

Cross-border cooperation between North Rhine-Westphalia and the Benelux Union

The flirt of NRW with Benelux Membership

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Abstract

The flirt of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) with Benelux membership is best understood as a mix of garbage-can logic and strategic action. The negotiations for the renewal of the Benelux treaty offered an opportunity for NRW to increase cross-border cooperation (CBC) in the region. Interviews with civil servants working in cross-border networks and government reactions on advisory reports indicate social and cognitive fixations that prevented new forms of regional cooperation. The highly unrealistic suggestion of NRW that it could join the Benelux Union triggered reflection on what forms of cooperation are possible and what topics are relevant to the context of Benelux plus NRW. The result is that NRW and the Benelux now have a special partnership based on the belief that they are part of one highly interwoven and interdependent area.

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1. Introduction

On 3 February 1958, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg signed the Treaty establishing the Benelux Economic Union. The respective parliaments ratified the treaty and it came into force in 1960. In 2007, the member states started negotiations to renew the Benelux Treaty as it was due to expire in 2010. The treaty also had to be adapted, because Benelux cooperation had expanded beyond economic affairs. The German state of North Rhine-Westphalia followed the negotiations closely and expressed its interest to participate. Elsevier magazine wrote a story on the topic: *“flirt across the fence”* (Paans, 2008: 78). The article featured a brief overview of the relations between NRW and the Benelux states and a number of statements and reactions of politicians from NRW, the Netherlands and the Benelux secretariat. The flirt of the government of NRW is peculiar as there is no precedent of a sub-national state entering a treaty between nation states. The aim of this thesis is to explore this behaviour of the government of NRW. In my report I hope to shed some light onto why NRW would want to become part of the Benelux Union and how this could be explained.

In the Elsevier article, CDU party leader Helmut Stahl and Minister of European Affairs Andreas Krautscheid explain the idea of their government as ‘only fitting’ since the area already is interwoven. Still, there are plenty of bottlenecks in communication

that could be solved by greater cooperation, of which the great infrastructural projects such as the Betuwe route and airport Twente are two examples. NRW membership could also revitalise the status of the Benelux as an example for Europe and give it renewed splendour. The source for this sentiment is a declaration of the government party CDU from May 2007 that calls for a reinforced partnership with the Benelux. In this document the CDU uses the following arguments: an increased importance of regions within Europe; a long tradition of strong cooperation; a necessity to go beyond bilateral relations and an opportunity presented by the upcoming renewal of the Benelux treaty. While the Germans are full of enthusiasm, Dutch Secretary of European Affairs Timmermans reacts reserved to the flirt. The relation with Berlin and the status of the Benelux within the European framework might not be served by a warm welcome of NRW.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the reasons for the flirt of the government of NRW with the Benelux Union by means of a series of interviews with civil servants that are part of the network of cross-border cooperation. Based on a review of literature on CBC I have formulated two questions that I want to address in this thesis. First, I want to know what the circumstances of CBC are in the relevant area. Are the conditions of Markus Perkmann's analytical model of re-scaling present? Secondly, I want to analyse the action of NRW: the opportunities, problems and outcomes connected to the flirt. Can mechanisms of garbage-can logic and configuration management provide an

explanation? The interviews are the main source of data, these are supplemented by government publications, advisory reports and government responses, as well as a few media reports. I will structure my findings with the analytical model of re-scaling: political mobilisation, governance building and strategic unification. I will then apply models of garbage-can logic and configuration theory to create links between the arguments for increased cooperation and the observed behaviour of flirting with Benelux membership. These models differ on the importance of circumstances, opportunity and intended outcomes and I will describe the flirt of NRW in detail from each perspective. I will end my analysis with a discussion on how the strengths of the garbage-can and configuration explanations combined bring me to a more complete explanation. In the concluding remarks I will come back to the questions that I set out to answer. I will summarise the results and analysis of my research, and also reflect on recent developments. In the end, NRW was rewarded for its effort: on 9 December 2008 the Benelux states and North Rhine-Westphalia signed a political declaration stating their intention to develop greater cooperation in the region (Benelux and NRW, 2008).

2. Literature Review

The flirt of NRW with the Benelux Union is in essence an issue of multi-level governance. It is about dispersion of decision making away from the central state (Hooghe and Marks, 2003). NRW is a sub-national government whereas the Benelux is

a centre of authority on the same level as central states where its members choose to make decisions in cooperation. The article of Hooghe and Marks is concerned with the question of how multi-level governance should be organised (2003: 1). It seemed a good starting point for my exploration to see if the idea of a sub-national government joining an organisation of nation states makes sense theoretically. Hooghe and Marks distil two types of governance from different schools of political science, labelled Type 1 and Type 2. *“Type 1 governance is non-intersecting from the standpoint of membership, type 2 is non-intersecting from the standpoint of tasks”* (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 18). The Benelux Union matches most closely the Type 1 jurisdiction, it is composed of three national states that want to coordinate decision making relevant to the scale. The Benelux is primarily an economic union, but new policy areas have been taken up in Benelux context as they became relevant (Secretariaat-Generaal Benelux, 2008). Participation by NRW would violate two core principles of the type 1 structure: non-intersecting membership and system-wide architecture. NRW is from a territorial level below the nation state as it is only part of Germany. Moreover, the institutional design of the Benelux would have to become horribly complex since NRW is hierarchically bound to German law. Thus, the flirt of NRW with the Benelux would break the ideal-types of Hooghe and Marks, Benelux plus NRW is logically inconsistent. This still leaves me with the question of how this flirt can be explained. What I need is an analytical template to describe this strange attempt at multi-level governance. The framework of Markus

Perkmann, is designed to be used for case studies aimed at identifying types of 're-scaling' strategies (2007). In his article he applies the framework to the EUREGIO and concludes that the dimensions can be used for creating variations across different cases of scale construction (2007: 263). The concept of 'scale' or 're-scaling' refers to configuration of territorial governance, or "*the establishment of governance functions at a scale that is different from where they were previously situated*" (Perkmann, 2007: 256). At the core of this process are the dimensions of political mobilisation, governance building and strategic unification. The strategic unification dimension is what sets re-scaling apart from simpler or earlier forms of CBC. Sabine Weyand for example only identifies economic and political motivation and conviction of the need for joint or coordinated action as common features for cooperation between regions belonging to different nation states (1999: 167). The bid for membership to the Benelux Union, which itself is clearly a functional unit and object of intervention, should be explored as something more than normal CBC. It is important to explore in each of the dimensions of Perkmann, *what are the circumstances of cross-border cooperation between NRW and the Benelux Union?*

The framework of re-scaling is meant as an analytical tool for exploring how this process actually works (Perkmann, 2007: 257). In Perkmann's analysis of the EUREGIO, administrative considerations, entrepreneurial acting by the secretariat, and a shared vision of the cross-border space, led to the emergence of the EUREGIO as a

self-governing territorial unit. Interestingly, this determined behaviour seems to be at odds with Perkmann's earlier ideas. In his 1999 article on institution building across European Borders, Perkmann argues that literature on cross-border regions overemphasises deliberate strategy and that cross-border cooperation should rather be seen as an emergent effect. CBC governance involves: (1) a multiplicity of actors who operate in an institutional context of opportunities and constraints; (2) institutions which are never neutral contexts; (3) policy problems that are by no means well defined from the outset and (4) institutions that crucially affect the constitution of actors (Perkmann, 1999: 660-661). Perkmann concludes that CBC should be interpreted as loosely coupled interaction patterns of horizontal and vertical networks that are fertile arenas for new policy initiatives. He also expects that the emerging 'europolity' will open up opportunities for actor formation on a transnational level. From this perspective, the idea of NRW joining up with the Benelux Union is plausible.

We do have to realise that Perkmann only sees the outcome of CBC as a compounded effect when taking into consideration the large number of actors, interactions and the broad scope of activities. This complex environment causes actors to behave according to garbage-can logic, decisions are based on a limited perception of circumstances and centred around windows of opportunity (Perkmann, 1999: 660 cf. March and Olsen, 1989) Since I am only interested in a single action of one particular actor, chances are that I will find a pattern of deliberate strategy rather than a garbage-can logic. Therefore,

I will also apply the configuration management perspective of Termeer. His approach is a variation of network management that views problems in terms of fixation and proposes solutions such as context variation or re-framing. Networks are inherently dynamic, but sometimes a configuration of actors, interaction, and perception will stabilise beyond the desire of the actors to reflect: the configuration will become fixated (Termeer, 1992: 5-6). Re-framing is a possible solution to this situation and involves an illogical, irrational jump to stimulate reflection of the actors. It is this re-framing that drew my attention to the configuration approach, because the idea of NRW joining the Benelux seemed so out of place. To guide my exploration of the behaviour of NRW from the perspectives of Perkmann and Termeer I have formulated the question: *What opportunities does NRW see in flirting with the Benelux Union and to which objectives can this behaviour be linked?*

I now have three perspectives from which to explore the flirt of North-Rhine Westphalia with the Benelux Union; the re-scaling and garbage-can logic of Perkmann and the configuration management of Termeer. First, I will look at the circumstances of cross-border cooperation in the context of political mobilisation, governance building and strategic unification to see if there is a basis for NRW and the Benelux to form a new territorial scale within Europe. As Perkmann has shown in his example of the EUREGIO, a new scale can emerge from pre-existing forms of cooperation (2007: 258). However, since the reaction of Timmermans in the Elsevier article was reserved and the

article pointed to other legal and political difficulties, the prospects for re-scaling are poor. Building on the information gained while exploring the circumstances of CBC, I will explore the opportunities and objectives associated with the flirt of NRW from the perspective of a policy initiative that is an effect of something on an emergent 'europolity'. This second perspective of Perkmann is opposed to the idea of institutional change based on optimisation logic and contents that single actors pursue strategic action within their limited knowledge. In my analysis of the findings on the opportunities and objectives of NRW, I will also consider the configuration management perspective of Termeer and its concepts of fixation and re-framing. His idea is that deliberate action can bring about positive change for the configuration as a whole. I will end my analysis with bringing the perspectives together for a single explanation, but now I will clarify my method of research.

