

**BIOEAST Foresight Conference 27 September 2021**  
**Director-General Wolfgang Burtscher's closing speech**

- I would like to thank the BIOEAST initiative, the Slovenian EU Council Presidency, the Visegrad Group Presidency as well as all people who helped to make today's event possible and a success.
- Today, we have looked at long-term trends and possible paths for the bioeconomy in the BIOEAST region towards 2050. Certainly, we cannot predict the future or expect it to be less disruptive in the coming years.
- Strategic foresight can, however, help to anticipate these profound changes, enable us to be better prepared and support today's policy-making in line with our long-term objectives.
- Let me, in my concluding remarks, highlight some key issues.

**On the bioeconomy**

- Our new growth strategy, the European Green Deal, consists of a set of policy initiatives for making the EU economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities.
- With its potential to connect and implement transformative policies holistically, the bioeconomy can play a key role in achieving our objectives.
- A modern bioeconomy that creates rural growth and jobs across the EU, but also promotes win-win scenarios for mitigation and adaptation to climate change. This will eventually make our rural areas and primary production more resilient to climate change, natural hazards and economic crises.
- The bioeconomy can also provide innovative solutions to support maintaining or improving our ecosystems and biodiversity. Sustainable, circular business models, based on valorisation of unavoidable waste, provide key contributions to protect the environment. They also help with creating diversified value streams by transforming a burden into an opportunity.

### **On Central and Eastern European countries**

- Already today, the EU bioeconomy contributes significantly to jobs and wealth by employing around 17.5 million people and generating € 614 billion of added value to the EU's economy.
- The further development of urban, coastal and rural areas across Europe is expected to lead to the creation of 400,000 new highly skilled jobs by 2035 in the bio-based sector and up to 700,000 by 2050, mostly in rural areas.
- While, at present, many Central and Eastern European regions are at the lower maturity stage of the bioeconomy development, foresight demonstrates that the BIOEAST region holds a real potential for the development of an internationally competitive circular bioeconomy. The rich availability of underutilised biomass, in particular residue and waste streams, and the potential of new technologies are considered as major opportunities for the region.
- Of course, this will also require structural changes at regional level, new forms of cooperation and a good deal of political determination.
- On the side of the Commission, we welcomed the BIOEAST initiative from the beginning and are supporting its ambitions, in particular the development of national bioeconomy strategies and the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SIRA), including through the dedicated H2020 project BIOEASTsUP.
- We will remain supportive and ensure that R&I will work hand in hand with the future CAP to unlock this still largely untapped potential for the primary production sector and rural areas.

### **On research and innovation**

- Under the new CAP, knowledge exchange, innovation and digitalisation will play a key role in helping farmers and rural communities meet the opportunities offered by the bioeconomy.
- EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are an excellent way to test and co-develop new practices, technologies needed for harnessing their full potential and to demonstrate well-working business models from which others can get inspiration. At present, there are already more than 2,000 Operational Groups across the EU, which shape already today our agriculture, forests and rural areas of tomorrow.

- For example, 30 EIP-AGRI Operational Groups in 9 Member States, including the BIOEAST region, are currently optimising the valorisation of waste streams for the production of biogas. By doing so, our farmers replace fossil fuels, prevent GHG-emissions that occur in open manure storages and at the same time produce a valuable biofertilizer to close the nutrient cycle, thereby protecting the soil quality and soil carbon.
- In addition, we will mobilise targeted investments under Horizon Europe, with around € 9 billion for the period 2021-27 dedicated to the work programmes, partnerships and missions of cluster 6 related to food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture and environment.
- Big initiatives such as R&I partnerships will help the EU deliver on the Green Deal ambition through concerted R&I efforts with the Member States, the private sector, and other stakeholders.
- We have proposed the partnership “Accelerating farming systems transition: agroecology living labs and research infrastructures”, because we believe that agroecology can provide a powerful contribution to long-term responses to the climate, biodiversity, environmental, economic and social challenges that our society is facing. I know that the BIOEAST initiative also believes in the potential of agroecology, as it is one of your core areas of work.
- Building innovation and business ecosystems around European research and innovation infrastructures will also accelerate the bioeconomy transformation by bringing innovations faster on the market. For example, the contribution of € 1 billion in the future Circular Bio-based Europe Partnership, mainly for demo- and flagship projects, will boost the development of innovative and resource efficient bio-based materials and products, thereby substituting their fossil-based counterparts. By doing so, we will also promote new value chains, in which primary producers are fully integrated. This will create new jobs and know-how at the level of primary production.
- The EIP-AGRI together with Horizon Europe will continue to provide this supporting framework for the deployment of a sustainable and circular bioeconomy.
- In addition, the new CAP will enable tailored advisory services and the development of better functioning ‘Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems’ (AKIS) to foster knowledge exchange and innovation in agriculture and rural areas.

## **On the bioeconomy in the CAP**

- The future Common Agricultural Policy recognises the opportunity for our rural areas and our primary producers to deploy the bioeconomy in a more holistic and systemic manner.
- This is the reason why, for the first time, the bioeconomy is explicitly included under one of the EU common specific objectives of the future CAP.
- The new delivery model for the future CAP is an opportunity for Member States to design bioeconomy tailor-made and more result-oriented interventions with more subsidiarity to adapt to local specificities.
- In the future, the bioeconomy could be specifically supported by the eco-scheme intervention, a new way of spending Pillar I funding (i.e. without MS co-financing) on environment and climate objectives, the enhanced conditionality as well as by rural development measures such as support for investments.
- In this sense, the inclusion of adequate support for the bioeconomy in the future CAP Strategic Plans is an important tool for delivering these benefits. This is the reason why the Commission has been deploying efforts in the last few years to support Member States, you, in this endeavour by raising awareness and facilitating exchanges at all levels on best practices and organising capacity-building events.
- Through our current structural dialogue with MS in the preparation of the CAP Strategic Plans, we encourage and support you to promote the potential of the bioeconomy in your national context.

## **To conclude**

- Agriculture and forestry will be key to reach the Green Deal objectives, such as climate-neutrality or the preservation of our ecosystems and the biodiversity.
- At the same time, a sustainable bioeconomy will create new economic opportunities for primary producers and rural areas, which can result in the revitalisation of rural areas and the generational renewal in the primary sector.
- To succeed and further deploy the bioeconomy, we have already a toolbox of supporting instruments available. The Commission will continue to work closely together with Member States to make the best use of these instruments.