



**BRILIAN**  
Circular Future for Rural Areas

## DISCUSSION & Q&A



**Webinar: Policy alignment: toward a coherent and supportive framework**

Period covered: Jan 23, 2025

## Introduction

The following document summarizes the outcomes of the discussion and Q&A session of the *Policy alignment: toward a coherent and supportive framework* webinar in an interactive format using the transcript of the video recording.

### Transformation and Regional Fit

**Question:** In the context of transformation across various sectors like bioeconomy, food systems, agriculture, rural development, energy, and digitalization, how do you see the role of regional contexts in shaping cohesive policy frameworks? Are these transformations universally applicable, or do they require place-based approaches to address differing regional priorities and challenges? Additionally, how can regional initiatives, such as innovation values for bioeconomy and food systems, contribute to achieving these visions effectively?

**Answer (Roberto):** The regional dimension is vital for implementing European policies, especially in areas like the bioeconomy strategy. While the EU has tools like the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Cohesion Funds aimed at improving social and environmental well-being across regions, the challenge lies in translating broad principles into local action.

Local initiatives are key to bridging the gap between the “Brussels bubble” of EU institutions and the real lives of citizens. Without strong local involvement, we risk creating two parallel worlds: one of policy-making and lobbying, and another of communities feeling disconnected from these efforts.

Take the Green Deal, for example. It started as an ambitious vision with many legislative goals, but member states are still struggling to implement it. With the next policy cycle, we may see some backtracking on these expectations, especially with anticipated budget cuts to the CAP and Cohesion Funds, partly due to the ongoing war with Russia.

The message is clear: keep pushing for local action. The connection between EU policies and local communities is the backbone of the European Union. Without it, achieving meaningful progress becomes much harder.



## On the Role of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

**Question:** The current CAP includes bioeconomy as a concept, but it often feels more like a keyword than a fully realized priority, with limited concrete measures to support it. For example, while some member states have taken steps to support bioeconomy products like bioplastics or initiatives like composting systems, these efforts seem fragmented and insufficient.

Given that a significant portion of the CAP budget goes to direct payments, how can we better integrate and prioritize bioeconomy within the CAP framework? What steps can be taken to ensure bioeconomy products are supported not just at the production level but also in reaching real market potential? Additionally, how important is communication in bridging the gap between bioeconomy innovations and market adoption?

**Roberto's Response:** Let me share a concrete example to highlight the current challenges. I recently met with the CEO of a major chemical company planning a massive investment in Belgium. They aim to produce 300,000 tons of bio-based plastics annually, using sustainably sourced feedstock, some of which will come from outside the EU. The company has everything lined up—land, connections, and resources—and plans to finalize the investment by the end of 2025.



However, the CEO was unsure who in Brussels to approach for support or guidance on promoting biorefineries and bio-plastics production. This highlights a critical issue: there's no single point of reference within the European Commission for such projects. While I suggested speaking to DG Climate, which is more open to non-fossil solutions, this lack of clear pathways creates unnecessary hurdles for advancing bioeconomy initiatives.

The interest in bio-based plastics is growing—it's no longer the mystery it was a year ago—but the mechanisms to support market opportunities are still missing. For example, while bioenergy receives incentives, biomaterials are often overlooked despite the presence of startups and companies offering bio-based solutions. Unfortunately, high costs and energy expenses remain significant barriers.

What's needed is a more streamlined approach in Brussels, perhaps through the new project group structure within the European Commission. Having a "one-stop shop" for bioeconomy discussions and support could make a real difference in enabling such promising initiatives to thrive.



## Overcoming Market Barriers & Simplifying and Bureaucratic Challenges

**Comment:** You've mentioned the importance of streamlining processes to support bioeconomy initiatives. From my experience assessing proposals for EU-funded projects and mapping the bioeconomy in Ukraine, it's clear that the EU's complex bureaucracy and regulatory hurdles often create significant barriers for innovation. For instance, while startups in countries like Germany may receive initial EU funding to develop their technologies, many eventually choose to scale their

businesses in markets like the United States or Singapore due to simpler and more accessible regulatory environments.

How can we address these challenges to make the EU a more competitive and attractive space for bioeconomy initiatives? What specific steps can be taken to simplify regulations and reduce bureaucracy, not just within agricultural policy but across sectors, to retain innovation and boost competitiveness in the EU economy?