3. Methodology

To explore the flirt of NRW with the Benelux Union I have conducted a series of five interviews with civil servants. I have also reviewed a number of advisory reports and corresponding government responses. The interviews were one on one with people active in CBC on the Dutch-German border from the provinces of Overijssel, Gelderland, Limburg, the EUREGIO, and the state chancellery of North Rhine-Westphalia. The type of the interviews was qualitative with a limited number of

questions, aimed at triggering in-depth explanations. The interviewees were happy to share their insights and recommended most of the reports used in this thesis. In general the form of research in this thesis is a field research according to the typology of Peter Geurts (1999: 152). Important considerations for this type of research are: (1) the nature of data needed for the research purpose, (2) the time dimension, and (3) the number of cases investigated (Geurts, 1999: 155). I will cover each of these aspects separately since they all had an impact on the choices of my methodology, although slightly different from the alternatives offered in the extended paradigm of Riley that Geurts uses.

Since the original purpose of this thesis was to explore why NRW wanted to become part of the Benelux Union, what I needed the most was a number of possible explanations. One of the preliminary research questions that I used while creating the interview questions was "Why does NRW wish to change the current state of cross-border cooperation with the Benelux Union?". In the interviews, I phrased the question as "what do you think NRW wishes to achieve with its recent approach of the Benelux Union?" I followed up on this question by asking for the most important purpose of CBC and lessons that could be learned from other integration processes. Questions regarding circumstances and need for political mobilisation, governance building and strategic unification were originally not intended as such. These questions were meant to capture elements of Joachim Blatter's framework of political institution building. The

process of institution building in his perspective is based on either an instrumental or an identity formation rationale (2001: 181-183). But since the analytical model of re-scaling links much more directly to the question of why NRW wanted to join the Benelux, I replaced Blatter's analytical framework with that of Perkmann. Finding out if CBC is mostly based on an instrumental or identity formation rationale does not add as much as finding evidence for strategic unification. Both models use similar variables, so this change did not render my interviews useless. One last note on the data received in interviews: the interviewees made clear that their opinions and perspectives could in no way be interpreted as the position of their respective governments. Since the purpose of this research is to explore rather than prove an explanation to the point, such generalisations are not necessary.

On 17 June 2008 representatives of the members of the Benelux Union signed the treaty to revise the Treaty establishing the Benelux Economic Union, days before I would have my first interview. I used this opportunity to include questions on the new treaty in my interviews. I asked the civil servants from the provinces and the EUREGIO if the new framework fitted their ambitions for CBC. The civil servant of NRW I asked what outcome he expected and if the result had been discussed. These questions had not been relevant when starting my research. Since I did the interviews in the provinces and the EUREGIO first I had some more time to prepare for the final interview in Düsseldorf. The insights from the first interviews allowed me to replace some of the

questions regarding circumstances of CBC for questions directly related to topics and issues that I wanted to explore further such as *Augenhöhe* and Eurodelta. Time also affected my research negatively, as I did my interviews during summer recess and it was not possible to arrange interviews with the Euregio Rijn-Maas Noord and the Euregio Maas-Rijn within the period that I had reserved for doing interviews.

I also did not interview any civil servants from the Benelux secretariat, the ministries of the Benelux member states or the German federal government. The main reason for this is that most of the literature that I used on institution building and re-scaling, from Perkmann, Weyand and also Blatter's article from 2001 on a political multi-level system, did not discuss nation states as actively involved in CBC. Information gained in the interviews also pointed to a difficult relation with The Hague and Berlin when it came to topics of CBC. For the perspective of configuration management this information was interesting, but the focus of my research was on the opportunities and objectives perceived by NRW. After also considering the passive, dismissive attitudes of Timmermans and Laarhoven in the Elsevier article I decided that I could better limit my research to the CBC network between provinces, euregions and NRW. Below, I will present the findings of this effort.

4. Circumstances of CBC

In this chapter I will present the findings of my exploration of cross-border cooperation between NRW and the Benelux Union from the analytical perspective of territorial re-scaling. Over the last few decades the government of NRW has been increasingly active in CBC: there was more political motivation for collaboration, the number of contacts in cross-border networks increased and the government became more accessible for regional partners. The number of policy initiatives that were adopted or supported grew as well. Since the better part of the border shared between NRW and the Benelux is with the Netherlands, most cooperation involves NRW and the Netherlands. The first thing to discuss is the general context of NRW and the Benelux as these are the parts from which NRW would like to construct a new territorial scale. I have included the euregions as these are new territorial scales within the Benelux plus NRW area, and they are also relevant to the processes of political mobilisation, governance building, and strategic unification. When I have explored all processes relevant to the model of re-scaling I can answer the first research question: *“what are the circumstances of cross-border cooperation between NRW and the Benelux Union?”*

4.1. General context

North Rhine-Westphalia is one of the most influential states of the German federation: it has the largest population (18 Million); it contains the most important industrial area and

for a long time it held the seat of government (Bonn). NRW's political influence extends beyond the borders of Germany, and in 1986 it was the first German *Land* to open a representative office in Brussels. Together with the other institutionally and economically strong regions in Europe, NRW strives for a Europe of powerful regions (Weyand, 1999). NRW is also part of the European regional policy structure as the joint secretariat for implementation of the INTERREG IVA programme is located in Kleve and the ministries in Düsseldorf are responsible for management and audit functions.

The Benelux Economic Union is comprised of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg and was founded in 1944 by the governments in exile as a customs union. In 1958 it became an economic union and since the year 2010 its policy area include sustainable development, justice, and internal affairs. When the new treaty is ratified it will simply be known as 'the Benelux Union', but in this thesis I will simply refer to it as 'Benelux'. The Benelux has always had a special relationship with the European Union since all Benelux member states were part of the original founders of the EU. The EU has gradually expanded its competences first to match and later beyond the policy areas of the Benelux, but the subsequent treaties always contained the clause that EU provisions cannot frustrate realisation of the regional unions of Belgium and Luxembourg and that of Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

There are four cross-border regions (CBRs) that cover the border area between NRW and the Benelux: EUREGIO, Euregio Rijn-Waal, Euregio Rijn-Maas Noord, and Euregio Maas-Rijn. The euregions are diverse in legal status, composition and methods (ROB, 2008: 8). Each has a unique history from which they arrived at their current organisational structure, but they are similar in their activities and projects. Euregions are grassroots organisations that emphasise their local involvement by promoting cross-border cooperation within their society. Secondly, they are programme managers for the local implementation of INTERREG and derive most of their income from this role.

These are the territorial scales that define the area for which NRW would like to see a new scale emerge. I will now discuss the developments in the core dimensions of the re-scaling framework to see what elements point favourably to the formation of a new territorial scale.

4.2. Political mobilisation

Political mobilisation refers to the process through which coalitions of social forces are built and maintained. (Perkmann, 2007:258 c.f. Swyngedouw, 1996)

Cross-border cooperation with the western neighbours has only come on the political agenda in NRW after the 1990s, starting with the fall of the Berlin wall and the German re-unification. When Bonn was the capital of western Germany, NRW had little incentive

to get actively involved in CBC since it could maintain international relations through the *Bundestag*. However, when it became clear that the seat of government would move to Berlin, the political locus of power shifted to the east of Germany. The *Landesregierung* in Düsseldorf had to reorient its position within Germany and in relation to the neighbouring states. This led to the realisation that the welfare and economy of NRW is dependent on the Rhine axis that is the artery of the states industrial heart: the Ruhr area. A parallel development was the growing importance of regions within the European Union, marked by provisions in the Maastricht Treaty that include regions in the EU framework (Weyand 1999:178). NRW then diverted some of its political attention away from Berlin and to its neighbours (Interview 5). The result for cross-border cooperation of this shift in political attention was that the *Landesregierung* of NRW devoted more time and effort to CBC and that lower governments could more easily access NRW for the purpose of CBC initiatives. Cross-border cooperation in NRW is based on the principles of establishing contacts, maintaining relations, and trying to build coalitions in the region (Interview 5). As Dr. Krebs of the EUREGIO puts it, it is far more easy to get attention in Düsseldorf than in The Hague (Interview 4).

