better information. More concretely, we want to make the expenses of public administration and investments that are taking place on behalf of citizens traceable and provide an overview of how they are being used. Furthermore, Volt will set up an online platform to illustrate how MPs voted urging them to explain why they voted for or against or abstained.

- **Establish a government and parliamentary transparency register for interest representation** – following the example set by the European Commission and the Irish Parliament, Volt will push to set up a Lobbying Transparency Register for companies to illustrate who they are, how much they invest in lobbying activities as well as which associations they are a member of. We will make it mandatory for interest representatives to register and to declare with whom they have met from the level of Head of Unit upwards.

- **State Reform** – In order to improve the state's efficiency, we suggest to merge the communities and the regions into four new entities: Flanders, Wallonia, Brussels and East-Belgium. Brussels and East-Belgium will also be independent on provincial level. The linguistic commissions in Brussels (Cocof, Cocom and Vcom) would be merged into a regional ministry of linguistic and community affairs. A pragmatic look towards the regional and national responsibilities is also required such as reducing an outdated state structure like the provinces.

- **Build better, more responsive Ministries** – We are facing various new, cross-sectoral challenges in an increasingly complex and connected world. Our response needs to address these through our government structures in order to best tackle cross-sectoral issues in a comprehensive way forward. Subjects such as foreign trade, environment, climate, health and education would immensely benefit from a more concerted approach and more federal coordination. Polluted air or water will not stop at regional or national borders. All Belgians should have access to the same quality of healthcare and education. To ensure this, it is only possible if the competences are federal.

- **Build modern, relevant Ministries** – Global issues such as climate change and digitisation need to be allocated across all aspects of government including local, regional and federal. As is the case already in many Member States a digital and environmental communication channel needs to be established as a first step to better coordinate. Important local and regional concerns such as culture and heritage-related matters may benefit from staying regionalised.

- **Talent and Reputation** – There is a clear need to improve the way that public administration is evaluated and that it is held responsible for its actions and the way it is operating. While we are not calling for a privatisation of the public sector, there should be ways and means to evaluate the performance of employees while also setting out clear performance objectives and incentives to grow.

- **Discrimination against women -** Gender equality is a fundamental human right that must be implemented in our society. In the current state of our societies, women are still being treated unfairly, face more barriers than their male counterparts, fall victim to specific forms of violence and are discriminated in their private, public and professional lives. An example of this is the fact that women are severely discriminated in the workplace: they often have lower salaries, are underrepresented in manager positions and have to deal with harassment and intimidation in the workplace. Volt will push for changing this and put men, women and everyone else on equal footing.

- **No discrimination based on ethnicity, origin, skin color or sexual preference** - Current legal instruments at national, European and international level do not offer enough protection to persons dealing with prejudice, unequal treatment and social exclusion. Minorities continue to face discriminatory treatment, including in the areas of education, employment, social services, law enforcement interaction, etc. Discrimination based on ethnicity and colour remains one of the most dominant forms of inequality, and minorities remain the most disadvantaged and persecuted persons in society. In addition, discrimination against travellers throughout Europe is particularly problematic. The following measures can be used:

    o Promotion and review of legislation addressing persistent discrimination against certain groups. We need to review relevant pieces of national and European legislation to amend it so that it is adequate for the 21st century.

- o Strengthening the law enforcement system to end police violence, harassment, and discriminatory profiling.
- o Delete the terms 'race', 'racism' and 'racial discrimination' in all legislation. The current concept of different races is socially constructed, since there is only one human race scientifically (Homo sapiens). The use of such terms must therefore be abolished by law and the concept redefined. On the basis of this merit, anti-discrimination policies must consist of the following terms: ethnicity, national origin, origin or skin color.
- o Similarly, along with other minorities – including women and the LGBTIQ+ community, individuals are often discriminated against in courts owing to bias practices within the justice system. As part of this fight, we urge to ban treatments where therapists try to cure homosexual behaviour. No scientific research is known to show that these methods are capable of changing sexual orientation. There is also no empirical or scientific evidence that homosexuality or bisexuality is a disorder. Apart from the fact that this is not scientifically substantiated, this os also in conflict with the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Make Belgium an economic champion

We want to overhaul the Belgian economy, make it more inclusive and build stronger links between Wallonia and Flanders. The Belgian economy is marked by several structural features, which requires reform, and has recently suffered from lower than expected growth, a drop in unit labour productivity and low levels of investments. However, such reforms will only be successful within a strong European economy and a fully integrated Single Market. This needs to be addressed and to do so we will:

- Build the right environment to grow truly Belgian, European and global champions
- Bring Belgian employment law into the 21st century by taking into account the new ways of working as well as the new realities of mother- and fatherhood
- Invest into technology infrastructures to provide the business environment with high speed internet
- Implement distributed ledger technology where most impactful
- Update schooling as well as university curriculums to ensure future Belgians are better adapted to today's economy
- Strengthen entrepreneurship education and support innovators
- Get rid of rules that hamper innovation and entrepreneurial ambitions
- Implement digital education throughout our education system
- Establish an environment, where all citizens living in Belgium benefit from the investments in future technologies including economic migrants, refugees, older and younger generations and regions where economic growth has been blocked due to a lack of investment
- Implement rules for a sustainable financial sector that supports the growth of an inclusive and green/circular Belgian economy and
- Speed up efforts to promote sustainable economic growth while targeting the long-term ambitions of our society

We believe that these ambitions will support Belgian companies to be global champions with the competitive edge of being sustainable and best responding to customer, worker and investor needs. Concretely our goals are:

- **Volt wants a strong and inclusive Belgian economy** – pursuing equality throughout the entirety of society, and seek a cultural revolution against conventional sex and gender norms; attitudes that are often enhanced from infancy. Volt seeks to plug the gaps in social and biological education taught at schools, to promote a more understanding, accepting, and inclusive society, to break the cycle.

- **Parent equality in private and professional life** – Belgium is still relatively traditional in the way it is treating new parents. Mothers get up to 3-4 months, while fathers get no more than 10 days. Leaving the decision to the couple of how they want to organize parental leave would make allow families to

decide for themselves rather than having the state tell Belgian families what to do. We therefore propose to allow equal paid maternity and paternity leave for a longer period up to 12 months and introduce family working time after parental leave to allow both parents to return to part-time work, with possible compensation for lower income during specific life stages (e.g. during early childhood, as provided for in the German Parental Leave Act).

- **Adapt the Belgian employment law for the 21st century** – greater emphasis needs to be put on the new challenges that the new economy is posing. It is no longer 9 to 5, instead there are new ways of working and being more flexible in your own work as long as you deliver. While rules for work flexibility exist, we want to help change the culture of work more and allow Belgian employees to take full advantage of their flexibility. Volt will reduce the costs of employing people in Belgium and refocus skills training towards the sectors that need them the most whilst ensuring that we are fully integrating new talented arrivals.

- **Invest in digital infrastructure** – to equip Belgium with a 21st century workforce, Volt will push for expanding high-speed internet across the country into rural and urban areas. Faster and greater access to internet is a proven factor in increasing economic growth, fostering innovation and connecting business and people economically.

- **Support technologies that are shaping the future of work** – Volt will support innovative companies across all of Belgium. Given the tremendous impact artificial intelligence and distributed ledger technology (DLT) will have on the future of our societies and economies, Volt will use dedicated EU funding schemes, amongst others, to support innovation in established companies as well as in young start-ups to develop ethical artificial intelligence and smart DLT.

- **Teach digital** – Volt will ensure that digital education is a core to the curriculum throughout our education system. In conjunction with the investments in digital infrastructure and innovation, Volt will set out to equip future Belgian generations with the skills and tools needed to succeed when AI and DLT will revolutionise the way we work. Current, and future generations need to be equipped with new skills that are not replaceable by AI or machines. Innovations have always resulted in new opportunities, Volt will make sure that Belgian citizens are able to benefit the most from these are are not left behind.

- **Strengthen the economic cooperation between Belgian regions** – To promote a strong Belgian society and economy, it is essential to overcome the language barriers between citizens. We believe that language lessons in Dutch, German, French and English should start at an earlier age to help bridge cultural gaps and provide for more exchanges between regions and also foster more inclusiveness.

- **Work towards greater inclusion of migrants and refugees,** who can become, if welcomed adequately and in a structured way, a core part of our society and economy. Providing language and vocational training, apprenticeships and traineeships for incoming refugees, as well as fostering an active dialogue between communities, would help improve economic, cultural and social integration.

- **Tackle social exclusion, regenerate communities, and put in place an ambitious programme of public and private investment in economically disadvantaged areas** – this is most needed in less economically strong areas such as parts of Brussels (Anderlecht, Molenbeek, Schaarbeek, St. Josse) and in post-industrial area of Wallonia.

