

The unification of Europe is a key issue this summer. Many of us have to vote for a European Constitution. A Europe without borders, with free movement of goods, people and companies, that's what it's all about. But what's the situation concerning free movement of plants and animals?

# The Veluwe route: The Dutch Ecological Main Ports opened up

The Netherlands promotes itself as a distribution country, as linchpin in the European network. We have developed the Veluwe route completely in line with this concept: the major ecological transport artery that must connect our country – just like its iron railway opposite, the Betuweroute – with our neighbours.

This is somewhat unnatural because in the eyes of animals and plants the borders that we are now manfully trying to demolish actually never existed. There is no deer that rambles from the Reichswald in Germany to the Duivelsberg in the Netherlands and has the feeling that it has arrived in an entirely different culture, or notices that the people speak a different language. Borders are made by people, both the national boundaries as well as the boundaries that cause difficulties for plants and animals to travel at their free will, such as towns and motorways.

Of course, we always consider our own need for mobility and it is distressing when that cannot be satisfied, for example when we are stuck in traffic. But many animals also dearly wish to be mobile and move freely, and it's our freedom of movement that often prevents just that. The Veluwe route aims to restore this balance.

However, the Veluweroute is more than a highway for plants and animals. The Veluweroute is the legend of the adventure of nature retold. In the Netherlands, the development of the countryside has become a technocratic activity with which average Dutch people can no longer identify themselves. It is therefore important that we are going to tell a beautiful story about nature again, so that we don't just bring nature to the people, but also bring the people to nature.

With the Veluweroute, however, not everything is about the ecology. There is also, of course, a lot of attention paid to the economic opportunities that this new concept of nature offers, such as in the field of tourism and recreation, water storage, sand extraction, care, sustainable agriculture linked with development of plant- and wildlife development. Nature is often an important base for the regional

economy. It even appears that in many regions – certainly when these are more off the beaten track – it is better to invest in nature development and landscape conservation as a base for the economy rather than to try to use huge grants and state subsidy to bring regular activities to these areas.

The intention is that the Veluweroute is for everyone. It is an idea that gives nature back to the people. To be sure, the National Forest Service of the Netherlands, Ark Nature, Natuurmonumenten, Bird Life International in the Netherlands and Kritisch Bosbeheer (a society for investigation new ways of nature conservation) have taken the initiative and KPMG has elaborated the concept, but the intention is that everyone has the space to work on the Veluwe route.

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