Actors that were glad to take advantage of the increased attention in Düsseldorf for CBC initiatives were the Dutch provinces of Overijssel, Gelderland and Limburg. There has been cross-border cooperation between NRW and the provinces since the 1970s in the form of the 3+3 dialogue of Dutch *Commissarissen van de Koningin* and German

Regierungspräsidenten (NRW, 2007: 17). The main motivation for this dialogue was to provide a platform for information exchange. The talks between the representatives that shared similar responsibilities occasionally led to cooperation initiatives. But as Doede Sijsma of the province of Gelderland explained, the lack of decision making authority among the participants ensured that the platform could never really do anything more than that (Interview 3). Cooperation on a higher level was for a long time not feasible because "*NRW is simply in a different league*" (Interview 3). The provinces found a solution to this issue with the realisation that they all had the same issue in their relation with the big German neighbour. It was standard practice for the provinces to cooperate in the policy areas for which they are responsible: spatial planning, environment, traffic, economic stimulation and risk management. All they had to do was solidify these coalitions and present themselves in unison as the regional partner for NRW (Interview 3). Combined, the provinces form a legitimate partner for NRW and a match has been made between *gedeputeerden* and Secretaries of State. The motivation for the political mobilisation of the provinces was strictly based in administrative and economic interests. Next to dealing with externalities, this involves lifting on NRW's capacity to lobby in Europe and with national governments (Interview 1). In none of the provinces I found much enthusiasm for coalition building in terms of a shared regional identity. Regional identity was more something for the immediate border area (Interview 1), or only as a 'face' to Europe (Interview 2).

For the EUREGIO, the increased attention for cross-border cooperation in NRW did not coincide with additional political mobilisation. It merely signified an upgrade in the number of projects initiated or stimulated by NRW (Interview 4). The reason for this is probably that the EUREGIO does not belong to the Rhine axis, but is part of the Amsterdam-Berlin connection. Also, the EUREGIO is already well established and coalitions have matured as it was founded back in 1958. Nationality is not even a factor anymore in the secretariat or in the EUREGIO institutions (Interview 4). Coalition building in the Euregio Maas-Rijn (EMR) however, is most definitely a process in progress. Strongly backed by the province of Limburg, this euregion has mobilised attention for issues caused by the presence of multiple borders in areas of education, labour market, health care, and infrastructure (Interview 2). The vision of the EMR is to become a laboratory for Europe by forming a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), a legal status created by the EU in 2006 (EC, 1082/2006). To achieve this, the EMR needs cooperation from the national governments and the European Union. The Benelux and NRW could provide assistance here, but N. Herzhig of the province of Limburg expects more from NRW than from the Benelux as the importance of the latter is diminishing within Europe (Interview 2).

The member states of the Benelux would probably not agree that its importance is diminishing, considering the recent effort to revitalise the project. Since its beginning, the Benelux Union has always been about economic cooperation. Political cooperation

between the Benelux member states is separate from the economic integration (AIV, 2007: 8). As is evident from the report of the Adviesraad voor Internationale Vraagstukken (AIV) and the cabinet's reaction, it is the ability to function as a laboratory for European cooperation that stimulates the members to continue with the Benelux Economic Union (AIV, 2007, MBZ, 2007). At the same time, the enthusiasm for the laboratory model is not extended to the political domain. Political mobilisation in the Benelux has always been inter-governmental. The institutions of the Benelux never had any supranational authority, nor is it part of the new treaty. The Minister rejected suggestions by the AIV to increase the political cooperation by formalising procedures for making Benelux memoranda. For the Dutch government, to revitalise the Benelux Union means bringing back focus in the tasks and increasing the visibility of the Union (MBZ, 2007).

It is clear from the discussion above that most political mobilisation for cross-border cooperation has been driven by economic interests. Yet, the example of the Dutch provinces demonstrates that there are social processes going on behind the scene. The inability of the provinces to directly cooperate with NRW was based in the belief that one can only cooperate with actors that are 'in the same league'. In the Dutch-German border area, this social dimension is complicated by the incongruence problem: because public authority is dispersed differently in the two countries it is difficult to find the appropriate partner in any given policy field (ROB, 2008: 28). In German, this

problem is called *Augenhöhe*, which translates to ‘eye height’. The German definition reveals the social nature of the problem, it is not so much a matter of having trouble finding the correct partner as it is about recognising partners as being equal. NRW prefers to look for cooperation in The Hague, The Hague wants to talk to Berlin and Berlin prefers to arrange things in Europe with Paris and London (Interview 3). Only by forming a coalition did the provinces receive recognition by NRW as partners worthy of attention. In NRW the issue of *Augenhöhe* is seen as something that melts away when initial contacts have been established (Interview 5). For the practical side of cooperation this may be true, but when it comes to forming coalitions and attitudes towards partners with a different set of competences I am sceptical.

Authorities try to find policy solutions in cross-border cooperation to improve the economic situation of their jurisdictions. Only in the cases of the Euregio Maas-Rijn and North Rhine-Westphalia I found political mobilisation for new forms of regional coalition building. There is however one other process for forming a social basis that I found in my interviews: the exchange of civil servants to get acquainted with each other’s culture. All interviews contained references to this phenomenon but I got no information that the practice of exchanges extends to politicians: apparently they don’t call each other (Interview 5). It may be that for politicians the *Augenhöhe* issue is a real concern and that for civil servants the practical considerations override any reservations.

4.3. Governance building

Governance building refers to emerging arrangements for channelling political and other interests and coordinating decision making. (Perkmann, 2007: 258 c.f. Balme and Jouve, 1996)

Let me stress first that governance building is not primarily about the legal competencies and decision making mechanisms of public law. Relevant sources of regulations for cross-border cooperation between NRW and the Benelux would be the agreements of Anholt and Mainz, EGTS and the Benelux treaty. But these examples are of little importance to the actors that operate in cross-border regions. Local conditions of bottlenecks and opportunities determine the structure: "*form follows substance*" (ROB, 2008: 8). At best legal frameworks stress the commitment to cooperation and can be used to push the participants into action (Interview 5). It is the networked arrangements spawned from voluntary cooperation within the context of a pragmatically defined set of rules that are important (Perkmann, 2007: 259). The arrangement of the three Dutch provinces presenting themselves as one regional partner to NRW is a good example. Below, I will further explore this network and other arrangements. During my research, I found two operational structures of networked relationships connecting NRW to actors in the Benelux area and some evidence hinting at the start of networked relationships between NRW and institutions of the Benelux Union.

First let me discuss the network structure of NRW and the provinces, headed by cooperation between *gedeputeerden* and Secretaries of State. As described in the previous chapter, cooperation started with the 3+3 dialogue between *Commissarissen van de Koningin* and *Regierungspräsidenten*, but they lacked authority to create substantive policy. Since the provinces have started approaching NRW with combined effort, connections have expanded to all the policy areas where both parties have competence. Policies and projects are prepared in working groups of civil servants from the provinces, *Regierungsbezirke*, and the *Landesregierung*. Politicians always make the final decision (Interview 1). Results can be simply informative, such as the map of all spatial planning projects for the border area from the Dutch-German regional planning committee sub-commission South, or they can involve active policy deployment such as the early warning system for flood risks VIKING. I would classify the network as horizontal and technocratic: most of the connections involve problem-solving topics in policy areas where both parties have competence, dealt with by expert civil servants. Two features make the structure multi-level: the use of euregions for project management and the necessity to involve the Dutch government for formalising arrangements. Policy making often involves starting cross-border projects, which in turn means securing financial resources to deploy them and assigning personnel to project management. The INTERREG programme is the most important source of funds for cross-border projects, and incidentally the euregions are both the relevant project areas

for INTERREG programmes and a source for experienced personnel in project management (Interview 4). When the result of cooperation involves political commitments to align policy, as is the case in the VIKING project, the Dutch central government needs to be involved as a signing party since the Dutch provinces cannot commit to international agreements independently. These features aside, the core governance building process in this network is the growing number of experts in the ministries of NRW and the Dutch provinces that see cross-border cooperation as an integral part of their function (Interview 5). Nevertheless, CBC does not happen if its not supported by politicians who allocate the necessary resources (Interview 3).

INTERREG is more than a means for decentralised governments to deploy projects: it is a vertical network structure connecting local authorities with the European Commission and everything in between. Because of the importance of INTERREG for cross-border initiatives and cross-border regions, its structure has already been thoroughly documented in literature (Perkmann, 1999, 2007 and Weyand, 1999). I will therefore limit my discussion of INTERREG to the observations from my interviews. While in the working groups of provinces and NRW the main concern is channelling administrative and political interests for problem solving, the INTERREG structure is the dominant structure for channelling economic interests. As with any discussion whereby money is involved, it is much more prone to conflict. An often heard complaint is that The Hague is inattentive when it comes to payment of Euregio projects. It is suggested

that this is caused by the withdrawn attitude of the ministry of economic affairs: apparently it does not take an active role in coordinating INTERREG subsidies for the other ministries, nor does it finance projects without a clear economic profile (Interview 5). From the evidence of actual participation in funding INTERREG projects, it can be concluded that the Dutch government is practically not part of the INTERREG network structure: most projects are financed by the EU, NRW and the provinces (INTERREG IV A, 2010). This is in very stark contrast to the importance of INTERREG in NRW's cross-border policy. The report on all efforts in cross-border cooperation of the *Landesregierung* to the parliament of NRW is full of projects deployed in INTERREG context. It is probably safe to say that the positive attitude towards NRW that I experienced in my interviews with the provinces and the EUREGIO is largely due to the active role that NRW plays in managing the secretariat for the INTERREG programme Germany-Netherlands. After all: *"the main purpose of cross-border cooperation is calculated self-interest"* (Interview 3).

