

CONFERENCE CONCLUSION

BIOECONOMY EDUCATION: A BIOEAST PERSPECTIVE

setting the BIOEAST Universities Network

08/12/2022, Prague

An international conference organised under the auspices of the Minister for European Affairs doc. PhDr. Mikuláš Bek, Ph.D. by the BIOEAST Initiative and BIOEAST HUB CZ in cooperation with the Czech Ministry of Education CZ took place on 8th December 2022 in Prague. The conference demonstrated the need to develop education in bioeconomy as a driving force to enhance sustainable transition and the implementation of the Green Deal. Thus, in the BIOEAST Macro-region it was proposed and facilitated the creation of the BIOEAST Universities Network.

Six universities from Central and Eastern Europe signed a memorandum of understanding on developing common research and innovation agendas and working together on common priorities to further enhance their curricula benefiting the next generations.

The conference was structured into three sections: (1) The regional perspectives of the Bioeconomy education, (2) Presentation of the universities' profiles which signed the memorandum of understanding for a network of bioeconomy universities in the BIOEAST macro-region, and (3) Panel discussion focused on challenges and some practical steps to be taken in the near future.

The conference was opened by Martin Úlovec, a representative of the Minister of Education Youth & Sports Czech Republic, Barna Kovacs, BIOEAST Initiative, Secretary General, Giuseppe Pellegrino European Commission, DG Research – Bioeconomy, and Christian Petermann, former European Commission director. **Martin Ulovec expressed the support of the Ministry of Education Youth & Sports for this initiative as bioeconomy has the perspective to alter consumer behaviour towards sustainability. Giuseppe Pellegrino appraised the event and articulated support of the EC for both the new network of Bioeconomy Universities in the BIOEAST macro region. BIOEAST UniNet has the potential to support the ever more important strategic thinking, inspire knowledge community and assist in the transformation to knowledge-based society.** Barna Kovacs highlighted that wider participation in the excellent based innovation is the core stone of the BIOEAST Initiative, he expressed that immediate enhancement of bioeconomy education is an essential prerequisite for the macro-region to reach to students, policy makers, entrepreneurs. **He identified the support from the EU and cooperation with the already established networks as key factors to support developing strategic action plans to boost bioeconomy implementation and sustainable development in the BIOEAST macro-region.** Christian Paterman addressed the audience in a pre-recorded video message. He emphasised the ongoing worldwide developments in new bioeconomy strategies promoted in USA and China, and highlighted the need that also in the **BIOEAST region should there be**

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re dynamisation of the bioeconomy action plan and proper information flow to improve coordination of funds and awareness raising activities.

In the keynote speech George Sakellaris, the Leader of the Thematic Working Group (TWG) Bioeconomy Education demonstrated the need to for a responsible smart transition process to a knowledge-based society that is strongly oriented towards circularity and sustainability in the light of global challenges. He compiled the BIOEAST Foresight Report and in particular the findings: the lack of human resources in higher education and research is one of the main bottlenecks to accomplishing the goals of the European Green Deal. Vítězslav Slíva representant of the Ministry of Education Youth & Sports presented the ministerial strategy for education of sustainability to reduce inequality and to support vocation training; the strategy has been accomplished, and now the ministry faces the implementation, the inter-ministerial cooperation is vital. Han van Osch Chairman, ICA-Community of Practice (ICA – CoP) on Bioeconomy Education introduced activities and international projects of ICA-CoP and endorse the support for the BIOEAST Uni Net. Martin Greimel from the BOKU University presented the EBU governance system and the foreseen changes as one of the objectives of the ongoing BOKU EBU Presidency. He articulated the intention to establish and strengthen synergies with BIOEAST Initiative and its working bodies. Marie Kubankova the Co-Leader of the TWG Bioeconomy Education and the Coordinator of the BIOEAST HUB CZ introduced TWG Bioeconomy Education as a working body of the BIOEAST Initiative that is facilitating the dialog between policy makers and researchers, engaging private and civic organizations in bioeconomy education. With the support of the BIOEAST Board the BIOEAST TWG Bioeconomy Education initiated the BIOEAST Uni Net and with will carry on establishing proper communication among the universities and first joint activities. **Marie Kubankova also briefed the conference about the activities of the BIOEAST HUB CZ, i.e. coordination of the inter-ministerial group of bioeconomy and development of the national concept paper for bioeconomy strategy supported by the BIOEASTsUP project and name several on-going national projects supporting bioeconomy education for SMEs.**

