



BIOEAST AS A DRIVING FORCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

*High-level conference on deploying sustainable and circular bioeconomies in
Central and Eastern Europe in the context of food, agriculture, natural resources
and bioeconomy related policies*

20-21 FEBRUARY 2020, BRUSSELS

FLASH NOTE

The conference provided a high-level political discussion forum for the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries' representatives who are part of the BIOEAST Initiative, the Commission services and other EU institutions. The attendance exceeded expectations, and almost capacities at over 150 participants out of 185 registered. Even though the event was mainly focused on the 11 BIOEAST countries and its representatives, and EU institutions, participants from other member states and third countries were also present, notably from BE, DE, ES, FI, FR, IT, NL, SE and Western Balkan countries (AL, MK, RS, UA). Several international organizations also showed interest in the event, among others representatives from the likes of BBI JU, COPA-COGEA and ENRD also attended. Participants were mainly policy makers, researchers, academia, and consultancy groups.

The 11 BIOEAST countries' state secretaries and ambassadors, a representative from Commissioner Gabriel's cabinet, the deputy director general of the Directorate General for Research and Innovation, 5 directors from the Commission services, the president of the COST action, and the keynote speaker former Commissioner Janez Potocnik assured the high-level discussions.

The conference was a timely addition to the ongoing European developments. The European Commission announced an ambitious roadmap to tackle the challenges ahead of us in the form of the European Green Deal (EGD), which is planned in a way to leave no individual or region behind in the structural reform and forthcoming transformation. In this context the BIOEAST Initiative may play a key role and the objectives of the initiative are more important than ever.

The main conclusion from the conference was that bioeconomy should be part of the sustainable and circular future. Moreover, the governmental initiative for knowledge-based agriculture, aquaculture and forestry in the bioeconomy (BIOEAST) consisting of 11 CEE member states could play a significant role in helping to form the necessary partnerships, to join forces to develop the needs, bioeconomy strategies with priorities and to work together at the European level to reach the ambitious objectives.

The high-level discussions reflected that it is undisputable that the European society will go through a deep change. Without a change, future is endangered. There is an urgency in the future steps, which will earmark the coming years. It was commonly agreed that the circular and sustainable economy should be built around the use of bioresources. Without the

sustainable use of biomass, the targets will be unreachable. There seemed to be an agreement that without research and innovation there is no competitive future possible. Moreover, it was emphasized that those countries, which try to keep their status quo and continue the “business as usual” scenario will weaken their competitiveness in the long run. Delaying the necessary steps and measures will only lead to the deterioration of the situation with dire consequences on future prospects.

The country representatives emphasized that even though it is evident that excellence-based research and innovation in the region are needed they face various problems, which require policy support for the necessary structural changes. There are investments in the region for the sustainable use of biomass, but the research and innovation infrastructure and human resources are lagging behind. There is a need for positive discrimination and structural efforts to connect the countries to the next research and innovation framework programme Horizon Europe as well as to invest into thematic education linked to the sustainable and circular use of biomass.

The BIOEAST Initiative already helped the countries in preparing their public administration and gathering stakeholders. The recently started coordination and support action BIOEASTsUP Horizon 2020 project will help to further develop and construct the countries’ capacities.

The conference showed that there is a commitment behind the Initiative, which could play a key role in the transformation ahead of us. The objectives of the EGD will not be reached if the CEE countries’ societies are left behind and the resources are not processed locally with local knowledge. The research and innovation potential of these countries needs to be used, coordinated and interconnected better. Special attention should be dedicated to bringing the benefits of the local resources to the macro region. Good examples start with individual approaches, however, the examples and personal approaches need to be fostered and systemically backed up in order to have a societal change. The Commission and its support are necessary for the further development and continued progress of the BIOEAST macro region.