Lastly, a network structure between NRW and the Benelux Union is in the process of starting up. As mentioned earlier, NRW shifted its political attention away from Berlin and towards its western neighbours. The resulting cross-border cooperation was first based on two pillars: establishment and maintenance of contacts and bilateral cooperation in practice (Interview 5). NRW wants to add a third pillar to the base, namely cooperation with the region as a whole. For the Benelux Union this has become

increasingly more relevant as its own focus is shifting from economic integration towards cross-border cooperation (NRW 2007:118). The result is that NRW can start to participate as observer in Benelux institutions and cooperate in some projects. In this phase it is important to find the topics for which NRW plus Benelux cooperation is meaningful, as first the Benelux must be active in a policy field and then NRW must have competence in the matter as well (Interview 5). One such a suitable topic is infrastructure, on which the Benelux secretariat organised a conference between Dutch, Flemish, Walloon and North Rhine-Westphalian governments. More topics are expected, as the new Benelux treaty opens up the possibility to cooperate with neighbouring countries, states or public entities for the formulation or execution of its programmes (Benelux, 2008: art.25). NRW has grasped this opportunity immediately and in the annual program for 2010 we already find a paragraph on cross-border cooperation between the Benelux Union and NRW. It involves the policy areas of regional planning, particulate matter, police and crisis response. Moreover, NRW has appointed a liaison officer for the Benelux secretariat (Benelux, 2010: 10). It appears that NRW is slowly building up ties with the Benelux decision making structure.

From the instances of governance building that I discussed above, it seems that there is more integration of NRW with its neighbours in actual structures of cooperation and decision making than there was a shared movement for political mobilisation. Provinces have expanded their network with NRW from the simple 3+3 dialogue to

cooperation in all shared policy areas and have involved both civil servants and politicians. NRW is also one of the key actors in the vertical network of INTERREG projects and is thus involved in the most practical application of cross-border cooperation. Lastly, even though the Benelux is not much of a political vehicle, NRW is gaining entrance in the Benelux decision making structure as an observer and occasional participant.

4.4. Strategic unification

Strategic unification refers to the construction of a new scale as a unit and object for politico-territorial intervention, constituting a link between strategic intervention and the (intended) effects to be achieved on economic and social processes affecting the territorial scale. (Perkmann, 2007: 258 c.f. Colomy, 1999)

Whereas political mobilisation is about forging coalitions on a social base, strategic unification is about an appeal to a certain vision of the scale under construction. Cooperation is more than a means to achieve general goals in terms of creating economic prosperity, improving communication or solving border issues. The institution building process is rationalised on grounds of realising the vision of a cross-border space (Perkmann, 2007: 262). For the EUREGIO, a structural analysis in favour of locally organised CBC coupled with a ceremonial discourse on European integration on the small scale provided the resources to make construction of the EUREGIO as a

functional scale possible. In my research, the most promising concept for a territorial unit that is relevant to the scale of NRW and the Benelux is the 'Eurodelta'.

Eurodelta refers to the economically coherent area consisting of parts of the Netherlands, Belgium and North Rhine-Westphalia, defined by the presence of the rivers Rijn, Waal and Maas (Interview 2). Its coherence is based on economic interdependence and logistics: the Ruhr area as the hinterland of the harbours of Antwerp, Rotterdam and Amsterdam. The Eurodelta area contains and connects all the major economic and demographic clusters: Randstad, Vlaamse Ruit and Ruhr. The problem is that these metropolitan areas are nationally oriented (Interview 5). The Eurodelta is the focus of NRW's political attention when it seeks to increase its economic prosperity by cross-border cooperation (Interview 2). A statement of NRW Prime Minister Jürgen Rüttgers illustrates the point: *"The Ruhr metropolis must be connected to the Seaports. It is in the interest of the NRW-Benelux region to complete the Betuwe route and reactivate the Iron Rhine"* (NRW, 2007: 17).

The term Eurodelta was coined by the Dutch *Raad voor Verkeer en Waterstaat* (RVW) in their 2005 report 'Cooperation in the Eurodelta'. This report by one of the advisory bodies for government and parliament, contains a structural analysis of coherence in the Eurodelta area and arguments for developing a joint strategic vision of the future. Like the Council of Europe report that helped construct the EUREGIO as a

scale, the analysis of the RVW contains a bundle of objectives and some general guidelines for developing the Eurodelta concept. The advice involves bringing together the euregional networks, making the Eurodelta an object of research and promoting the area as a whole (RVW, 2005: 36-37). Although this report was credited by the people I interviewed in the border area, it received little support from the minister in The Hague. The reaction of the minister did not contain any reference to working towards a vision for the Eurodelta, instead it boils down to facilitating and supporting cross-border cooperation in the regions without taking active part (MVW, 2006). This effectively removed the potential of Eurodelta becoming the object of strategic unification.

On the idea of using the concept of Benelux plus North Rhine-Westphalia as the object of strategic unification no such structural analysis exists. After all, the reason for doing this research was that the idea is completely new. Yet, both the Elsevier article and the Düsseldorf Erklärung used the image of Benelux-plus to conjure up a future of renewed vitality for the Benelux: an example of European cooperation, centre of innovation and political force within the enlarged union (CDU, 2007). It seems like an attempt to mobilise political support by referring to the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions', a concept discussed by Sabine Weyand (1999). However, this concept applies to regions on the level below nation states that share common problems and/or interest for which joint action is needed. The Benelux treaty is not a vehicle for such a regional identity because there is no shared identity (Interview 1). Alternatively, 'Europe of the

Regions' may refer to the formation of coalitions between countries as a new dynamic in EU negotiations (AIV, 2007). Europe is still very much a community of countries, so Benelux-plus in this political sense can not include NRW. Sub-national states have no voting power in the EU, nor can they be involved in the enhanced cooperation procedure. The image invoked of NRW plus Benelux as a region within the EU mismatches with two concepts of a 'Europe of the Regions'. Support from followers of either discourse seems unlikely, although it could appeal to both sides. I did not find evidence to rule out either option.

There has been plenty of governance building, even though motivation for regional coalition building was low in both the border area and the Benelux Union. Both concepts that have the potential of becoming the focus of a shared ambition for strategic unification of the region are not widely supported. Dutch government dismissed the idea of the Eurodelta as an integrated economic space as it sees the area through the lens of competition for attracting investments. NRW plus Benelux as a political region, representing the future of European Integration, does not quite match current ideas on a Europe of the Regions. Besides, Dutch government had already rejected formalisation of Benelux Political Cooperation so why would it support Benelux-plus?

In my discussion of the circumstances of cross-border cooperation between NRW and the Benelux I found that there were only a few elements that pointed favourably to a

process of re-scaling. A shared vision of working together on creating something new as Perkmann had observed for the EUREGIO was simply not present. The problem of Augenhöhe had a negative impact in the social dimension. The difference in attention for CBC between the governments of the Netherlands and North Rhine-Westphalia is clear in dimension of governance building. The rejection of the Eurodelta concept in The Hague blocked an option for strategic unification. These are the circumstances of cross-border cooperation between NRW and the Benelux. As expected, my exploration of the first research question revealed that there is not enough evidence to suggest that NRW and Benelux are building a new territorial scale. Therefore, I will now explore the opportunities and objectives of the flirt with Benelux membership for the government of NRW.

5. Reasons for the flirt

In this chapter, I will explore possible explanations for why the government of NRW would flirt with Benelux membership under the circumstances described in the previous chapter. In the perspectives of Perkmann and Termeer I have two mechanisms by which I can link the flirt of NRW to opportunities and objectives perceived by the government. In Perkmann's perspective, the flirt is based on garbage-can logic and the main variable is the opportunity presented by the renewal of the Benelux treaty. Termeer would consider the fixation of current cross-border relations in the region and explain the flirt

as a re-framing effort to remove this fixation. I will first work out both explanations in as much detail as I can from the information that I collected and then discuss the merits of each. With the knowledge of both models I can answer the second research question: *“What opportunities does NRW see in flirting with the Benelux Union and to which objectives can this behaviour be linked?”*

5.1. Garbage-can logic

Before discussing my research findings from the perspective of Markus Perkmann, let me summarise his views and his observations on cross-border cooperation. The starting point for Perkmann is that CBC governance cannot be seen as the realisation of deliberate strategies because of: *“...the loosely coupled interaction patterns, the considerable number of participating actors, and the broadly defined policy objectives...”* (1999: 665). Conjunctions of circumstances and windows of opportunity are the key explanatory variables in strategies that follow garbage-can logic. The loose nature of the networks makes CBC a fertile arena for trying out new policy initiatives. Perkmann ends his conclusion with the observation that through the action of CBC, opportunity structures are created for actor formation on a transnational level (1999: 665). I will now analyse if this could be the case with the flirt of NRW.

An explanation of the flirt of NRW as a strategy of garbage-can logic is based on a combination of circumstances and windows of opportunities. Since the relevant window

of opportunity for the flirt of NRW is quite obviously the negotiations for renewal of the Benelux treaty, this is where to start searching for issues and objectives. Negotiations began in spring 2007 and the CDU party from NRW's *Landestag* was very much aware of this. The *Düsseldorfer Erklärung* already speaks of a once in a lifetime opportunity presented by the expiration of the old treaty. German press reports the initial reactions of politicians from the Benelux states as ranging from positive to reluctant (FAZ, 2007). CDU chairman Helmut Stahl and other emissaries, work hard to promote the idea among politicians in the Benelux, circumstances seem perfect as Christian Democrats are represented in all governments (Duitslandweb, 2007). When I took notice of these events in Dutch media from Elsevier Magazine, the Minister of European Affairs Andreas Krautscheid was also involved and the goal of Benelux membership was nuanced a little compared to earlier press releases. This nuance is probably due to reactions that it would be impossible under international law and because CDU needed to make a common stance with coalition partner FDP (Westfälische Rundschau, 2008).