The second session was opened by doc. Ing. Svatopluk Kapounek, Ph.D. vice rector for creative activities MENDEL University who introduced the ambition of MEDELU as the coordinator of the newly established BIOEAST UniNet to support cooperation in the development in bioeconomy education, the possibility of further development of joint study programmes and research projects. **He expressed the aim to apply the results not only at the level of economic policy, but primarily in practice.** Debrecen University, Hungary was introduced by Prof. László Zsombik, Agricultural University Nitra, Slovakia by vice rector for strategic development and international collaboration doc. JUDr. Lucia Paľšová, PhD., Osijek University, Croatia by Prof. Marina Tisma Agricultural University-Plovdiv Bulgaria Prof. Christina Yancheva, Vytautas Magnus University Lithuania Prof. Rimantas Dapkus.

The session was completed with a ceremonial signature of the Memorandum of Understanding by all six Universities and the official establishment of the BIOEAST UniNet.

The topics raised in the morning sessions were intensively debated in the afternoon panel discussion moderated by Barna Kovacs. In the panels were participants Giuseppe Pelegrino from the EC, George Sakellaris from the BioEast Hub CR, Ingar Janzik from the ICA – CoP Board, Martin Greimel representing the European Bioeconomy University on behalf of BOKU, and Biljana Kulišič from the EC.

Giuseppe Pelegrino appraised that things are moving forward and declared his personal commitment to be the contact point to support the BIOEAST Uni Net and he encouraged universities to get involved in the consultation of the Horizon Europe work programme. The BIOEAST Initiative, TWG Bioeconomy Education and BIOEAST Unit Net should join forces and express their opinion and demands. He also offered logistical support for any meeting in Brussels. Martin Greimel referred to a rather blurred concept in the beginning of the establishment of EBU, difficulties caused by the COVID-19

pandemic. Biljana Kulišič noted that the long-term impact is far more important than the speed. Ingar Janzik accented the role of CoP as knowledge-based network that can facilitate good practice exchange not only about the success but also to share failure to eliminate repeating the same mistakes. She also called for cooperation to engage industry. George Sakellaris outlined few possibilities for prompt cooperation in summer schools, publications, training, or conferences.

(Conference Conclusions)

Further development and enhancement of bioeconomy education and skills is a clear priority of the European Commission as the sustainable bioeconomy is expected to become the motor for economic, ecological, and social change. The transition process toward sustainable bioeconomy contrasts in EU macro-regions. The 2021 BIOEAST Foresight Report identified lack of bioeconomy-related education and skills in the BIOEAST macro-region as the key risk of failure in accomplishing the goals of the European Green Deal and connected EU strategies. Six years ago, the European Bioeconomy Universities alliance of bioeconomy universities from Western, Northern and South Europe, was established. The newly established BIOEAST Uni Net is meant to become a new ally.

The discussions highlighted the most prominent problems of the countries, namely the missing national level strategic thinking and action plans. Without political and policy priorities on bioeconomy, none of the countries will be able to take advantage of the benefits of a sustainable bioeconomy. Moreover, the education system cannot thrive, the industrial sector will not be able to align with the sustainability priorities. The universities, and in general the education system can significantly contribute to the understanding of bioeconomy, but without political priority this development raises questions about the labour market development, innovation and research driven economy and societal understanding.

Due to the promotion of the European Commission, few international projects have been launched. Sadly with minimum participation from the educational organizations from the BIOEAST macro-region. The conference highlighted the need to be better engaged in bioeconomy education development projects. This situation could further enlarge the disparities among EU macro-regions as a lot of activities are happening outside the BIOEAST macro-region. The European Commission supports the newly established BIOEAST Uni Net, and an encouragement to express the needs and demands was clearly conveyed. EBU and ICA-CoP declared support for the newly established BIOEAST Uni Net and offer cooperation. The BIOEAST TWG Bioeconomy Education can advance upon the above-mentioned discussion, continue on acting and articulating the demands and specify needs, while connecting policy makers and universities from the BIOEAST macro-region with the counterparts from all over Europe