- **Educate** – One of the most important aims of education is to transform young people into citizens. Volt stands for a revival of democracy, and for this, targeted education is essential. Philosophical attainment targets are indispensable for the following reasons:

  a. Especially the art of arguing and piercing through false reasonings must be given a clear place in the general formation of future generations. Especially in a time of 'fake news' and more citizen participation in policy making is of great importance.

  b. Studies also indicate that philosophising has a positive impact on both the intellectual and emotional capacities of students.

  c. Western philosophy is a part of our cultural heritage that must not be lost. In addition, insight into philosophies originating on other continents can promote insight into other cultures and tolerance.

A new Green Deal for Belgium

Citizens are demanding a change: students and pupils are asking for a better environmental future, bike riders for a more sustainable mobility able to increase traffic safety and improve air quality while reducing traffic congestions, households to cut energy costs, citizens for a more healthier and liveable country. Shift to a low-carbon and circular economy, foster investment in renewable energies, move to a smart and efficient mobility and transform our approach to production, consumption and waste, is not only possible, but necessary and achievable.

Our current economic model is outdated and based on the unsustainable use of finite resources (environmental as well as human) - create value and then waste. Together with an individual-oriented vision on mobility (promotion of private cars, insufficient investments in public transport), this wasteful model has presented severe limitations and has had adverse ramifications on our environment.

At the same time, air pollution[3] in Belgium is leading to more than 11,000 premature deaths in Belgium as a result of cancer, cardiovascular and respiratory health deficits and other significant health problems[4].

Our proposed changes do not occur in isolation, but rather in a broader joint European effort to build a sustainable Europe. Volt proposes positive measures with a significant impact such as more investments in sustainable mobility and circular economy, that can foster a new green deal.

1. Smart & Sustainable Mobility

Annually, millions of euros are lost by traffic congestion in Belgium. About 50,000 people are wounded due to a traffic incident[5]. In conjunction with the negative impact of air pollution (see below) the driving of cars across cities and motorways is exacerbating the Belgian healthcare system with costs continuing to remain high for the Belgian state, which it is not able invest into education, digital infrastructure or public infrastructure.

Car-concentrated infrastructure requires a lot of space, reducing the space available for people, recreational green areas whilst at the same time increasing the percentage of concrete surface creating urban heat islands, in particular in cities like Brussels[6].

Our Belgian state will rethink its mobility plan. It has to shift its transport infrastructure towards non-car means of transport in order to improve air quality and reduce the negative effects and ensure that Belgium is in the future a healthier society. It also enables increased livability of cities and suburbs with more space for people

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[3] Off which car & truck transport is one of the major causes - on car-free sundays air pollutant concentrations of nitrogen dioxide , black carbon and ultrafine particulate matter are >50% lower compared to an average Sunday (.The Lancet Commission on pollution and health 2017)

[4] The European Environment Agency (EEA) in its report concerning air quality in Europe, reveals that in 2015, in Belgium, 11,200 people died prematurely due to the effects of air pollution. Moreover, in 2018 Belgium has been referred to the Court of Justice, because it has been failing to respect the agreed air quality limit values and for failing to take appropriate measures to keep exceedance periods as short as possible.

[5] https://statbel.fgov.be/en/themes/mobility/traffic/road-accidents

[6] http://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20150420_01639850

by creating more recreational areas. As a result of sharply reduced costs for congestion, spatial occupation and healthcare, those measures will generate more economic growth.

To achieve this, Volt suggests policies and projects that build on supporting citizens rather than punishing them. We want to bring positive changes such as more affordable public transport, more and cheap or free bike sharing systems, more and safer cycling infrastructures including more cycling highways, subsidising of car sharing systems and sufficient availability of electric chargers. We will not introduce new or additional taxes on people who do not have another choice than use a car. Instead we focus on providing alternatives to people as possible in order to achieve the Paris COP21 climate goals, to improve Belgium´s WHO air pollution targets and increase economic growth. Volt proposes to:

- **Significantly increase the budget for public transport** – increased investments in new train connections are needed to enable more people to leave their cars at home. Trains should also be made more affordable[7]. We aim both for the extension of urban and suburban networks, as well as new connections in rural areas that are often disconnected from the railway transport network[8]. International train travel should also be made more affordable. Belgium should take the initiative to push for less expensive high-speed connections and work together with its European partners to expand high-speed international train connections.

- **A new vision for cars** – we will get rid of bad inherited systems annually subsidising company cars with billions of euros. Instead, we want to invest in systems of the future, by enabling and promoting more electric car sharing systems[9]. We also aim for sufficient availability of electric car charging stations to make its use more user-friendly for people who buy an electric car.