Whenever the economic ties between NRW and the Benelux are mentioned, it is in connection to the ports of Antwerp, Rotterdam, Amsterdam and Duisburg. Increased cooperation is needed to strengthen the infrastructure between the Ruhr area and the Seaports. Whatever else happens, there can be no more failures like the Betuwe route or the Iron Rhine. Arguments used in press releases that focus on economy, seem like a direct reference to the report on the Eurodelta by the Raad voor Verkeer en Waterstaat.

The RVW already signalled that while only parts of the Netherlands, Belgium, and North Rhine-Westphalia show a high degree of economic interdependence, taking the whole NRW plus Benelux area might be more convenient for administrative purposes (RVW, 2005: 16). Yet, the report also mentions that for the purpose of enhancing the coherence of the economic integrated area, such an administrative dimension would not be necessary. If the behaviour of North Rhine-Westphalia is explained from garbage-can logic, such a subtle nuance in a report does not matter. What counts is that the 'Eurodelta' report was published only a year and a half before the *Düsseldorfer Erklärung*. The line of reasoning from the Eurodelta report is easily modified to suit the occasion: 'enhanced cooperation in Eurodelta is needed' is transformed into 'enhanced cooperation in NRW plus Benelux context is needed'.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact goal of the negotiations from the various press releases and statements. Was membership seriously the ultimate goal?; was a form of special partnership everything NRW wished for?; or was anything fine as long as cross-border cooperation in the region got an impulse? The *Düsseldorfer Erklärung* speaks of trying for a special partnership, but in the press releases following this declaration Stahl comments on the legal difficulties of joining the Benelux Union (FAZ, 2007). In the government report to NRW's parliament, the stated goal of the effort is a 'deepened partnership' and the concrete objective is to participate in the future development of Benelux cooperation (2007: 118). In the publication of Elsevier one month later, the

desire for actually joining the Benelux Union is back but Andreas Krautscheid would not be disappointed with a status just below full membership (2008: 79). From my interviews, I also got this impression that there was some uncertainty as to the goal of the talks with the Benelux states. Based on my last interview, I think that in the end NRW was after cooperation in the multilateral context, preferably written down in a political declaration. From my discussion of the variation in stated goals between the various sources, it is most likely that this 'final' objective was formed in a context of several actors that shaped the agenda of NRW over the course of the negotiations with the Benelux states. However, It is also very well possible that there was no predetermined goal at all and that Stahl adapted the message to the audience. Official documents such as the *Düsseldorfer Erklärung* and the report to the *Landestag* voiced the more reasonable goal of special partnership and the desire to increase cooperation. The idea of joining the Benelux as a member was only a juicy story for the media (Interview 4). Either option fits within the garbage-can model: evolution of the goal during the negotiations or strategic behaviour of Stahl to get his agenda across in different contexts. I cannot rule out either explanation with the material available to me.

Another element in the material published over the course of the negotiations is the lack of clear relation between the problems identified and the 'solution' of NRW plus Benelux cooperation. When reading the Elsevier article it even seems as if the problems have not actually been identified at all: "*Krautscheid has asked the ministries in his state*

to put down a list of problems in cooperation with the Benelux States" (2008: 80). This is exactly what Perkmann means when he writes that the object of governance evolves with the operation of governance institutions (1999: 660). It is an attitude of 'build up an institution first and we'll figure out what to do with it along the way'. In the *Düsseldorfer Erklärung* we find the same absence of a direct link between actual problems and institution building. The most explicit reason is the idea that cross-border cooperation on the regional level increases understanding of citizens for the 'European thought'. But I already concluded on the basis of the article of Weyand and my first interview that this 'Europe of the Regions' idea only applies to the local CBC. The argument for NRW plus Benelux becomes even less substantiated when it is proposed on the basis of making a strong political voice in Europe and the opportunity to perform a laboratory role for new forms of European integration. There is no forum for a political NRW plus Benelux voice within the European framework. Neither is there a place for NRW in the council of ministers, nor can NRW participate in enhanced cooperation procedures. Benelux political cooperation alone is already difficult and a common position can only be found occasionally, adding in NRW would complicate reaching consensus even more. Reaching consensus becomes especially complicated when the principle of subsidiarity is involved. The ability of the Benelux Union to function as a laboratory for EU cooperation is based on the EU treaty provisions that protect development of the regional union from infringement by EU regulations, but regional cooperation with NRW

is not covered. NRW may be aiming for increased cooperation in Benelux context, but *"...the nature of the policy problem is by no means well defined from the outset"* (Perkmann, 1999: 660).

The perspective of garbage-can logic would explain the flirt of North Rhine-Westphalia with the Benelux Union as follows. The opportunity presented by the renewal of the Benelux treaty spurred political action in NRW. The Benelux Union is an excellent substitute for the concept of Eurodelta when economic ties are emphasised to explain the importance of increased cooperation. What form the increased cooperation should take exactly evolved with ongoing negotiations or was presented differently depending on the audience. Actors in the government of NRW sought policy problems while at the same time the talks on forms of cooperation were taking place. Problems were by no means well defined from the outset. It was the time for action, details could come later.

5.2. Configuration management

Configuration theory explains the flirt of NRW with the Benelux Union from a rather different perspective. The key difference with the garbage-can logic of Perkmann is that institutional change is about intervention when fixation occurs (Termeer, 1992: 12). Intended change is the dominant factor instead of windows of opportunity. In the article of Termeer individual actors are the relevant units, but I have very little information on

the individual actors involved. Since the configuration theory is centred on the process itself and the link between social and cognitive dimensions, this should not be much of a problem. Explanatory variables are the interaction patterns and reality definitions that can become fixated. Context variation and re-framing are the strategies that can be used to break this fixation (Termeer, 1992: 12). I will first assess the situation in terms of social and cognitive fixation and then explain how the flirt of NRW can be seen as an attempt at re-framing.

In my research findings I described the issue of *Augenhöhe* as a problem in the social dimension that had a negative effect on coalition building in cross-border relations. Because of the differences in dispersion of authority between public actors in NRW and the Benelux, it is difficult for actors to see their partners as being equal. In this case, the Benelux countries look down on NRW because it is only one state of the German federation. The Benelux Union is an exclusive club, even recognised as such in the EU treaty. Within the Benelux Union, its member states can engage in multilateral cooperation without interference of EU institutions or fights over interpretation of the subsidiarity principle. There is no external 'force' to dictate the actions of the members. Under these conditions, it is not strange that the Netherlands is reluctant to change anything in the interaction pattern. The government's reaction on the AIV's advice to formalise elements of Benelux political cooperation was that it considered the informal nature to be its strength, making consensus seeking a 'duty' would only undermine its

effectiveness (MBZ, 2007). This is what Termeer refers to as social fixation, there was a strong desire to leave interactions as they were and alternatives were rejected out of hand.

The rejection of the Eurodelta concept and the difference in attention for CBC are the issues that belong to the cognitive dimension. In both these issues, the perception of the Dutch government was locked in a reality definition and it rejected alternative perceptions. In the case of the Eurodelta, the prevailing perception was one of national orientation. The RVW signals that policy is aimed predominantly at national areas of economic priority (RVW, 2005: 17). The council challenges this practice and recommends that policy should be focused on strengthening the regional components of economic interdependence. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) provides the argument for this recommendation in their 2005 report on regional development, which concludes that economic development is increasingly concentrated in 'strong' regions (RVW, 2005: 20). The empirical findings of the RVW suggest that the Eurodelta as a whole is such a region. In the reaction of the Minister there is not a hint of making development of the region as whole the main priority of policy: *"this advice provides valuable insights and leads for internationalizing Dutch policy"* (MVW, 2006). The whole point of the Eurodelta report was that it advised to not create Dutch policy, but a *"joint Dutch-Belgian-German strategic vision"* (RVW,

2005: 35). The minister only accepted the bits of the Eurodelta report that could be fitted in the national orientation.

In her reaction the Minister also speaks about being open to signals of barriers in CBC on the regional level and she is willing to contribute her thoughts on initiatives from the border regions. This is a testament to the second fixation in the perception of the Dutch government: the role of national government in cross-border cooperation is passive and focused on facilitating lower levels of government. There has been progress in cross-border cooperation on the national level in a number of policy areas even without permanent attention from the government, but it is dependent on the motivation of an administration to pick up the topic. Attention comes in cycles and initiatives of previous administrations are abandoned or forgotten (ROB, 2008: 73). This is a problem, as all my interviewees stressed the importance of political attention for CBC as a necessary factor for success. The advice of the *Raad voor het Openbaar Bestuur* (ROB) contains two proposals to secure permanent attention for CBC in the future. First: make CBC an explicit task of a member of the administration. The advice also speaks of a number of softer variations on this, but any solution that gives the responsibility to a civil servant instead of a politician is insufficient (Interview 1). Second: integrate attention for CBC in the departments so that new policy is checked for unintended consequences to the border regions, the 'border test' (ROB, 2008: 74). The purpose of these proposals could be to recreate the effect that I found in Düsseldorf. I

could not get a precise answer to the question how many people in the departments of NRW were involved in cross-border cooperation because it was more and more becoming part of the routines of civil servants (Interview 5). Implementing these proposals would signify a shift to a more active involvement of national government in cross-border cooperation, but as was the case with the advice on cooperation in the Eurodelta it was not taken up in The Hague. The 'border test' would be too much of an administrative burden and the signalling task could better be done by provinces and municipalities. Members of the administration are to be more open for signals from regional authorities (MBZ, 2008). Active involvement in CBC is delegated to a Task Force, exactly the sort of thing that was pointless according to Van der Kamp (Interview 1). The perception that the role of national government in CBC is that of facilitator to the local and regional governments remains unchanged.

