



Director General DG RTD, ROBERT-JAN SMITS

THE KNOWLEDGE BASED BIO-ECONOMY TOWARDS 2020
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Closing speech by Director General DG RTD,
ROBERT-JAN SMITS

Delivered by Dr. R. Strohmeier

The Conference today was an important step to engage in a wide consultation on the development of a shared vision for a European bio-economy, a vision which would help us move from a fossil-based economy to a economy based on the sunlight of today and on sustainable and innovative use of our biological resources from land and sea.

The conference challenged us to expand our thinking beyond our scientific disciplines and policy areas in order to identify the common ways forward over the next decade and beyond. It became evident that we can no longer think in isolation about the improvement of plant productivity, the changing nutritional needs in our urbanised societies, the call for more bio-fuels, the need to reduce waste in the production cycles or the urge to start using bio-mass as an input to our chemical industries. These issues are all interdependent, all putting claims on the available land, water and other resources.

It is of utmost importance to develop interdisciplinary and holistic thinking to tackle such societal challenges which at the same time constitute the driving forces for creation of bio-economy. We in DG Research are pursuing a cross-cutting approach. I believe you have noticed the joint calls we have launched in last years which combine efforts of several research directorates. Also, the new Joint Programming Initiatives in the area of Agriculture and Climate Change as well as in Healthy Food and Healthy Diet should contribute to a stronger integration of the research teams both geographically, between Member States, but also across themes.

To the same end, I would like to underline that we are committed to work with other departments of the European Commission to better link the bio-economy with relevant EU policies. I am glad to say that we already have good collaboration on going with our colleagues in agriculture, industry and environmental domains, as also demonstrated by the presence of distinguished speakers today. This is how we want research policy to work – in close cooperation with all stakeholders in the bio-economy, throughout whole innovation chain.

Presentations throughout the day took stock of the achievements in the diverse bio-economy sectors in terms of providing new knowledge and innovation, fuelling economic

growth and improving quality of life. An excellent exhibition took place during the event today to illustrate what our bio-sciences and related innovation has and could further deliver as technological and social innovation.

The bio-economy can address current societal challenges – that is beyond doubt. But harnessing this power in the most efficient way is still the real challenge. We all agreed that an integrated policy framework can help us closely interlink diverse bio-economy areas and actors at European, national and regional levels. In this regard, the recent initiatives in countries such as the Netherlands and Germany to create specific national strategies for promoting bio-economy, are most welcome.

As Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn already noted, the Commission will put forward its “European Strategy towards a sustainable bio-based economy 2020” taking into account the outcomes of the conference today. Your experiences, views and ideas for the future you have shared with us today will form an indispensable input into the new policy agenda.

Let me also recall other main steps in this process. In addition to this conference, there will be a number of other consultations. We aim to launch a public consultation later this year. We will carry out an impact assessment and we will consult a number of external expert groups on the socio-economic implications, education needs and other aspects of the strategy. Taking into account all these preparations the Commission plans to adopt the Communication in autumn next year and we hope that the Spring Council will have it on its agenda in 2012.

I would like to stress that the bio-economy strategy and action plan needs to be seen in the light of other important on-going initiatives. Later this month, Commission will adopt a new policy framework for the Innovation Union. The Innovation Union will deploy legislative and non-legislative tools for linking research and innovation, and thus address effectively the societal challenges we face today.

We are also in the process of preparing for the next Framework Programme (FP8). FP8 will be developed against the backdrop of Europe 2020 and the Innovation Union and will therefore need to contribute to meeting the objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive

growth and will need to be centred more closely than in the past on addressing societal challenges.

We are also committed to strengthen the innovation dimension of the Framework Programme, by creating stronger mechanisms for dissemination and take-up of research results.

All these aspects need to be kept in mind when putting together the policy agenda for the bio-economy. Although I am aware that tasks will not be easy, I'm convinced that with the tremendous offers of support and commitment from all bio-economy stakeholders that we received today, we can realise our ambitions.

Let me end by thanking all the speakers and participants for their extremely valuable contributions; and especially the Belgian Presidency for their support and hard work which has made this event possible.

On behalf of the European Commission, I wish a lot of energy, good ideas and successful work in the future in launching and implementing the new bio-economy policy agenda.