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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: Outcome of the "BIOEAST and Beyond: Partnering for the Future" high-level conference on Central and Eastern European research and innovation priorities in the context of sustainable soil and water resilience, food systems security and bioeconomy related policies (Budapest, 4-6 December 2024) - Information from the Presidency

In 2011, during the last Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR) endorsed the **Budapest Declaration**. This declaration called for a common understanding that Europe must focus on research areas of strategic importance to enable a swift transition toward sustainable food consumption and production in a resource-constrained world.

From 4 to 6 December 2024, the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in close cooperation with the European Commission, the SCAR, and the BIOEAST Initiative hosted a high-level conference "BIOEAST and Beyond: Partnering for the Future" in Budapest, Hungary. This event brought together over 300 key stakeholders, including ministers, policymakers, researchers, and private sector representatives, to deliberate on Central and Eastern European (CEE) research and innovation (R&I) priorities in the context of sustainable soil and water resilience, food systems security, and the bioeconomy.

The aim of the conference was to initiate an in-depth discussion on key research thematic areas that are particularly important from the region's perspective: soil health, freshwater resilience, food systems security, and localized biomanufacturing. The conference sought to serve as a cornerstone for the development of a future research and innovation initiative, aiming to enhance the production and utilization of local biomass in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Western Balkans and other accession countries. The conference also highlighted the important role and effectiveness of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) and the role of CAP in developing it.

The conference highlighted the region's critical role in addressing European challenges, such as achieving Strategic Autonomy, strengthening sustainability, and enhancing resilience. Discussions aimed to align regional research and innovation capacities with broader European Research Area (ERA) goals.

Shock and Resilience in Agri-Food Systems:

Opening plenary discussions focused on systemic shocks—such as climate change, resource scarcity, and geopolitical tensions—that impact European agri-food systems.

Distinguished keynote speakers addressed the interconnected roles of soil, freshwater, food systems, and bioeconomy innovations in fostering resilience and sustainability.

Thematic Panels on Research and Policy Priorities:

The panel on Carbon-Water Cycles Nexus explored the interdependencies between soil health and freshwater resilience. Discussions emphasized governance models and research priorities that promote sustainable landscape and green water management.

The panel on Nutrition-Biomanufacturing Cycles Nexus highlighted opportunities for food system security and locally valorized biomass in bioeconomy solutions. Special focus was placed on integrating food and non-food biomass into circular economic models.

Policy and Science-Policy Dialogues:

Panels discussed policy needs in terms of research, the potential contributions of the CEE region to European Strategic Autonomy, more particularly in the context of EU Missions: ‘A Soil Deal for Europe’ and ‘Restore Our Ocean and Waters’ on focusing research on regional biomass resources, sustainable technologies, and innovative governance frameworks.

Participants underlined the importance of tailored R&I approaches to address the unique needs of the region. Also discussed the importance of synergies between different policies to improve knowledge and innovation systems, highlighting the role of CAP as well based on the *“Conclusion on farmer focused post 2027 Common Agricultural Policy: Towards a competitive, crisis-proof, sustainable, farmer-friendly and knowledge-based future EU agriculture”*.

Advancing a Geographically Focused Pan-European R&I Initiative:

The conference reaffirmed the aspiration for a dedicated R&I initiative to enhance sustainability, resilience, and innovation in the CEE region. The Hungarian Presidency's efforts have laid the groundwork for this initiative, with the Council Conclusions calling for a gap analysis to evaluate its feasibility and impact.

Research and Innovation Priorities:

Identified priorities include soil health and green water management, food systems security, biotechnologies deployment, and societal engagement in sustainability transitions. These themes align with ERA objectives and require further investment and policy support.

World Soil Day Ceremony:

A commemorative event underscored the importance of soil health for sustainable development, including keynote addresses and the presentation of awards for achievements in soil science.

Preparation for the future:

Working towards a more in-depth Gap Analysis: Experts were invited to support the Competitiveness Council Conclusions' recommendation to conduct a comprehensive gap analysis 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.

Recognizing the untapped potential of the region's natural resources and innovation capacity, stakeholders were urged to advocate for greater regional collaboration to address Europe-wide challenges.

The Hungarian Presidency emphasized the importance of a potential next step by preparing a BIOEAST position paper. This paper could articulate regional priorities for the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Horizon Europe's successor, FP10, ensuring the CEE region's needs are integrated into European funding and programming and the development of Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) in the future CAP.

Conclusion

The "BIOEAST and Beyond" conference has set a strong foundation for advancing research and innovation in the CEE region. By fostering collaboration and leveraging regional strengths, Ministers are invited to take decisive steps to ensure the conference outcomes translate into tangible actions.
