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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Council
Subject:	European Bioeconomy Scene 2019 (Helsinki, 8-10 July 2019) *- Information from the Presidency*

Delegations will find in the Annex a Presidency paper on the bioeconomy conference "European Bioeconomy Scene 2019" held in Helsinki on 8-10 July 2019, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council on 14-15 October 2019.

ANNEX

European Bioeconomy Scene 2019

The European Bioeconomy Scene 2019 conference organised jointly by the EU Commission and the Finnish Presidency was held in Helsinki on 9 July 2019. The high-level conference brought together some 330 participants representing policymakers, research institutions, academia, businesses and the civil society from all over Europe to exchange knowledge, to discuss new actions and to coordinate activities.

The programme included expert speeches and panel discussions. The major topics of the conference were: i) the role of bioeconomy strategies in supporting the transition to a sustainable and circular bioeconomy; ii) unlocking the potential of the European bioeconomy; iii) adding value to bio-based value chains with special focus on the farming sector and blue bioeconomy. Social sustainability was the cross-cutting theme of the conference.

Since the publication of the European Bioeconomy Strategy in 2012, several steps forward have been taken in the development and consolidation of a European bioeconomy and the number of Member States that have already adopted a national bioeconomy strategy is rapidly increasing. The European Bioeconomy Strategy was updated in 2018 (Commission Communication "A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: Strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment" - COM(2018) 673 final). The time has come to increase public awareness on the bioeconomy and to further promote the dialogue between the Commission and Member States on how to fully deploy it. In early-2019, The Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU placed the bioeconomy high on their agenda and the Finnish Presidency intends to continue along the same path, recognising the role of the bioeconomy on our way towards a climate neutral Europe and a sustainable agricultural sector.

Conference conclusions

The conference conclusion were given jointly by the Finnish Presidency and the forthcoming Croatian Presidency. It was emphasised that the bioeconomy has a transformative potential and it seeks to contribute to a more sustainable production and consumption. Social and technological innovations were considered as key with a view to changing our way of living and thus supporting more sustainable lifestyles in the future. It was also widely stressed that research and innovation are at the core of providing the solutions that will allow us to drive a just transition to a circular and sustainable bioeconomy.

Member States were encouraged to mainstream a comprehensive bioeconomy strategy into their policies and programmes. One of the main messages was that building innovation and business ecosystems around European research and innovation infrastructures has the potential to accelerate the bioeconomy transformation by bringing innovations faster into the market. However, it was recognised that the implementation of the bioeconomy in terms of research and innovation capabilities is not optimal yet and further efforts are necessary in this direction. In this light, Member States can learn from one another and share best practices with each other: as a matter of fact, it was stressed that "no one should be left behind" in this process.

The conference highlighted that the role of farmers, forest owners and their cooperatives is crucial in achieving a European circular bioeconomy, because it contributes to the development of rural areas and plays an active role in tackling challenges linked to climate change. As a result, farmers must be seen as an integrated part of the bio-based value chains and the added-value stemming from those value chains should be shared equally between the actors involved in them. To this end, it was also pointed out that a common understanding of the status of the blue bioeconomy in the EU is needed, given the positive impact that marine resources can have on the development of a sustainable bioeconomy.

Take-home message

We need to understand the bioeconomy as a political path towards an environmentally and socially sustainable and just society, where also economy can flourish within the limits of nature and local and global social equality.

Next steps

The Finnish EU Presidency will work on Council Conclusions on the Updated European Bioeconomy Strategy. The incoming Croatian Presidency plans to put the bioeconomy high on its priorities list primarily in, but not limited to, the area of agriculture. Croatia will build on the basis created by the Finnish and Romanian Presidencies to raise awareness on the bioeconomy as well as its implementation in agriculture and other sectors. Croatia intends to organise a high-level event on this topic, alongside with some technical meetings in Brussels and Croatia. In 2020, it will be two years since the adoption of the revised EU Bioeconomy Strategy, which potentially marks a good time to start the discussion on its evaluation.

The full report on the conference is available at the following website: https://www.biotalous.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Conference-Outcome-Report-EUBioScene19.pdf