

## SUMMARY

The regional policy statement 2009-2014 stresses the significance of sustainable development and the Walloon Region's intent to treat it as exemplary in its own management. The Walloon government's declarations of intent advocated under previous legislative terms did not always have much effect and an attempt to develop a regional strategy of sustainable development failed.

Against this background the Court decided to review the current situation at the beginning of the new legislative term in order to allow an assessment of the sustainable development regional strategy at a later stage. The policy conducted with respect to the sustainable management of the Region's buildings was taken as an illustration by this review.

Notwithstanding the numerous existing action plans in relation with sustainable development and approved under the previous or present legislators, such as the Marshall plan 2.Vert, the air-climate plan or the environment plan for sustainable development, the Walloon Region is still without a regional strategy for sustainable development that would incorporate its three – economic, social and environmental - dimensions, that would frame short-term and long-term strategic and operational objectives and put in place decision-making processes ensuring its effectiveness in terms of stewardship, monitoring and reporting. But a common strategy for the numerous plans and measures approved to promote a sustainable development with measurable objectives, follow-up indicators and implementation deadlines is the very missing link between the prospective vision set out in the regional policy statement 2009-2014 and the range of measures listed.

The Walloon administration stated its intent to treat it as exemplary in its internal management. Admittedly the Court noted that a sustainable development plan drawn up by the Walloon Public Service (WPS) was under way as so advocated by the Walloon government. This plan, however, is not connected with a development process, is not part of an overall strategy plan for the Walloon Region and the general secretariat, which heads both the working group responsible for designing this plan and the SPW's strategic committee, is not able to stand for its monitoring.

Finally, as far as the sustainable management of the Region's buildings is concerned, the Court did not find a real strategy, though announced in the present government's regional policy statement, designed to combine the dispersed measures approved in this area. Moreover it is very difficult to distinguish among the range of actions the initiatives fostered by this government from the measures introduced under previous legislative terms, and yet this is indispensable to assess the progress that will be made under this government at the end of the current legislative term.

The Court wants to stress how important it is to design and implement a regional strategy for sustainable development. There are several reasons behind it.

First from a legal point of view article 7 bis of the Belgian Constitution provides the obligation for each body of the federal state to take on its share of Belgium's international commitments with respect to sustainable development and the fight against climate change. Moreover the Walloon Region itself has committed itself to adopt a strategy with respect to sustainable development. The non-compliance by the Walloon Region with its own commitments or the Federal State's commitments puts at risk the achievement of the objectives on international level and may damage its image on the international arena.

The need to implement the principles of an adequate management of public funds is at the core of a regional strategy for sustainable development. Acting without relying on a strategic framework, more particularly in a field as large and complex as sustainable development, entails an enormous risk of dispersed investments which, in the end, will fail to deliver the expected result.

Finally, the working out of a regional strategy for sustainable development has been wished for, for several years both by the administration and civil society.

The Court examined under what conditions a future strategy for sustainable development is likely to succeed. An effective monitoring of such a strategy is a major challenge because of the cross-sectional nature of this concept due both to the various levels of decision-making powers and the numerous policy domains where at least one of the - economic, social and environmental – dimensions play a role. In this respect the Court pointed out that the Walloon Region created a minister responsible for sustainable development during this new legislative term, which points to a favourable trend. Whereas the implementation of a strategy for sustainable development requires a joint commitment from all government members, it is also essential that the responsibility for its monitoring be entrusted to a minister jointly empowered to coordinate, activate and, if necessary, arbitrate between dissimilar approaches.

After its review of the current situation the Court issued a range of recommendations proposing the establishment of a regional strategy for sustainable development with measurable strategic objectives and articulated around operational objectives and indicator-related actions. This strategy needs to be activated, coordinated and steered by a single empowered body. Finally a reporting process should be put in place to allow for the implementation of a learning cycle aimed at updating and readjusting the objectives to achieve and the actions to take.