If these are the fixations, then how can the flirt of NRW with Benelux membership break them and bring about a positive change for NRW? The key is that the social and cognitive dimensions are interlinked (Termeer, 1992: 8). Changes in one component of the configuration will have an effect in the other dimension. Fixations in one dimension affect the other component of the configuration as well. Forming a closed circle of members will prevent access of new reality perceptions to the group. The fixations that I perceived from the information that I gathered can be linked likewise. The idea that cross-border cooperation is something for regional and local governments could be part

of a more general perception: sub-national governments have cross-border cooperation, whereas national governments have international relations. It is the same thing except that the latter implies that its for nations only, thus, it excludes cooperation with sub-national governments from other countries. Alternatively, because the Dutch government is not open to changing the rules of interaction in the Benelux, the idea of creating a vision for the Eurodelta is dismissed as well. Benelux political cooperation is rejected so creating a highly political 'strategic vision' is not even discussed. When there are fixations in both the social and cognitive dimensions, the method of re-framing could be a solution as it is aimed at changing perceptions, behaviour, and relations (Termeer, 1992: 14). This method presumes using an irrational, illogical jump or paradigm shift.

The statement of Helmut Stahl that NRW was interested in membership of the Benelux Union was a trigger for the Benelux states, or the Netherlands in particular, to start thinking differently about cross-border cooperation with North Rhine-Westphalia. It triggered the question of whether that was even possible, thus forcing the Benelux states to reflect on the possible relations with NRW. Prime Ministers Juncker of Luxembourg and Leterme of Belgium offered privileged partnership in answer to the statements of Stahl's CDU (FAZ, 2007). Negotiators from NRW could talk with representatives of the Benelux states about what sort of relationship was possible and agreeable to all. Then the next question that must have been raised is 'what do we want with it?'. The parties would have to choose topics that are the shared concern of NRW

and the Benelux Union. The area affected would have to be NRW plus the Benelux or most of it and the topic at least somewhat economic for the Benelux Union as an authority to be involved: basically they would have to pick topics that are the concern of the Eurodelta. As the RVW had observed, NRW plus the Benelux could provide a forum of governance for the economically integrated area (2005: 16). When a proper relation between NRW and the Benelux is found and the topics for cooperation decided, the new form of cooperation can be put into practice. In the new Benelux treaty, states bordering on the Benelux can participate in the formation and implementation of its programmes (art. 25). This means that least civil servants of NRW and the Benelux states will be working together in the workgroups of the Benelux Union. Multilateral cooperation in a regulated structure will make any distinction between CBC and international relations obsolete and *Augenhöhe* will cease to be a problem through regular contact.

The explanation of the behaviour of NRW from a configuration theory perspective starts with the flirt itself. The outrageous idea of Helmut Stahl to make NRW member of the Benelux Union was the trigger to resolve the fixations that were making cooperation in the region difficult. It triggered reflection on the sort of relations that the Benelux could have with external parties. It also triggered the question of what is important for the combined NRW plus Benelux area, to which the answer is managing risks and opportunities in the highly interwoven Eurodelta. In the new Benelux treaty we can

already see that the Benelux opens itself up to cooperation with others. It seems like for NRW, a high opening bid is a negotiation strategy with merits.

5.3. Discussion

The information that I gathered during my research can be used as input for both explanation models. They differ in what pieces of information are considered to be important, how the explanation mechanism links these pieces of information, and what factor to attribute the flirt of NRW to in the end. Yet, the perspectives do not necessarily contradict each other and could very well be used in combination.

The contribution of the configuration model is a link between the problems observed in interviews and reports and the action of NRW in the media that first brought me to this topic. But configuration theory as I understood it from the article of Termeer does not contain any reference to windows of opportunity as a variable. Instead, the source for actions such as re-framing is the configuration manager: *"an actor, to whom the task of configuration manager has been given or who has taken this task upon himself"* (Termeer, 1992: 15). The position of configuration manager can be filled by an actor with respected authority in the absence of a formal hierarchy. Fact of the matter is that NRW may be respected, but it does not have a position of authority within the Benelux states. A configuration manager may take that role upon himself, but from the literature it appears that he should at least be accepted in this role by the network. I

cannot find an explanation in configuration theory for why it is NRW that pursues a re-framing strategy and for what the significance is of the renewal of the Benelux treaty.

This is precisely what a garbage-can model does best: linking strategic action to windows of opportunity. The window of opportunity was of course the renewal of the Benelux treaty. Helmut Stahl also saw a window of opportunity in the renewal of the treaty and a decision opportunity in the fact that Christian Democrats were part of the administrations of all four states. It was the time for action, but what? A garbage-can model is a bit complicated when it comes to identifying problems, agendas, and actors. I would have to search for factors that could affect the decision outcome at the right time or were privileged by the institutions involved (Perkmann, 1999: 660). At best I have a number of factors that were present, but no way to measure their influence on the outcome. Such an analysis is certainly possible, but it is not within the scope of this research project.

The best explanation for the flirt of NRW that I can give with the information and analytic tools available to me is that:

The negotiations for the renewal of the Benelux treaty provided the opportunity for North Rhine-Westphalia to pursue a strategy of re-framing. The objective was to trigger the Benelux states into reflection on the relations that the Benelux could have with NRW, resulting in cooperation relevant to the Eurodelta area.

6. Conclusion

This thesis explored cross-border cooperation between North Rhine-Westphalia and the Benelux states, in particular the Netherlands, in the case of the flirt of NRW with Benelux membership. I applied three perspectives from literature on the information gained from interviews and publications, from which the following conclusions can be drawn.

First, there is not enough evidence of political mobilisation and strategic unification to suggest that there is a deliberate strategy to construct a territorial scale on the level of NRW plus Benelux, although there has been a steady process of governance building between NRW and different levels of government across the border. Networked structures in all sorts of policy areas have sprung up to work on information exchange, policy creation, and project management. These structures are only based on economic and administrative concerns and are not accompanied by coalition formation on the level of NRW plus Benelux. There is coalition formation between the Dutch provinces and in the Euregio Maas-Rijn, but suggestions for tightening the Benelux more as a political unit by the AIV were rejected. The same happened to suggestions by the RVW to treat the economically integrated 'Eurodelta' as a unit. NRW seems to be alone its idea of a *'europäische Kernregion'*.

The region as a whole is not working on the construction of a new territorial scale, but that does not stop NRW from trying to improve cooperation in the region. The best explanation for the flirt of NRW with Benelux membership that this thesis can provide is a mix of garbage-can logic and a re-framing strategy. The negotiations for the renewal of the Benelux treaty provided the opportunity for North Rhine-Westphalia to pursue a strategy of re-framing. Practical problems and fitting solutions were of later concern, it was the time for action. The attitude of the Dutch government towards cross-border cooperation and on the dynamics of Benelux cooperation needed quite some shaking up. At present, it seems like NRW succeeded.

The 2008 Benelux treaty introduced the option of external relations for Benelux purposes. NRW grasped this opportunity immediately and found its way into the first Benelux programme based on the new rules. Apart from topics like regional planning and police cooperation that had already been part of NRW-Benelux cooperation, something new was introduced: a liaison officer in the Benelux secretariat. Since communication is key in solving the *Augenhöhe* issue, this novelty is fairly significant. It might be just as important as the political declaration of 9 December 2008 that contained the acknowledgement: *"...that we form one highly interwoven and interdependent, urbanised area with over 45 million inhabitants"*. It will be interesting to see how cooperation between NRW and the Benelux proceeds.

This thesis could only explore cross-border cooperation between NRW and the Benelux on the surface. A thorough analysis of the actors involved in the actual negotiations for renewal of the Benelux treaty and the effort of NRW to get involved requires resources and access well beyond the scope of a bachelor thesis. Nevertheless, this thesis provides an overview of the networked structures, issues in cooperation and possible explanations for the desire of NRW to form CBC structures in the region. It can be expected that NRW will not let the Benelux drift into a slumber.

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Appendix A: Elsevier article, 'flirt over de schutting'.

BUITENLAND

NOORDRIJN-WESTFALEN

Flirt over de schutting

GROOTSTE DEELSTAAT VAN DUITSLAND PROBEERT BENELUX TE VERLEIDEN TOT INTENSIEVERE SAMENWERKING, MAAR STUIT OP NEDERLANDS VERZET

In 1960 werd het Beneluxverdrag van kracht, dat in de praktijk een pilot-project bleek voor de Europese eenwording. Met het sterker worden van de Europese Unie is het belang van de Benelux afgenomen. De Duitse deelstaat Noordrijn-Westfalen zou zich graag bij de Benelux aansluiten. 'We zijn al samengegroeid.'

Arjan Paans in Düsseldorf

Politiewagens die met gillende sirenes de grens oversteken om criminelen te achtervolgen die dachten naar het buitenland te kunnen vluchten. Ziekenwagens die patiënten daarheen brengen waar ze het best en snelst worden geholpen, ongeacht welke taal de dokter spreekt. Werknemers die overal aan de slag kunnen zonder dat ze problemen krijgen over de erkenning van hun diploma.

