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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	<i>Preparation of the Council (Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space)) on 28-29 November 2024</i> Draft Council conclusions 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 - Approval

1. The Council conclusions on the opportunities of the bioeconomy in the light of current challenges with special emphasis on rural areas, approved on 25 April 2023¹, highlight the important role of the sustainable and circular bioeconomy in facing current challenges and in supporting the Union's economy, notably by providing essential jobs and increasing competitiveness.

¹ 8406/23

2. On 20 March 2024, the Commission presented the communication “Building the future with nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU”², which outlines the need for a review of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy in 2025, taking into account the current societal, demographic and environmental challenges, while ensuring the EU’s resilience.
3. In July 2024, the Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Research of 10 EU Member States signed a Declaration to reiterate their commitment to address key challenges in the deployment of the bioeconomy in Central and Eastern Europe.
4. Within this context, the Presidency proposed draft Council conclusions, with the aim to launch an assessment, in form of a gap analysis, on the need for, the feasibility, and impact of a potential new Europe-wide research and innovation (R&I) initiative on sustainable natural resource management, food systems security and the deployment of the bioeconomy, harnessing the potential of Central and Eastern European Member States, Western Balkan countries and EU candidate countries. This assessment should be carried out by the Commission and should consider all possible options of a potential new R&I initiative.
5. The Presidency proposal and its subsequent revised versions were discussed by the Research Working Party at its meetings of 18 July, 11 September, 10 October, and 5 November 2024. Following an informal written consultation, the Research Working Party agreed on the text of the draft Council conclusions as set out in the annex to this note.
6. The Permanent Representatives Committee is therefore invited to confirm the agreement reached at technical level and to submit the draft conclusions, as set out in the annex to this note, for approval by the Council (Competitiveness) at its meeting of 29 November 2024.

² COM(2024) 137 final

**DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS 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**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING

- the European Council conclusions of 23 and 24 June 2022³, which recognise the European perspective of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, while expressing its full and unequivocal commitment to the EU membership perspective of the Western Balkans;
- the European Council conclusions of 26 and 27 October 2023⁴ on the EU's competitiveness, which emphasise that the EU needs a strong economic base that ensures its long-term competitiveness and a level playing field both internally and globally;
- its conclusions of 29 November 2019⁵ on the updated Bioeconomy Strategy 'A sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: strengthening the connection between economy, society and the environment', which acknowledge the role of BIOEAST in the implementation of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy;
- the Council Recommendation of 26 November 2021⁶ on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe linked to the Commission Communication on 'A New ERA for Research and Innovation';

³ EUCO 24/22.

⁴ EUCO 14/23.

⁵ 14594/19.

⁶ 13701/21.

- its conclusions of 25 April 2023⁷ on the opportunities of the bioeconomy in the light of current challenges with special emphasis on rural areas, which encourage the Commission and the Member States to strengthen cooperation under BIOEAST;
- its conclusions of 24 May 2024⁸ on a competitive European industry driving our green, digital and resilient future, which urge the Commission to recognise biotechnology and the bio-based economy as an elementary part of the EU’s industrial policy and to ensure coordination in order to enhance policy coherence;
- the Commission’s Communications and accompanying documents on ‘The European Green Deal’⁹; ‘A new Circular Economy Action Plan for a cleaner and more competitive Europe’¹⁰; ‘EU Climate Action Progress Report 2023’¹¹; ‘Securing our future: Europe’s 2040 climate target and path to climate neutrality by 2050 building a sustainable, just and prosperous society’¹²; and ‘Building the future with nature: Boosting Biotechnology and Biomanufacturing in the EU’¹³, which highlight the importance of the bioeconomy in supporting the green transition and European competitiveness,

⁷ 8406/23.
⁸ 10127/24.
⁹ COM(2019) 640 final.
¹⁰ COM(2020) 98 final.
¹¹ COM(2023) 653 final.
¹² COM(2024) 63 final.
¹³ COM(2024) 137 final.

1. ACKNOWLEDGES that achieving the medium and long-term targets of the European Green Deal for 2030 and 2050 relies also on the sustainable production and use of biomass, including bio-waste. EMPHASISES that the sustainable and circular bioeconomy can both help to meet the targets of the European Green Deal and also boost Europe's competitiveness. WELCOMES the information on the foreseen update of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy by the end of 2025, which should consider the current societal, demographic, economic and environmental challenges, the bioeconomy's industrial dimension and its links to biotechnology and biomanufacturing to contribute to a stronger EU economy. At the same time, it should also take into account the precautionary principle and prioritise consumers' interests. TAKES NOTE of the increasing complexity of challenges, addressed by the abovementioned strategies, which extend beyond Member States' borders and would benefit from a wider transnational collaboration with third countries that share EU values and principles.
2. RECOGNISES the ongoing debates surrounding sustainability and competitiveness, particularly regarding indispensable but vulnerable natural resources such as soil, freshwater, and ecosystem services, as well as the critical importance of European food systems security and the potential of bio-based innovation and solutions and biomanufacturing in driving socio-economic and sustainable development in Europe.
3. UNDERLINES the work done in this regard in the ongoing European Partnerships, including but not limited to those in Cluster 6, of the Horizon Europe Programme, such as the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking (CBE JU), which has put in place a widening strategy and action plan, with the aim of mobilising underrepresented stakeholders and beneficiaries, as well as the positive example of the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) as an instrument for enhanced cooperation with neighbouring countries of the EU. UNDERLINES the importance of synergies between and complementarities with missions, in particular the EU Missions 'Restore our Oceans and Waters' and 'A Soil Deal for Europe'.

