

Limburg has already begun meeting the 'Lisbon' requirements



Dutch Limburg is a top province for entrepreneurs. That's the verdict of a recent report (February 2006) by Graydon (www.graydon.nl), the renowned financial consultants. Massive levels of investment are going into this top province to help maintain this healthy entrepreneurial climate in the future.

Limburg is in the heart of the Top Technological Region of Leuven-Eindhoven-Aachen. High grade technology with a strong focus on Life Sciences, Health Care & Cure, Chemicals and Agro, Food & Nutrition has a prominent place within this triangle. Possibilities are investigated in the area of new energy. 'Large sums of money are needed for new technology and innovations. Which will also bring us closer to the objectives of the Lisbon strategy,' said Martin Eurlings, member of the provincial executive in Maastricht with responsibility for Economic Affairs. 'We have therefore drawn up a so-called Acceleration Agenda which will contribute towards what was agreed in Lisbon: To make Europe into the strongest economy in the world.'

The Acceleration Agenda has become a familiar topic among industrial and commercial circles in Limburg, and in the Provincial Government Building where *The Maastricht Treaty* was signed. And this is also being discussed by the Dutch Government in the Hague, and among the neighbouring borderland regions of Belgium and Germany (with which Limburg cooperates closely in many fields, including the Life Sciences).

In October 2005, Limburg presented the Acceleration Agenda to Karien van Gennip, state secretary of Economic Affairs. Earlier that year, the government in The Hague had expressed great concern about the heavy impact the globalisation of the economy has on Limburg, where industry tends to be dominated by manufacturing. Exactly a year ago in March 2005, the ministry of Economic Affairs requested an assessment of the likely prospects for structural economic success for the Limburg region. The provincial government of Limburg came up with a very promising response in the form of the Acceleration Agenda. Eurlings said: 'You should see it as a kind of bidbook, and I should emphasise that it has been drawn up by all the important parties: companies, scientific institutions, intermediary organisations and authorities. Yes, that includes major corporations like DSM, SABIC and Océ,

which have given commitments to the objectives of the Acceleration Agenda.'

SIXTEEN MAJOR PROJECTS

A quick recap would be useful here: in the 1970s a large section of the Limburg economy underwent a complete restructuring (after the coal mines closed). Now, over 30 years later, this region is facing a new challenge to gain another leading role. This is vital because any region that takes a lead now will reap the benefits for years to come, said Eurlings. 'But you need an excellent policy which focuses on science and innovation in order to bring about sustained growth, employment and prosperity.'

That is why the Acceleration Agenda is confined solely to projects which match the goals of the *Lisbon Agenda*. The first stage is already underway, focusing on 16 major projects within the powerful clusters of Health Care & Cure, Chemicals and Agro-Food/Nutrition. Furthermore, innovation among the SME sector has been placed high up on the agenda, as well as the *New Energy* project. The projects in the Acceleration Agenda will have an investment effect on the region of over 600 million euro. The money has to be provided by industry, scientific institutions and government. Eurlings said: 'I have said it time and again: we do it here together.' The 600 million sum does not even include the widening of the A2 motorway (Liège-Maastricht-Eindhoven) which involves a further 370 million euro. Martin Eurlings realises these are enormous sums. 'But the funding will be there. We are also counting on support from Brussels. The fact that we have already begun shows just how focused this region is on the Acceleration Agenda.'

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