



**European Committee
of the Regions**



ECRN
EUROPEAN CHEMICAL
REGIONS NETWORK

Harnessing the Bioeconomy potential in European regions

European Committee of the Regions

7 June 2017

On 7th of June ECRN and Committee of the Regions jointly organized an event on *Harnessing the bioeconomy potential of European regions*. This was an afternoon full of knowledge-exchange and sharing of real-life experiences. The event was organized just a month after the Opinion of the CoR member Mrs Katrin Budde ["The local and regional dimension of the bioeconomy and the role of regions and cities"](#) was unanimously adopted in CoR.

The European Chemical Regions Network is proud to be an example of a network that makes a *"major contribution to expanding the bioeconomy"* as stated in the CoR Opinion.

The debate was kicked off with a political panel where the ECRN director, Renatka Krcova, together with CoR member Katrin Budde (DE/PES), ECRN Vice President Twan Beurskens, MEP Miapetra Kumpula-Natri (FI/S&D) and the Director of Dir F Bioeconomy in DG RTD John Bell outlined key trends in the field of bioeconomy, focusing particularly on the role of regions and chemical industry as contributors to the European bioeconomy. A common message voiced by all speakers in the panel was that the bioeconomy is present in many economic sectors, EU initiatives and regional policies. Thus, the bioeconomy should be harnessed on different levels and by various actors. John Bell made a strong case for regional bioeconomy strategies, arguing that regions have an important role for assessing, mapping and channeling the biomass in the right way, while the bioeconomy opens an opportunity for regional and rural renaissance for the local communities. Katrin Budde pointed at the potential of chemical regions to be leaders in boosting the bioeconomy, while Twan Beurskens called for tailored policy approach on regional level and support for SMEs. Among the MEPs, there should be better understanding what enables and blocks the development of bio-based industries, according to the MEP Kumpula-Natri.

The panelist in the second sessions presented real-life experiences of bioeconomy value-chains established across industries and borders through cluster cooperation. Regional examples from Saxony-

Anhalt (BioEconomy Cluster), North Rhine-Westphalia (CLIB2021), Limburg (Brightlands Chemelot Campus), Baden-Württemberg (BIOPRO) and Wallonia (Valbium) revealed the different strategic approaches regarding the organization of the regional and cross-border stakeholders, utilization of biomass, collaboration with regional and national authorities, combination of funding and pilot projects. Bureaucracy and regulative differences were pointed as main challenges to cross-border regional projects, while the opportunities available under the Bio-based Industries Joint Undertaking (BBI JU) are still not easily accessible by SMEs.

The third panel looked at steps ahead, and Sebastian Kehrer from Bioeconomy Council Bavaria stressed the importance of inter-ministerial cooperation which should lead to the development of common inter-ministerial strategies on regional level.

For ECRN, the debate created bridges to EU institutions and to local actors, which would provide a stable ground for further collaboration, on EU and regional level, for accelerating the development of integrated policy approaches and delivering real socio-economic impact.

The event was a great opportunity for regional representatives to identify potential priorities for their future bioeconomy strategies, while industry and cluster representatives were able to learn about good practices and share the challenges they face, which need to be further tackled on policy level.

Looking at the calendar until the end of the year, the bioeconomy will be high on the agenda of the European Commission. The Horizon 2020 Info week takes place in Brussels on 14-17 November 2017, and the Commission is organizing a plenary session to present its review of the European Bioeconomy Strategy and Action Plan.

The moderator Thomas Wobben, Director of Directorate C - Legislative Work 2 in CoR, concluded that the momentum is there and regional authorities should use it to build sustainable development strategies as a long term framework for the bioeconomy. At the same time, the ongoing review of EU funding policies (Cohesion Policy, Horizon2020) is an opportunity to better utilize the synergies between regional ,national and EU funding for bioeconomy projects.