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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	AOB item for the meeting of "Agriculture and Fisheries" Council of 9-10 December 2024: Council Conclusions adopted on 29 November 2024 Competitiveness Council on a potential Europe-wide R&I initiative on advancing sustainable natural resource management, food systems security and the deployment of the bioeconomy, harnessing the potential of Central and Eastern Europe - Information from the Presidency

The Hungarian Presidency is pleased to inform about the Competitiveness Council's approval of the Council conclusions on a potential Europe-wide research and innovation (R&I) initiative for sustainable natural resource management, food system security, and the deployment of the bioeconomy, harnessing the potential of Central and Eastern Europe.

The conclusions focus on enhancing the sustainable bioeconomy across the EU, with special attention to Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, and EU candidate countries.

The agreement of the 27 Member States is a significant step toward assessing the research and innovation needs and gaps in the macro-region, which should trigger sustainable transition pathways for soil and freshwater management, and biomass valorization at the local level for both food and non-food uses. Tailored research and innovation actions should help to add value to biomass locally in rural and coastal areas. The natural resources and biomass from the macro-region should greatly contribute to Europe's food, industrial, and energy security.

Recognizing the macro-region's valuable natural assets, such as fertile soils, freshwater resources, and renewable biomass, discussions were initiated last year by the BIOEAST Initiative. These were followed by a Stakeholders Manifesto stressing the need to enhance local knowledge of environmentally friendly technologies.

Accordingly, agriculture and research ministers from 10 BIOEAST countries—Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia—signed a common declaration to strengthen their cooperation in research, innovation, and development. This declaration also emphasized involving other countries, such as the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, to facilitate their integration into the European Research Area in agriculture and other bioeconomy sectors.

The conclusions request the European Commission to conduct a gap analysis to assess the need, feasibility, and potential impact of a new R&I initiative. This assessment will explore options for addressing challenges in sustainable natural resource management and bioeconomy deployment, with input from experts and Member States. The Commission is asked to prepare a strategic roadmap for potential implementation based on the analysis.

The conclusions call for a strategic roadmap to outline actionable next steps, which could align with the 2025 review of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy.

This decision brings renewed momentum to the bioeconomy, empowering Central and Eastern Europe and other regions to maximize their biomass resources and human capital, while contributing to rural development, resilience, and sustainability. The Hungarian Presidency highlights this development as a key milestone for the macro-region's bioeconomies and invites agricultural ministers to reflect on its implications for their national strategies.