**Roberto's Response:** Simplifying processes is absolutely essential for the EU over the next five years. A major challenge lies in the uneven support for bio-based solutions across member states. For example, Germany has been reluctant to embrace bioeconomy innovations, instead favoring fossil plastics, partly due to the influence of its chemical industry. This highlights the importance of advocacy and action at local and national levels, where change can begin.

Encouragingly, there are positive examples, like in Belgium's Flanders region, where farmers are exploring bioeconomy opportunities due to economic challenges in agriculture. However, significant work is still needed to amplify the bioeconomy's voice across Europe.

Stakeholders often ask whom they should approach to drive change. The answer is clear: regional and national authorities, as they implement legislation and set the rules that impact bioeconomy initiatives. Although biorefineries exist across Europe, and some member states like the Netherlands, Sweden, and Finland lead the way with innovative policies, the EU needs a stronger, collective political push to expand the market and make bioeconomy solutions viable on a larger scale.

Ultimately, while research and innovation in Europe are thriving, building a broader market and achieving political momentum remain the biggest hurdles.





## Decentralized and Modular Biorefineries & Mobilizing Investment and Creating Critical Mass

**Question:** We are a biotech, Irish startup, focuses on creating modular, on-site biorefineries to process waste streams, particularly in the distillery and brewery industries. One key challenge is educating stakeholders and addressing the complexities of scaling up economically. Modular solutions, such as shipping container-sized biorefineries, could offer an innovative, cost-effective alternative to large-scale facilities. What are your thoughts on the potential for such modular approaches, and how can financing models or collaborations be optimized to encourage companies to adopt or co-own these smaller, incremental biorefinery solutions?

**Roberto's Response:** There's a need for incremental solutions in achieving sustainability goals, particularly in areas like recycled content in plastics. For example, bio-based plastics could contribute to meeting EU legislation requiring recycled content, such as the 25% target for new cars. Even small contributions, like 1-3%, demonstrate potential.

One idea is to have roadshows for investors to showcase bioeconomy solutions. This would involve presenting successful initiatives—such as rural biorefineries and modular systems—to investors in cities like London, Dublin, and Rome. The aim is to highlight existing technologies, attract private investment, and bridge the gap between innovation and implementation.

An example of innovation in action is a demonstrator unit on a trailer, which can be brought to client sites to show how on-site biorefinery solutions work. This approach addresses a knowledge and innovation gap by integrating bio-based solutions with existing facilities. However, achieving this requires more investment in areas like financing, training, and connecting with relevant networks.

The key message is clear: the technologies exist, but better communication, investment, and collaboration are essential to scale these solutions effectively.

**David's Point:** The European Innovation Council (EIC), which organizes events that connect startups with investors in the EU and beyond. If you'd like, you can share your email, and I can help you make some introductions.

There is a considerable amount of funding available, but many investors have concerns regarding the European legislative landscape. As mentioned by Roberto, while there is potential for growth, the timeline for clarity is uncertain. The EIC frequently holds pitch events for innovative ideas, attracting investor interest.

It's important to address the market drivers and legislative requirements when discussing potential investments. For example, by 2028, fertilizers and seeds are required to move away from non-biodegradable plastics, which creates a demand for sustainable alternatives. Similar shifts are occurring in cosmetics, where certain products must align with new regulations.

Investors are keen to understand if these market trends will support significant investments. Exploring

these connections may provide valuable opportunities moving forward.

**Comment:** There is a need for standardization and common equipment to reduce capital expenditure (CapEx). For pilot projects, it is important to effectively bring solutions to the marketplace and to potential end users. While centralized biorefineries can be beneficial, I believe there should also be a clever decentralized or modular approach that allows for rapid expansion and diversification of capabilities.



## The Path Forward

- Local and Regional Advocacy: Effective transformation requires aligning EU policies with regional priorities and enabling grassroots efforts.
- Simplification and Standardization: Streamlined regulations and standardized technologies can reduce barriers to market entry.
- Investor Engagement: Initiatives like roadshows and targeted communication can highlight the bioeconomy's potential to private investors.
- Decentralized Solutions: Modular biorefineries offer practical, scalable pathways for industries to adopt bio-based technologies.
- Policy and Legislative Support: Strong legislative frameworks with clear market incentives are vital for driving bioeconomy adoption.

The bioeconomy transformation holds immense potential, but realizing it requires collective efforts across local, regional, and EU levels, combined with robust stakeholder engagement and innovative financing.



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