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Elia joins forces with Be Planet, supporting citizens' initiatives that promote a sustainable society

- Boosting biodiversity and public acceptance for projects
- Raising awareness of the energy transition

As part of its efforts to always put the interests of society centre-stage and boost the sustainability levels of its activities, Elia is launching a structural partnership with Be Planet, a 'public utility foundation' (fondation d'utilité publique/stichting van openbaar nut). Be Planet supports innovative citizens' initiatives that have a beneficial environmental impact and that could play a role in the energy transition.

At an event on the evening of 14 February 2017, Be Planet announced the 32 new beneficiaries of support from the Be Planet fund. Elia is sponsoring six of these: Bûmplanters, literally meaning "Tree Planters" (focussing on biodiversity in Brussels), Maximilian Park's Farm (training the public to reuse waste and draw on bioenergy), "Days Without Meat" (raising participants' awareness of their impact on the climate), Terre@air, i.e. "Land@air" (educating the public about sustainable energy), SeaWatch-B (addressing biodiversity in a maritime environment) and Samenwerking voor Agrarisch Landschap, the Cooperation for Agricultural Landscape Association (dealing with reusing wood waste).

These are all initiatives which can specifically help Elia with enhancing the biodiversity surrounding its projects or which fit into the drive to raise awareness of the energy transition. In addition, Elia will launch targeted calls for citizens' projects through Be Planet. These projects aim to boost the sustainability and public acceptance of Elia projects at local level.

Elia Chief Public Acceptance Officer Ilse Tant explains: *"Be Planet's mission dovetails perfectly with our social role as a grid operator. We are working on ensuring a smooth transition to the power system of tomorrow – one that is reliable, sustainable and affordable. All of this is done in close consultation with the relevant parties and, where possible, by creating win-win situations. Be Planet has the potential to help us bridge the gap with local networks and to work bottom-up on enhancing biodiversity and energy efficiency."*

The structural partnership with Be Planet is the starting point for an internal process at Elia in which programme managers – in charge of a total of 800 projects between them – will examine opportunities for citizens' projects. Multiple calls for projects to systematically cooperate with citizens will be launched each year through Be Planet.

Be Planet General Manager Michaël Ooms says: *"We firmly believe that businesses are part of the answer. We provide the link between the*

many voluntary initiatives run by citizens on the one hand and businesses conducting a sustainable policy on the other. In many cases these two worlds are not on the same wavelength, and so with Be Planet we bring citizens and companies together to work on concrete projects."

The energy transition, or the revolutionary switch towards a greener (i.e. low-CO₂) and more flexible energy system, is in full swing. In its role as grid operator, Elia is capitalising on the growing renewable energy and decentralised generation capacity on offer and is making adjustments to its high-voltage grid to reflect these developments. To make this possible, Elia is rolling out the biggest investment programme in its history – and all on top of operating 5,500 km of overhead high-voltage power lines and 2,800 km of underground cables across Belgium.

The partnership with Be Planet comes in addition to a number of existing projects. For example, a large-scale ecological management plan involving redevelopment of the land beneath the high-voltage line running from Zutendaal to Maastricht has been launched in cooperation with a local sheep herder, the Flemish Agency for Nature and Forests and 130 landowners. Meanwhile, under the Life+ project in Wallonia green corridors have been created in conjunction with local partners.

Since 2016, Elia has had a separate Public Acceptance Division to promote both public acceptance and the biodiversity surrounding its extensive infrastructure.

About Be Planet

Be Planet was initiated by three environmental associations that have been defending nature for the past 40 years: Inter-Environnement-Wallonie (IEW), Bond Beter Leefmilieu and BRAL.

Be Planet builds bridges between people and/or companies who are concerned by the environment and who want to turn the tide and those citizens working on ideas accelerating the transition. Be Planet supports and accompanies those innovative and sustainable citizens' projects.

In order to fulfill this mission, Be Planet raises funds from the public authorities, entrepreneurs and the Belgian population. In this way civil society, such as citizens, associations and cooperatives, has the opportunity to make come true their ideas or projects. In order to obtain financial support the projects have to be innovative and need to have a positive and local impact on the environment. This way of fundraising for environmental projects is new and unique in Belgium.

About Elia

The Elia Group is organised around two electricity transmission system operators (TSOs): Elia Transmission in Belgium and (together with Industry Funds Management (IFM)) 50Hertz Transmission, one of the four German TSOs, active in the north and east of Germany.

With more than 1,900 employees and a transmission grid comprising some 18,300 km of high-voltage connections serving 30 million end users, the Elia Group is one of Europe's top five TSOs.

It efficiently, reliably and securely transmits electricity from generators to distribution system operators and major industrial consumers, while also importing and exporting electricity from and to neighbouring countries. The Group is a driving force behind the development of the European electricity market and the integration of energy generated from renewable sources.

In addition to its TSO activities in Belgium and Germany, the Elia Group offers businesses a range of consultancy and engineering services through its subsidiary Elia Grid International (EGI).

The Group operates under the legal entity Elia System Operator, a listed company whose core shareholder is the municipal holding company Publi-T.