

Workshop:

"Synergies between EU Programs and Cohesion Policies in the areas of Bioeconomy and Blue Economy: sharing information to co-design more effective fund synergies"

Date and location:

- January 24, 2022 (2:30-6:30 p.m.)
- Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Rome

Organizers:

- National Bioeconomy Coordination Group of the National Committee for Biosafety, Biotechnology and Life Sciences of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers
- Healthy Planet Directorate of the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission

Regional Delegation - Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia:

- Stefano Zannier, Regional Minister for Agri-food, Forestry, Fisheries and Mountains
- Andrea Giorgiutti, Director of the Production Quality Enhancement Department

Regional contribution (maximum 7-10 minutes):

Good afternoon,

I am Stefano Zannier, Regional Minister in charge of Agri-food, Forestry, Fisheries and Mountains of the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, and I am speaking on behalf of the President of my region –Mr. Massimiliano Fedriga - who is also the President of the Conference of Italian Regions, who was unable to attend today's meeting due to overlapping commitments. He is nevertheless fully committed to the strategic importance of the topics we are discussing today.

First of all let me thank:

- the European Commission's representatives and the other speakers for their availability and the quality of their contributions;
- the National Bioeconomy Coordination Group for organizing this workshop and for all the other important activities it carries out while constantly involving the Regions;
- the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for hosting this initiative, confirming it's strong strategic interest in circular bioeconomy;
- the representatives of the other Regions, whose attendance underlines the shared interest in the issue;
- last, but not least, my regional administration for the insights that have been provided in support of my speech.

In order to be able to properly deal with the topics "synergies between funds" and "bioeconomy", we should take into consideration that a common effort is required from both the public and the private sector in order to implement a greater interaction between these different sectors. Furthermore there is a need for dialogue between them and the various operational instruments that are often not coordinated. For this reason, coordination activities at the European, national and regional levels play a key role. In this framework, we are aware that simply responding to the important needs of the primary sector, which I represent, is not enough to achieve European objectives. Dialogue can be a great asset in achieving them, though.

Delving into the topic of the workshop, I can say with certainty that the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia has made great efforts to put into practice these synergies, but there is still a wide margin for improvement.

I would now like to bring to your attention the following regional best practices:

1) Successful examples of synergies among Horizon2020/BBJ JU and structural funds implemented by the Region;

- with reference to an achieved coordination at regional level, the Regional department dealing with International Relations and European Programming was given the main task of working on unified and integrated programming.

This has made it possible to achieve some important results, including:

- The creation of the [Europa FVG website](#), which has been structured in a such way to gather all information on European programming and related calls for proposals, and to provide a tool for identifying topics of interest. This tool has been implemented thanks to the collaboration of all the Regional Managing Authorities. In the Europa portal, a section is also dedicated to the European Commission's directly managed programs, including Horizon Europe in order to give maximum visibility to both instruments co-financed by cohesion policies and directly managed programmes. Information is a key component to get familiarised with these subjects.
- To have started an analysis on the possibility of better publicizing (at the regional level) the calls for proposals opened also by other regions, in order to promote partnerships between different subjects. Friuli Venezia Giulia is a member of the Core Group of regions that, within the Vanguard Initiative, would like to investigate the possibility of establishing a new Interregional Funding Mechanisms (IFM) that would allow to complement and achieve the above-mentioned synergies. This implies a close cooperation with the neighbouring territories which, in our case, means also improving the dialogue with countries such as Austria and Slovenia on projects of mutual interest.
- Having contributed to the drafting of the Vademecum on synergies between Structural Funds and other EU funding programs which has been published last July (2022) via the Regional Liaison Office in Brussels. This was possible through an active participation in the informal group, coordinated by APRE, which brought together all the liaison offices and the Brussels representatives of other Italian stakeholders, which specific reference to the fields of Research & Innovation (GIURI).
- Having published a first shared regional strategic document on Cohesion Policies (ERDF, ESF, Interreg). This was done starting from the consultation of the regional partnership and was also useful to identify the synergies between Cohesion Policy funds and NRP missions.

As far as Rural Development (EAFRD) is concerned, this Fund it is expected to be used for specific issues starting from 2023, as the National Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy was approved by the European Commission only in December 2022. On this last point, I think it is crucial to point out that, in the 2014-2022 EAFRD programming period:

- several projects were implemented, in particular those dealing with a focus on innovation in agricultural productivity and sustainability. This was implemented through the Operational Groups recognized in the European Innovation Partnership;
- start-ups dealing with non-agricultural activities in the sector of circular economy and bioeconomy were supported as well.

- Another important step at regional level which should be highlighted is the approval of the regional smart specialization strategy (S3) and the operational program underlying the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

- In the updating phase of the regional smart specialization strategy (2021-2027), the Clusters of Horizon Europe were taken as a reference, wherein specific reference to the bioeconomy sector was made. Through this, its strategic importance was recognized by regional policies, taking into account the expertise gained in this field, also with reference to interregional partnerships and European Thematic Platforms.

- In the context of the ERDF, the added value of Project proposals already positively evaluated under the Horizon / Horizon Europe Programs was recognised. This was made through the inclusion, in the related calls for research, development and innovation (R&D&I), of the evaluation criterion No. 9 called "Project already positively evaluated but not funded under the European Horizon Program." The criterion was already included in the first ERDF R&D call, which is linked to the development of the Regional Strategy for Smart Specialization 2021-2027.

- Finally, I think it is useful to point out that the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia is strongly committed to and is actively participating in the recently created Agrifood & Bioeconomy FVG Foundation (FAB FVG). FVG Region wants to identify possible synergies between funds, thanks to the public-private interaction that characterizes the Foundation.

2) Benefits and difficulties associated with the implementation of the mentioned synergies.

With reference to the issues related to the implementation of the above-mentioned synergies, I simply point out that in order to achieve them, it would be extremely useful to organise consultations between the bodies in charge of programming of directly managed funds and the regional managing authorities already at the programming stage. At this earlier stage, it becomes easier to align the tools instead of aligning them afterwards (during the implementation period).

3) Suggestions about tools and actions that can facilitate synergies among Horizon and structural funds at territorial level

I conclude with a brief mention of the Horizon Europe Seal of Excellence (SoE) and its use in regional calls for proposals:

- projects with the Seal of Excellence should not follow the normal selection process for ERDF projects, wherein they should undergo a simplified evaluation according to the selection criteria approved by the Program Monitoring Committee. This seems to cause difficulties at operational level, hampering a smooth process of synergies between the Horizon Europe Program and ERDF funds.

In particular, the regional evaluation process related to the sealed (SoE) projects should be carried on in a simplified way through a mere "compliance check", but the lack of standard procedures to be followed by the Managing Authorities at present results in:

- a differentiated approach (highly variable practices among regions);
- and more or less "heavy procedures", depending on each different Management and Control Systems of every individual ERDF Program.

I thank you again for your attention and I am available for questions and clarifications.