

## DEVELOPING REGIONAL INNOVATION VALLEYS ON BIOECONOMY AND FOOD SYSTEMS A RISING OPPORTUNITY SUPPORT FOR THE COUNTRIES IN THE BIOEAST MACRO-REGION

On 13th October 2023 the European Commission launched the concept note on Regional Innovation Valleys for Bioeconomy and Food Systems (RIV4BFS)<sup>1</sup> during the High-Level Conference in Plovdiv, Bulgaria. The event was co-organized by the European Commission and the Agricultural University of Plovdiv under the auspices of the BIOEAST initiative, the Bulgarian Prime Minister, and Innovation and Growth minister. RIV4BFS is a new comprehensive initiative aiming to transform the bioeconomy and food systems landscape by integrating sustainability, innovation, and regional collaboration depending on local priorities. RIV4BFS aims to build innovative value chains by ensuring no resources are wasted, focusing on multiple products and services coexisting in an industrial ecosystem symbiosis. RIV4BFS rely on regional sustainable resources, strengthening resilience and strategic autonomy, and avoiding negative environmental or social impacts. Moreover, it aims to link more developed with less developed regions by sharing experiences and knowledge.

The macro-regional BIOEAST Initiative is an important player in the bioeconomy policy development in Central and Eastern Europe. It is supporting the development of knowledge and cooperation based circular bioeconomies to enhance inclusive growth in the BIOEAST countries. BIOEAST Initiative was the only one acknowledged by the *EU Council in Agriculture and Fisheries* (April 2023)<sup>2</sup> as a role model for the support the development of sustainable and circular bioeconomy systems. BIOEAST Initiative has been enhancing the alignment between the EU bioeconomy policies and national policies and with the support of the [BIOEASTsUP](#) Horizon2020 project delivered 11 national concept papers that could assist in development of national bioeconomy strategies. With the support of the [ShapingBIO](#) Horizon Europe project these concept papers were analyzed to sum up the barriers of bioeconomy innovation deployment in the BIOEAST macro-region<sup>3</sup>.

### Policy and governance

Except for Croatia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, official national bioeconomy roadmaps have not been developed yet in the countries of the BIOEAST macro region. There is a lack of cross-sectoral policy dialogue and no formal bioeconomy inter-ministerial groups setting in most of the countries, systemic approach prevents boosting innovation and investment in food chains and related new business models. Yet there is a political interest in general terms in the innovative investments (among others bio-based sectors), targeted bio-based focus is still missing

due to rather scattered understanding and inability to see bioeconomy in an overall picture. Policy makers continue to emphasize traditional sectoral approaches as bioeconomy's value added is still not tangible. The BIOEAST Foresight developed in 2020 -is one of the first tool of this kind in the region- emphasized that in the context of sustainable transition stronger recognition of bioeconomy policies by decision makers and stakeholders needs to be ensured. The political level priority setting is still lagging.

### Applied R&I and technology transfer

<sup>1</sup> [t.ly/tkUYC](https://t.ly/tkUYC)

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8194-2023-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>3</sup> BIOEAST countries: EE, LT, LI, PL, CZ, SK, HU, SI, HR, RO, BG



Vast majority of the innovation performance of the countries in the BIOEAST macro-region is moderate and below the EU average. Although some initial steps have been made. There is a **need to align research agendas with Green Deal and related strategies and to emphasize more the value chain approach in R&I program.** Low enhancement of the sustainable food systems in the BIOEAST macro-region is yet another result of the missing long time-oriented research policy (as indicated in the BIOEAST Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda)<sup>4</sup>. **There is a strong need to provide evidence, governance models of innovation ecosystems for circularity in food systems and examples of good practice to develop and to present demo projects based on circular bioeconomy principles, investigate the possibility of innovative methods and other nature-based practices, identify and launch scale up pilot projects, bioeconomy demonstration and pilot facilities.**

#### **Cross-sectoral collaboration**

The production structure in primary sectors is rather fragmented, there is need for innovative context-adapted solutions, initiative for sustainable short food supply chains, new green business models in food processing. Business

integration in conventional bioeconomy-related industries is rather low (both vertically and horizontally), that is one of the obstacles for a full functioning bioeconomy concept. **There is a strong need to implement the value-chain principle in biomass management to overcome limitations in logistics and scalability, fully exploit its economic potential for both food and non-food use, Integrate renewable energy sources and more energy-efficient farming practice. The scattered business - science cooperation needs to be supported by new bioeconomy HUBs, clusters, associations that encourage interdisciplinarity and multi actor cooperation.**

#### **Financing**

Missing national bioeconomy action plan and weak focus of the public funding on bioeconomy are factors behind the low interest and low mobilization of private funding in bioeconomy. There is a strong need to provide targeted and adequate funding for bioeconomy related research consistently and in a planned way, based on medium- and long-term strategic planning, **provide better support for business innovation by upgrading competences of science, technology, and innovation public sector policy makers.**

### **Conclusions**

BIOEAST Initiative acknowledges the newly launched RIV4BFS as it can activate the regional level, enhance development of the regional bioeconomy strategy **bringing all stakeholders and to be able to discuss a common long-term vision of their region. Public sector in the BIOEAST macro-region needs support to set a viable inter-ministerial cooperation, stakeholder involvement and encouragement, support in systemic thinking and good practice exchange.** The RIV4BFS has the potential to bridge Central and Eastern European regions with regions that are more advanced in bioeconomy, show good practice of functional bioeconomy value chains, enhance peer to peer mutual learning and hereby advance systemic thinking and new approach to biomass utilization. **Involvement in the Plovdiv launching event clearly showed the recognition of the BIOEAST Initiative that will continue to raise awareness of the RIV4BFS and to support the member states to monitor the involvement of the local regions.** As of 01 January 2024, the new Horizon Europe project **Boost4BIOEAST** should also assist in this endeavor.

<sup>4</sup> <https://bioeast.eu/download/bioeast-web-par/>

