

## Circular Economy Conference Fribourg 31 March 2023

*On 31 March 2023, the Swiss presidency of the European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP) started in Fribourg with a conference on the topic of circular economy. The "Fribourg Declaration" calling for joint efforts was signed by the participants.*

The conference took place at the School of Engineering and Architecture of Fribourg (HEIA-FR). Jean-Nicolas Aebischer, the school's director, welcomed the participants and stressed the importance of circular economy as a core topic for HEIA-FR's education and applied research activities, a fact notably evidenced by HEIA-FR's long-standing participation in relevant Interreg projects and EUSALP action groups. Opened by Didier Castella, President of the Fribourg State Council, who reminded the audience that the circular economy allows for growth to be maintained while respecting the environment, the conference provided a framework for collaboration at different levels (inter-city, regional, state). It was also a forum to present initiatives and projects that can be duplicated at European scale. Many speakers, and in particular Leonore Gewessler, Federal Minister of Austria, referred to the significance of the circular economy and its interaction with climate protection.

The conference was then divided into three parts, first outlining Switzerland's commitment towards a circular economy, followed by a presentation of concrete projects and possible future collaboration.

Roland Mayer, Secretary-General of the Conference of Cantonal Governments, Jerry Krattiger, Director of the Development Agency of the Canton of Fribourg and Sabine Kollbrunner Co-leader of the Regional Policy DSRE of the State Secretary for Economic Affairs talked about the commitment of Switzerland and the cantons in the economic transition. They underlined the advantages of encouraging this transition (less waste, greening of the image) and highlighted several examples.

Among the different initiatives, the start-up [Low Impact Food](#) was introduced. It breeds insects to encourage a new source of protein that is less polluting. On the same occasion, the Fribourg project Wood\_ID, a totally modular wooden construction, developed around a circular model, was also presented by the start-up [Enoki](#). The floor was further given to the German start-up [Value Chain Generator \(VCG AI\)](#). This start-up is a spin-off of the AlpLinkBioECO project, which includes EUSALP members. Finally, an Austrian example: [Kunststoff Cluster](#) presented its solutions for promoting waste recycling through networking in the upper Austrian Region and access to European funds.

The last panel discussed the success factors for a future collaboration around the circular economy. Several levers were mentioned to encourage cooperation. First, a market with high entry costs that requires solid actors, then the economic situation (war in Ukraine, energy crisis) and finally multi-faceted value chains that force stakeholders to cooperate. The sharing of good practices and information within partnerships and Interreg projects are solutions that will allow all territories to modernise this aspect of their economy.

Finally, the actors present signed the "Fribourg Declaration", introduced by the State Councillor of Fribourg Jean-François Steiert. The declaration proposes a common engagement on the circular economy and wishes to promote collaboration, exchange platforms and common projects. Representatives of the EUSALP Youth Council were invited to read the declaration and underlined that this declaration should mark the beginning of concrete actions on a large scale.

Switzerland will hand over the EUSALP presidency to Slovenia for the year 2024 and Slovenia has declared that it will continue to address and prioritise the topic of circular economy. Switzerland therefore wants to use the remaining time of its presidency to discuss certain fields of action and their possible implementation.

### FRIBOURG DECLARATION 2023

#### TOGETHER FOR A CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN THE ALPINE REGION

##### VISION

A common engagement is needed to **save raw materials** and **address climate change**. By means of the circular economy raw materials and products are **kept in circulation** and are used for **as long as possible**.

Thinking is characterised by circular flows and processes such as **sharing, reusing, recycling and repairing**.

##### OBJECTIVES

- » **Raising awareness** towards circular economy
- » **Promoting the exchange of experience** between countries, regions and actors from business, science, education, politics and society
- » Considering the domains of **construction, biomass, recycling and others**

##### ACTIONS

- » Facilitate **cooperation and networking**
- » Contribute to a **common platform** to share best practices
- » Support **communication** and keep **EUSALP regions informed**