

Added value

A prosperous economy stimulates growth and can lead the way to recovery, writes **Lambert Van Nistelrooij**

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The European commission strategy on the bioeconomy in Europe will, if properly supported and implemented, enable all stakeholders along the bioeconomy value chain to harness this research expertise and translate it into strong European bio-based industries. For too long, the EU has focused on research and technology development in separate fields, without an integrated follow-up to the market. We invested a lot in bio-related research, but we were very weak in making money out of it. Now we have an opportunity for actions with great added value. It is an opportunity for innovation, utilising the commission's strategy, fully into programmes such as Horizon 2020, the European innovation partnerships (EIPs), new formulated regional funding and public private partner-

ship initiatives. It is for the first time that the EU will support the actors on the bioeconomy value chain in developing demonstration and pilot projects, supporting the creation of bio-refineries and the necessary infrastructure here in Europe to make the bioeconomy a success.

In this respect, I underline the chances in markets such as bioplastics, for example, which goes hand in hand with new economic initiatives in Europe's regions. For the bioeconomy to be truly European, the production of sustainably sourced raw materials must be encouraged in European agricultural communities and regions. In the regional policy we introduced the approach of "smart specialisation". For 2014-2020 every region has to bring forward tailor-made choices as a basis for future funding from the regional funds. I see room for more synergy between the research projects and the innovations to be created by entrepreneurs all over Europe. Crossovers between the chemical sector, agriculture and consumer products are coming. Regional examples are available from the Netherlands, France and Italy and elsewhere and demonstrate what institutional and structural support for the development of the bioeconomy can achieve. In cohesion policy we want all regions to develop their own strengths. Europe has good possibilities both inside the traditional industrial heartlands and in more rural parts. Thus, the European bioeconomy can be a central element in ensuring a more balanced development all over Europe, supported by the EU 2020 approach.

A flourishing bioeconomy in Europe not only offers growth, but it is also a good example of how to bring the results of research to the market. The bioeconomy will stimulate much needed smart, inclusive and innovative growth in Europe's regional and rural communities. It can lead the way to recovery from the crisis and to a more resource oriented economy. As it stands, European research centres in the Netherlands, the UK, Finland and elsewhere is at the cutting edge of research into the bioeconomy and bio-based materials, such as bioplastics. I look forward to working with my colleagues in parliament's industry, research and energy committee and with our responsible commissioner Máire Geoghegan-Quinn in ensuring that the bioeconomy in Europe fulfils its potential. ★

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