Een mooie droom, die ook werkelijkheid kan worden, gezien het groeiende aantal regionale samenwerkingsverbanden in Europese grensgebieden. Ver weg van de stopperige Brusselse bureaucratie knappen steeds meer Europese regio's anno 2008 zelf hun zaakjes op. Vooral in Duitsland, dat is omringd door negen buurlanden, wordt het belang van dergelijke samenwerking ingezien. Beieren en Bohemen, door een eeuwenlange geschiedenis nauw verbonden, sloten onlangs een samenwerkingsverdrag op het gebied van duurzame energie, toerisme en economie. In de grensregio Saar-Lor-Lux (Duitsland-Frankrijk-Luxemburg) zijn de grenzen zo vervaagd dat dagelijks honderdduizend

werknemers de grenzen overgaan om in het buurland te werken. In overleg en eens onder weerstand van de eigen hoofdsteden lossen de regio's de praktische problemen op waarmee hun grenswerkers te maken hebben.

Het jongste geval van 'flirt over de schutting' heeft dicht bij huis plaats. Noordrijn-Westfalen, dat via een aantal Euregio's met Nederland is verbonden, wil zich aansluiten bij de Benelux. Hoera, zou je zeggen, want hoewel het bondgenootschap van België, Nederland en Luxemburg volgende maand zijn vijftigjarig bestaan viert, vinden

veel de samenwerking achterhaald. Uitbreiding tot 'Bene-no-lux' is daarom zo gek nog niet. Misschien is de toenaderingspoging van Noordrijn-Westfalen wel een kans om de ingedutte Benelux te reanimeren.

Je kunt je een slechtere partner voorstellen. Met achttien miljoen inwoners is Noordrijn-Westfalen op eigen houtje de zevende economie van Europa en de belangrijkste handelspartner van Nederland

en België. Van de vijftig grootste Duitse ondernemingen hebben er 25 hier hun hoofdkantoor, waaronder wereldconcerns als Deutsche Telekom, Bertelsmann, RWE, Deutsche Post en ThyssenKrupp.

Irritationen

Hoe zelfbewust Noordrijn-Westfalen ook over de eigen kracht mag zijn – de deelstaat heeft zelfs een eigen ambassade bij de EU – door de Duitse eenwording en vooral sinds de verhuizing van de regering van Bonn naar Berlijn heeft de grootste deelstaat aan ge-



Noordrijn-Westfalen

In tegenstelling tot de Benelux was de samenvoeging van Noordrijn en Westfalen in 1946 allern minst een huwelijk uit liefde, maar een 'moetje'. De Britse bezettingsmacht besloot in Londen dat het Rijnland en het voormalige koninkrijk Westfalen werden verenigd. De gehele operatie kreeg weliswaar de codenaam *Marriage*, vooral karakterologisch gezien zijn er volgens de inwoners nog altijd verschillen en bestaat er tot op de dag van vandaag een zekere rivaliteit.

'Wij Westfalen moeten nadenken wat de Rijnland's beloven,' zou minister-president Fritz Steinbohl bij zijn aantreden in 1956 hebben gezegd tegen zijn collega Willi Weyer van Financien, toen ze het met z'n tweeën moesten doen met een kabinet vol gezellige Rijnlanders. De belangrijkste stad van Westfalen is Dortmund, met 580.000 inwoners, en van het Rijnland Keulen, met 980.000 inwoners.

Keulen is met bijna één miljoen inwoners de grootste stad van Noordrijn-Westfalen



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Duitse, Belgische en Nederlandse agenten doen routinecontrole bij oeverlandspoor. Douane en politie uit de drie landen werken nauw samen

wicht verloren. Weliswaar heeft nog altijd een kwart van alle Bondsdaagafgevaardigden zijn kieskring in deze deelstaat, als het erop aankomt heeft Berlijn het voor het zeggen.

En dus zint de deelstaatregering in Düsseldorf op mogelijkheden zichzelf terug op de kaart te krijgen. Volgens regeringspartij CDU is toetreding tot de Benelux een van de mogelijkheden. Fractievoorzitter Helmut Stahl: 'In 2010 eindigt het Beneluxverdrag. De Benelux was bij de oprichting, vijftig jaar geleden, een pilot-regio

voor heel Europa. Nu is het tijd om na te denken over de volgende vijftig jaar.'

Andreas Krautscheid, minister van Europese Zaken in Noordrijn-Westfalen beseft dat de ambitie van zijn deelstaat ergernis oproept. 'Het is nieuw dat een deelstaat überhaupt met andere landen spreekt.'

Toch vindt Krautscheid zijn volkenrechtelijke normen de moeite van het proberen waard. 'We moeten nu al met vakmensen op het gebied van economie, veiligheid en duurzaamheid overleggen wat de mogelijkheden van samenwerking zijn. Ook al leidt dat uiteindelijk tot een status die net onder een volwaardig lidmaatschap zit.'

CDU'er Stahl ziet tal van terreinen waarop intensievere samenwerking noodzakelijk is. 'Natuurlijk is er voortsigging, maar er zijn tal van gebieden waarop we nog

Benelux: 50 jaar

Al in 1869 werd er gesproken over een douane-unie tussen België, Nederland en Luxemburg, maar de gesprekken liepen toen op niets uit. In 1944 richtten de regeringen in ballingschap in Londen dan toch de Benelux op. Het aanvankelijke doel was om onderling goederen te kunnen transporteren en een uniform tarief te hanteren voor goederen van buiten de landen. Op 3 februari 1958 werd het Beneluxverdrag ondertekend dat van de drie lan-



den ook economisch een unie maakte. Belangrijkste doel is naast het vrije verkeer van goederen, ook dat van diensten en kapitaal.

Daarmee was de Benelux een voorloper van de latere Europese Monetaire Unie (EMU). Met de

uitbreiding van de Europese Unie werd het belang van de Benelux geleidelijk minder. Een laatste -verrengende vorm van samenwerking op politiegebied - werd in 2004 overeengekomen in het Verdrag van Schengen. Sindsdien mag de politie van de drie landen

onbeperkt en zonder toestemming vooraf over de grenzen reizen, verdachten arresteren en wapens dragen.

Het Beneluxverdrag, dat in 1960 in werking is getreden, loopt in 2010 af. Over de verlenging, die zo goed als zeker is, wordt de komende jaren onderhandeld.

De huidige Benelux heeft 27,4 miljoen inwoners, van wie er 22,5 miljoen Nederlandstalig zijn, 3,4 miljoen Franstalig en 0,5 Luxemburgers spreken zowel Luxemburgs als Duits. Van de Brusselaars zijn er 1 miljoen zowel Frans- als Nederlandstalig.

BUITENLAND

'Naberschap' is mooi, als de brandslang maar past

Een Europa zonder grenzen, het kan zo mooi zijn. Een sterk voorbeeld van dit Europese ideaal was te zien tijdens de vuurwerkramp in Enschede, op 13 mei 2000. Honderden Duitse hulpverleners schoten spontaan te hulp en hielpen met blussen en de opvang en het transport van gewonden. Vanzelfsprekend vonden ze dat, want in het westen van Duitsland is Nachbarschaftshilfe net zo ont-

wikkeld als naberschap in het oosten van Nederland. Een probleem dat de kop opstak, was dat de Duitse brandslangen niet op de

Nederlandse pasten en dat de Duitse en de Nederlandse brandweermannen door verschillende apparatuur niet met elkaar kon-

Duitsers hielpen in Enschede spontaan met blussen



beter kunnen samenwerken. Maar bij alles moeten we ons afvragen wat ons gezamenlijke belang is.

De nieuwe regio zoals Stahl die ziet, bestaat uit veertig miljoen mensen met als verbindende element de Rijn. 'De haven van Duisburg kan je zien als een "binnenhaven" voor Amsterdam, Rotterdam en Antwerpen. De ziekenhuizen in Aken en Maastricht hebben sinds 2007 een prachtig gemeenschappelijk Europees centrum voor vaatchirurgie. We zijn al samengegroeid. Waarom zou je dat niet sterker benadrukken?'

Waar Stahl als een volloende charmeur probeert de toekomstige partner te overtuigen van het voordeel van de liefdesverbintenis, is de praktijk toch weerbarstig. Of het nu de ontwikkeling van de internationale landbouwregio Greenport bij Venlo is, waarbij veel te laat contact werd gelegd met de Duitse buren, of de ombouw van het militaire vliegveld Twente tot een burgerluchthaven, terwijl op 50 kilometer afstand het vliegveld Münster-Osnabrück ook gaat uitbreiden, telkens blijkt dat de communicatie tussen de beide landen veel te wensen over laat. Het meest pijnlijke voorbeeld is de bouw van de Betuwe, waarvoor in Nederland miljarden werden geïnvesteerd, terwijl de Duitsers het beloofde extra spoor niet bouwden.

Scepsis

Maar terwijl Noordrijn-Westfalen staat te popelen om zich aan te kunnen sluiten, overheerst in Nederland de scepsis. Een advies van de Raad voor Verkeer en Waterstaat om de Eurodelta (het land tussen Rijn, Schelde en Maas) voortaan als één economisch gebied te zien en als gemeenschappelijk in de rest van de wereld te verkopen, werd in 2006 door toenmalig CDA-minister Karla Peijs van de hand gewezen. Volgens Peijs concurreren de steden in deze regio meer met elkaar dan met andere regio's in Europa.

De verantwoordelijke staatssecretaris van Europese Zaken, Frans Timmermans (PvdA), vindt het idee van een

Bene-lux wel aardig, maar wil toch op de ren trappen als het gaat om een echte Anschluss. 'Ik geloof dat we veel gemeenschappelijk kunnen doen, maar het sluiten van een staatsverdrag is iets wat we aan de federale Duitse overheid moeten overlaten. We zouden ons te veel moeilijkheden op de hals halen als we proberen een verdrag tussen soevereine staten zover te openen dat ook deelstaten daaraan deel kunnen nemen.'