- **Significantly increase investments in cycling infrastructure** – increased and sufficient investments in bicycle infrastructures are needed to get a higher percentage of people on the bike and to increase traffic safety for people riding a bike. We propose a connected network of cycling highways across Belgium[10]. We will make these highways more secure by introducing separate lines for usual bikes and electric bikes to reduce conflicts or dangerous traffic situations between manual bikers and fast-bikers. We also aim for an increased and better network of bike sharing systems across Belgium that are cheap and easy to use[11].

- **Use improved mobility policy as a tool for improved urban planning and space allocation** – currently, an overwhelming part of space in cities is occupied by cars, both for driving and parking. Sufficient public transportation, bike sharing systems and (electric) car sharing systems will free up space in cities and suburbs. This will allow for urban redevelopment and rehabilitation of city centres and suburbs[12] with more attention for social (including increased social contacts) and environmental aspects,

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[7] Also national prices of train tickets in Belgium - currently most of the time higher compared to the fuel cost of a car with even one passenger - should be lowered. The cost for doing this is reasonably low (the yearly ticket revenue of the NMBS is only € 797 million per year, which is for example far less than the annual subsidies for company cars).
[8] Lalive, R. et al., Does Supporting Passenger Railways Reduce Road Traffic Externalities? (2012) available at: http://www.hsr.ca.gov/docs/newsroom/reports/2012/Passenger_Railways_Subsidy.pdf
[9] Studies indicate each shared car can replace 5 to 15 private cars and can reduce the share of car transportation. https://www.transportenvironment.org/sites/te/files/publications/Does-sharing-cars-really-reduce-car-use-June%202017.pdf
[10] Buekers, J., et al., Health impact model for modal shift from car use to cycling or walking in Flanders: application to two bicycle highways. Journal of Transport & Health (2015), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2015.08.003i
[11] Studies have shown that more people on bikes (and e-bikes) create a net economic gain for society (benefits-costs), in contrast to people driving cars what is - despite tax benefits - a net cost for society.
[12] Transport Environment, Does sharing cars really reduce car use?, (2017) available at: https://www.transportenvironment.org/sites/te/files/publications/Does-sharing-cars-really-reduce-car-use-June%202017.pdf

including more space for people and green areas. The latter can also facilitate the reduction of urban heat islands.

2. Catapult Belgium towards a Circular Economy

Government authorities, citizens and businesses have to join forces to fully seize the growth and development opportunities in the transition to a circular economy. Our goal is a state that pursues green growth solutions and innovative ideas to create a better environment for its citizens and business while creating jobs and improve every citizens´ life quality.

Important efforts have been undertaken in Belgium to implement its circular economy, yet the country has fallen short in comparison to its performance in 2015. The main reason is the low implementation of eco-innovation, the lack of participatory approaches to innovate with and for citizens and the limited support for the development of an enabling business environment.

Volt proposes to empower citizens, businesses, academia and knowledge centers to innovate together fostering a sense of policy ownership that can lead to more sustainable and lasting change. Volt will also create a waste reduction roadmap gathering all stakeholders of the waste sector.

- **Partnership for the circular economy** – the public sector should act as facilitator favoring the exchange of ideas and initiatives to pursue the transition to circular economy. It should set up a platform involving the main actors and encourage the implementation of participatory projects to test different ways for the public sector to catalyse the transition to a circular economy.

- **Waste reduction roadmap** – waste sector actors should convey around a common roadmap for developing the sector towards a circular economy and a circular resource market. The scope of the roadmap is to define an innovative approach of "production- consumption-waste": from the design phase to the products' end of life, making it possible to reduce inputs, reuse and recycle secondary or wasted material at any stage. Furthermore the synergy between waste actors will further develop a circular and integrated resource market.

- **Spurring eco-innovation** – further research is needed to rethink products and develop new ones together with creative business models[13]. Together with its regions and its communities Belgium should launch an international science hub for knowledge and talent to meet, thrive and flourish.

- **Rethinking food systems** – a complete circular economy is not only about material and products but also about food. Our current dietary habits are contributing to the unreasonable waste of resources and ecological problems, as one third of purchased food is lost in supply chain every year and the production of our food requires the largest consumption of natural resources as fresh water[14]. Volt propose to define a common food strategy with a focus on a circular economy approach to half its food waste by 2030, by boosting food donation, reduce packaging (especially plastic packaging), facilitate the consumption of ugly fruit and vegetables[15].

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[13] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/ecoap/indicators/index_en
[14] https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/7/2/1429
[15] Sustainability, Cutting Food Waste through Cooperation along the Food Supply Chain, available at: Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), Save Food: Global Initiative on Food Loss and Waste Reduction, available at http://www.fao.org/save-food/resources/keyfindings/en/

The mentioned actions will also lead to the ban plastics, reduce water and soil consumption as well as decrease environmental pollution[16].