4. NOTES that the trends of the European Innovation Scoreboard indicate that Central and Eastern European (CEE) Member States are mainly among the emerging and moderate innovators and their participation in framework programmes remains moderate.
EMPHASISES the need to increase investments at national level and to take further action in order to broaden participation, to support the exchange and valorisation of excellent science and bio-based innovations across the European Research Area (ERA).
5. NOTES the need to promote the sustainable development of supply chains and business models including for higher value products and the local processing of bioresources in CEE Member States by engaging stakeholders in an inclusive and bottom-up manner in the research, innovation, and the deployment of sustainable bio-based solutions to facilitate Europe's transition towards a circular and sustainable future.
6. NOTES the role of BIOEAST in supporting the European green and just transition and the progress it has made in recent years as a platform with an established coordination mechanism, structure, and resources in identifying common strategic research and innovation (R&I) priorities in the fields of agroecology, freshwater resilience, food systems security, and the circular and sustainable bioeconomy. UNDERLINES the potential of aligning policies and regulations related to the bioeconomy at Union level, in particular with respect to creating a conducive environment for investment, research, innovation, and sustainable development in the sector.
7. TAKES NOTE of the commitment of the Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Research of the 11 Member States participating in BIOEAST as expressed in the 2019 Joint Declaration¹⁴, outlining the future trajectory of BIOEAST , as well as the reiterated commitment in the form of the Declaration signed in July 2024 by the Ministers responsible for Agriculture and Research of 10 Member States to develop a partnership to address the interconnections between sustainable natural resources, the food systems, and the deployment of the bioeconomy in CEE.

¹⁴ 9235/19.

8. RECOGNISES the need to boost open and inclusive cooperation in bioeconomy related R&I among all EU Member States, while fostering open cooperation with the Western Balkan (WB) and candidate countries. TAKES NOTE of the proposal of the BIOEAST declaration signed by 10 Member States to set up a potential Europe-wide R&I initiative on carbon, water, nutrition, and energy cycles, in the context of sustainable natural resource management, food systems security and the deployment of the bioeconomy, harnessing the potential of CEE Member States, WB and candidate countries, as that could address local needs through the adoption and adaptation of excellent research results and innovative solutions. The BIOEAST signatories advocate that such a potential initiative could further increase European competitiveness in the area of the bioeconomy, including biomanufacturing and biotechnology, while contributing to the protection and efficient use of natural resources, accessing private and public funds to boost innovative bio-based solutions.
9. RECOGNISES the need for a more in-depth discussion with all Member States and the European Commission on the role of R&I in harnessing the bioeconomy potential of CEE Member States, WB and candidate countries in the context of European strategic autonomy. A potential new R&I initiative could help in delivering key knowledge and know-how, enhancing science diplomacy through the promotion and protection of European values, such as research ethics, integrity, and gender equality, as well as fostering relationships, stability, prosperity, and sustainable transition to WB and candidate countries and address brain drain. Better use of synergies and increased participation should bring added value to the European R&I ecosystem, contribute to the EU's food systems security by paying special attention to the safety, authenticity and quality of food products and waste valorisation, as well as to help untap the potential of underutilised biomass in the EU, and in WB and candidate countries, with positive spillovers throughout the single market, and to increase European competitiveness.

10. UNDERLINES the added value of transnational R&I initiatives in delivering new solutions for the twin green and digital transition, health, and societal challenges, and IDENTIFIES the urgent need for projects of sustainable and high-quality design that are implemented in line with a high level of transparency and standards. Such a potential new Europe-wide initiative could lead to further strategic cooperation and should define clear objectives to avoid overlap between existing and new R&I activities at EU and national levels to avoid the duplication of funding, and to ensure greater resilience in the face of crises.
11. Therefore, INVITES the Commission, in full respect of its right of initiative, to carry out a gap analysis in line with applicable procedures to assess in consultation with experts, the need for, the feasibility, and impact of launching a potential new Europe-wide R&I initiative, considering all possible options, on sustainable natural resource management, food systems security and the deployment of the bioeconomy, harnessing the potential of CEE Member States, WB and candidate countries. Subject to the outcome of such an analysis, the preparation of a strategic roadmap could be considered, in consultation with Member States, to ensure that the natural resources of Member States, supplemented by the WB and candidate countries, can be repositioned and valorised based on the most excellent science and innovative technology that is available and desired across the EU.
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