Timmermans' terughoudendheid heeft meer dan één reden. Enerzijds is het inderdaad ongewoon dat een deelstaat uit alle macht wil toetreden tot een verdrag dat eigenlijk voor staten is bedoeld. Hoewel er voor de Duitse Grondwet geen probleem is – die staat de deelstaten namelijk toe eigen akkoorden te sluiten op beleidsterreinen waarvoor zij zelf verantwoordelijk zijn – leidt de operatie van Noordrijn-Westfalen in Berlijn tot gefronste wenkbrauwen. De deelstaat, zo luidt het, zou de grenzen van de Grondwet willen oprekken en nog net niet uit Duitsland willen stappen. Door een al te enthousiaste reactie zou Nederland de Bondsregering in Berlijn voor het hoofd kunnen stoten, en daar zit niemand in Den Haag noch in de Eurodelta op te wachten.



Helmut Stahl



Andreas Krautscheid

den communiceren. Bovendien mochten de Duitse brandweerlieden die hun leven waagden in Enschede daar eigenlijk niet zijn, omdat ze in het buitenland niet verzekerd waren.

Ondanks de praktische problemen werd de Duitse brandweercommandant Hein Tenspöde, op wiens initiatief de hulp tot stand kwam, geëerd met de Otto von Guerickeprijs, voor het bevorderen van de goede betrekkingen tussen Nederland en Duitsland.

Anderzijds zou een uitbreiding de rol van de Benelux als gevestigde Europese institutie kunnen verzwakken: omdat de Benelux ouder is dan de EU is in het Verdrag van Rome vastgelegd dat Europese bepalingen geen beletsel mogen vormen voor het bestaan en de voltooiing van de regionale unie tussen België, Luxemburg en Nederland. Dat betekent in de praktijk dat de Benelux ook zonder Europa hervormingen kan doorvoeren die noodzakelijk worden geacht. Deze exclusieve status zou waarschijnlijk verdwijnen als zich een vierde land aansluit.

Rijn

Toch wil de Nederlander Jan van Laarhoven, secretaris-generaal van de Benelux, het enthousiasme van Noordrijn-Westfalen niet al te veel temperen. 'De Beneluxlanden hebben net zo goed baat bij samenwerking. De Rijn stopt niet bij Lobith en vervuilde lucht gaat ook de grens over.' Hoewel ook Van Laarhoven dat streeft naar een meer gemeenschappelijke aanpak op het gebied van markt, veiligheid en duurzaamheid, wil hij voorlopig nog niets vastleggen: 'Misschien dat we over een paar jaar kunnen praten over een structuur.'

In de tussentijd heeft Krautscheid de ministeries in zijn deelstaat gevraagd een lijst neer te leggen van knelpunten in de samenwerking met de Beneluxlanden. Een eerste ontmoeting met Van Laarhoven heeft al plaatsgehad, een tweede volgt de komende weken. Een overzichtje van onderwerpen die zeker ter tafel komen: uitbreiding van de justitiële samenwerking die boven het Verdrag van Schengen uitgaat, de wederzijdse erkenning van diploma's en betere samenwerking op verkeers- en infrastructureel gebied.

In het visioen van Krautscheid moet de Benelux van de toekomst weer net zo avant-gardistisch zijn als die van vijftig jaar geleden. 'Europa wordt steeds groter, maar mensen willen zich goed voelen in hun eigen regio.'

Appendix B: Düsseldorfer Erklärung



Neue Vitalität für eine europäische Kernregion - Partnerschaft NRW-Benelux vertiefen

Düsseldorfer Erklärung der CDU-Fraktion im nordrhein-westfälischen Landtag

I.

Im stetig zusammenwachsenden und weiter voranschreitenden Europa kommt dem vitalen Zusammenspiel der Regionen eine immer stärkere Bedeutung zu. Grenz-überschreitende europäische Kooperationsformen auf regionaler Ebene stärken das Verständnis der Bürger für die europäische Idee, geben in Zeiten gesellschaftlichen Wandels Orientierung und befördern das friedliche Miteinander in wirtschaftlichen, kulturellen, politischen und gesellschaftlichen Bereichen. Sie machen den Mehrwert europäischer Politik bei den Menschen vor Ort erfahrbar und leisten einen wertvollen Beitrag zum Gelingen des europäischen Integrationsprozesses in seiner Gesamtheit.

Zwischen Nordrhein-Westfalen, Belgien, den Niederlanden und Luxemburg bestehen seit langer Zeit enge und intensive Kontakte und Beziehungen, die auf der räumlichen Nähe, gemeinsamen Kulturlandschaften und ähnlichen Mentalitäten der hier lebenden Bevölkerung gründen. Zusammengenommen bilden die Beneluxländer und Nordrhein-Westfalen einen europäischen Kultur- und Wirtschaftsraum, in dem mehr als 40 Millionen Menschen leben. Über zwanzig Vereinbarungen, gemeinsame Erklärungen und Abkommen in allen relevanten politischen, kulturellen, wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Bereichen sind ein lebendiger Beleg für den bereits gegenwärtig erreichten hohen Verflechtungsgrad.

Insbesondere in den Grenzregionen sind Probleme, aber auch Chancen und Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten der Zusammenarbeit täglich erfahrbar. Zwischen Nordrhein-

Westfalen, Belgien und den Niederlanden hat sich im Rahmen der aktiven Mitarbeit in vier Euregios eine Form grenzüberschreitender Zusammenarbeit entwickelt, die europaweit einzigartig ist und einen vorbildlichen Ruf genießt. Die grenzüberschreitende Kooperation wird dabei zunehmend als Normalität wahrgenommen, was vor dem Hintergrund der Erfahrungen zweier Weltkriege keine Selbstverständlichkeit darstellt, sondern ein kostbares Gut ist, das es zu bewahren und zu pflegen gilt.

II.

Die Beneluxländer und Nordrhein-Westfalen als Land der Bundesrepublik Deutschland zählen zu den Gründungsmitgliedern der Europäischen Union. Hieraus erwächst eine besondere Verantwortung für die zukunftsbeste Gestaltung des gemeinsamen europäischen Hauses.

Die CDU-Fraktion im Landtag von Nordrhein-Westfalen ist von dem festen Willen getragen, das fruchtbare Fundament partnerschaftlicher Zusammenarbeit zwischen Nordrhein-Westfalen und den Beneluxstaaten weiter auszubauen und qualitativ fortzuentwickeln und begrüßt die bisherigen Bemühungen und Initiativen der Landesregierung zum Ausbau der Kooperation mit einzelnen Partnern im Beneluxraum.

Wir sind davon überzeugt, dass vom Weg der Zusammenarbeit zwischen Nordrhein-Westfalen und den Beneluxstaaten richtungsweisende und beispielgebende Impulse für ein europäisches Politikmodell ausgehen können, das die zukunftsbeste Gestaltung und Vertiefung des europäischen Integrationsprozesses nachhaltig vorantreibt. Über den bislang erreichten Stand der bilateralen Beziehungen hinaus sehen wir deshalb die Notwendigkeit, auf eine noch engere und ganzheitlichere Form der Zusammenarbeit mit den Beneluxstaaten hinzuarbeiten.

III.

Im Jahr 2010 läuft der zwischen Belgien, den Niederlanden und Luxemburg geschlossene Vertrag über die Benelux-Union aus. Für Nordrhein-Westfalen als größter europäischer Region und bevölkerungsreichstem deutschen Bundesland ergibt sich in diesem Zusammenhang die einmalige Chance, im Rahmen einer Fortführung der

Benelux-Union über das Jahr 2010 hinaus, die Möglichkeiten einer besonderen Partnerschaft oder besonderen Form der Assoziation mit der Benelux-Union zu prüfen. Eine solche Verbindung sollte einen erfahrbaren Mehrwert für alle Partner haben. Das anzustrebende übergeordnete Ziel muss es dabei sein, zusammen mit einer stärkeren politischen „NRW-Benelux-Stimme“ innerhalb Europas aufzutreten und die gemeinsamen Interessen in Brüssel wirksam und nachhaltig zu vertreten. Aus unserer Sicht ist insbesondere vor dem Hintergrund der erst jüngst erfolgten Erweiterung der Europäischen Union auf 27 Mitgliedstaaten ein aufeinander abgestimmtes und geschlossenes Auftreten des größten europäischen Ballungsraums „NRW-Benelux“ auf der europäischen Ebene stärker denn je notwendig und angemessen.

Im Rahmen einer um Nordrhein-Westfalen erweiterten Benelux-Union könnten neue Potentiale, Perspektiven und Wege der europäischen Zusammenarbeit erarbeitet, erprobt und vorgelebt werden. Wir werben deshalb dafür, die Beziehungen zwischen Nordrhein-Westfalen und den Beneluxstaaten im Sinne eines europäischen Referenzraums „NRW-Benelux“ auszugestalten, der sich als Motor der Europäischen Union und innovativer Kern Europas auf regionaler Ebene versteht und betätigt.

Wir rufen die Landesregierung dazu auf, in den kommenden Monaten und Jahren die hierzu notwendigen politischen Gespräche mit den Regierungen der Beneluxstaaten zu führen und die erforderlichen Umsetzungsschritte zügig in Angriff zu nehmen.

Wir werden das Zusammenwirken mit unseren Partnerfraktionen und Partnerparlamenten in den Beneluxstaaten verstärken.

Düsseldorf, im Mai 2007