FLASH REPORT: MEETING WITH EUROPABio - 22 JANUARY 2020

PARTICIPANTS

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EUROPABio:

REPORT

EuropaBio outlined their key recommendations to face the challenges of the biotech industry, calling for a more innovation-friendly environment in Europe, where the regulatory framework is still overly restrictive.

In the agricultural sector, it is important to improve the GMO import authorisation process, which is costly and time-consuming (it takes about 6 years for a GM crop to be authorised). On crops resulting from new genome-editing techniques, quick action is needed to harmonise international legislation and avoid trade disruption due to the Court’s ruling that imposed treating them as GM crops. Moreover, the EU’s opportunities to innovate in this field should be better exploited. Policies on MRLs and presence of active substances may also turn out to be a threat for smooth trade.

In the healthcare sector, although the EU fares well in basic research, financing for biotech companies, notably SMEs, should increase to avoid capital outsourcing, particularly from the US. EuropaBio also calls for improving the competitiveness of the EU IP system and consistently supporting clinical trials, especially in the area of rare conditions. EU’s centres of excellence should be better connected with a view to create innovation clusters in the framework of a life sciences strategy.

On industrial biotechnology, the EU FP9 rightly reflects biotech priorities, but more should be done to further facilitate market uptake of bio-based products via e.g. public procurement rules, awareness raising initiatives, etc.
COM underlined that the authorisation process for GMOs relies on expert, scientific judgement and MS approval, but reassured that Commissioner Hogan understands well the supply chain’s concerns and the issues at stake in relation to new genomic techniques, and invited EuropaBio to reach out to DG SANTE too, as well as to provide their inputs to the upcoming stakeholder consultation, which will feed into a Commission study on the topic. Legislative action will follow, if needed. Interesting initiatives in this area are springing up, e.g. the citizens’ initiative “Grow Scientific Progress” of WUR students, calling for a sound legal framework for new breeding techniques based on sustainability and safety. Better communication, data and evidence are needed now. Biotechnology can also play a key role towards achieving the objectives of the EU Green Deal and the initiatives within that framework, notably the 2030 Biodiversity and the Farm to Fork strategies.

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