3. An Air Quality Plan that can save lives

Belgium performs poorly in terms of air quality compared to other EU countries. According to the Environmental Performance Index (EPI), Belgium has one of the worst air quality in Europe and continuously exceeds emissions limits[17].

Volt proposes an ambitious plan to tackle air pollution. Volt will contribute to initiatives for reducing the air pollution and by 2020 will set an ambitious plan for lowering target values complying with the National Emission Ceiling (NEC) Directive. We also support initiatives such as sensor networks for air quality and projects such as Curieuzeneuzen where citizens can be highly involved in providing valuable data to public measurement efforts to ensure that efforts are made to reduce air pollution:

- **Better implementation of regulation** – it is necessary to understand current legislative gaps, and to set clear legislative and non-legislative measure in coordination between state, regions and cities for all major pollutants.

- **Deploy digital and technological solution to facilitate the monitoring and control of emission, enforce regulation and measures, pursue polluters** – to fully exploit the potential of technological development, Belgium should increase the collaboration with knowledge centers to better understand and model the impact of major pollutants on human health.

- **New regulations to reduce major pollutants** – to get back down to the limits that are proposed by the WHO, additional regulation and greater ambition is needed. This includes reglementations on transportation, residential warming with wood stoves and agriculture and industry.

- **Improved finance for air quality research and monitoring** – investing is crucial for Belgium to improve its air quality. Investment should be mobilised for infrastructures. (e.g. that government institutes are able to buy monitoring instruments such as instruments for real-time monitoring of particulate matter composition and instruments to improve the collection of real-time traffic emission data to improve air pollution models).

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[16] OECD, Managing water sustainably is key to the future of food and, last accessed 19.03.2019, available at:
agriculturehttp://www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/water-and-agriculture/
[17] http://www.irceline.be/news/environmental-performance-index-epi-does-belgium-have-europes-worst-air-quality

Belgium's Progressive European Defence

Volt Belgium strongly supports the European-level vision for the future of European Security and Defence and agrees with the three building blocks on which it is based:

1. Democratic decision-making. Matters of European security and defence on all levels must be decided as part of a democratic and parliamentary process and security forces must be under civilian command.
2. A fully integrated defence force, under a European Ministry of Defence that allow the EU to respond autonomously to conventional and nonconventional threats to its territory and population.
3. Create a common security culture and ensure that security forces across Europe defend the same enlightened values of democracy, justice, multilateralism, freedom and equality; wherever they have to operate.

At the Belgian level, Volt Belgium encourages continued and increased cooperation with all EU Allies in general and the BENELUX partners specifically. The unification of the BENELUX airspace, the Belgian-Dutch naval cooperation and continued bi- and tri-national military deployment around the globe all count as examples of best practice. However, Belgian Defence must keep its eye on the future as well. The Scorpion Program allow for intense cooperation with France, as does the procurement of the F-35's with Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway. Finally, other hiatus must be filled with new ideas and new types of cooperation. International cooperation is required in order to offer our soldiers proper CBRN-protection and medical care in operations.

There is only one way forward in order to guarantee a real and proper European security, the European way forward.

Make animal rights a constitutional right

Volt demands the welfare and dignity of animals to be included in the Belgian constitution. Animals are sensitive creatures that should have their rights to be defended. Because public opinion has evolved demanding the rights of animals to be adequately defended. is therefore high time that our Constitution evolves. Other countries, including our European neighbours such as Germany, Luxembourg and Switzerland already have animal protection embedded in their constitutions.

The Belgian Constitution is based on a series of divergent and fundamental principles, such as the right to the protection of a healthy environment. Animal protection definitely belongs tothat list. It has since been scientifically proven that animals (certainly the species with which we surround ourselves and which we use) have a consciousness. We therefore focus on the species that are known to be in pain and suffering experienced (i.e. at least all vertebrates, cephalopods and certain other molluscs).

This constitutional change will encourage governments to introduce increasingly better laws and policies to protect animals. This gives animals a fundamental basis that legally justifies the adoption of concrete measures. Moreover, this will give the Courts of Appeal, and in particular the Constitutional Court, legitimate reasons for judging the merits of a new law for the protection of animals.. Animals and their welfare will count much more and gain in value and importance for their own good. This will make our society more just. Caring for the most vulnerable anchors in the Constitution is proof of social civilization. It is an important step towards the recognition of legal personality for animals.