

Welcome speech of Commissioner Mariya Gabriel

Check against delivery

Dear Minister Podgoršek,

Dear Minister Nagy,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to start thanking the BIOEAST initiative, as well as the Slovenian EU Council Presidency and the Hungarian Visegrad4 Presidency for organising this event and inviting me to address you today. I am honoured to be part of this timely and forward-looking conference.

Indeed, in July 2021, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its Sixth Assessment Report (AR6), confirming that climate change is widespread, rapid, and intensifying.

Besides, limiting global warming to 1.5°C will be impossible unless there are immediate, rapid, and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Reductions that can only be achieved with innovation in all areas, notably in the bioeconomy area. Hence, we need to move towards a bioeconomy, based on sustainably sourced, renewable biological resources.

In addition, we need to ensure that any decision we take keeps in mind the goal of having an economy that works for all, not leaving anyone behind!

With this in mind, the European Commission recognizes the bioeconomy as a catalyst for systemic change, which tackles the economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainability.

Bioeconomy can ensure a fair and just transition involving many European citizens.

In fact, the bio-based sectors will create 400 000 green jobs by 2035 if supported and deployed by regional and national strategies.

Already today, bio-based industries provide a substantial contribution to Europe's economy, by employing around 17.5 million people with an estimated contribution of 4.7% of the EU-27 GDP.

In BIOEAST countries precisely, this sector employs more than 7,4 million people, generating 85 billion euro of added-value which makes up 7 % of GDP in the BIOEAST countries.

As bioeconomy is such an important sector in our endeavor to make Europe a fair, just and climate-neutral continent by 2050, the Commission put in place three sets of initiatives supporting the sector in this transition: the EU Bioeconomy Strategy, actions within our research and innovation programmes, and

Allow me to start highlight first the three main directionalities included in the EU Bioeconomy Strategy: first, to strengthen and scale-up the bio-based sectors, unlock investments and markets; second, to deploy local bioeconomies rapidly across Europe; and third, to understand the ecological boundaries of the bioeconomy.

In this context, a central focus of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy is cooperation with Member States.

Last year, the Commission set up the European Bioeconomy Policy Forum, which is a new dedicated forum for Member States to support the strategic advancement of a circular and sustainable bioeconomy in Europe. The expert group facilitated mutual learning exercise between Member States, which resulted in a final report with 10 key policy messages as well as good practice examples.

Besides, this year, our Directorate Generale Joint Research Centre created the Strategic Foresight Report to foresee what the EU bioeconomy might look like in 2050. Based on four alternative scenarios for the EU bioeconomy in 2050, the result was that an integrative bioeconomy approach is the key to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. We very much welcome the BIOEAST Foresight Exercise and support the recommendations provided by the report.

I would like now to turn to our set of initiatives in research and innovation. In Horizon 2020, the European Commission already dedicated €3.85 billion to bioeconomy projects.

Yet, further researches on bioeconomy are needed and will be financed through Horizon Europe as it is crucial to invest in technologies and solutions that can help us move towards a green and climate-neutral future.

Indeed, through Horizon Europe, we will seek to develop the knowledge base, networks and innovative solutions, as well as to improve governance.

In this respect, I would like to emphasise the three directly related to bioeconomy: the adaptation to climate change mission, having healthy oceans and waters mission, and recovering healthy soils mission. For instance, the objective of the Healthy Soils mission is to create 100 living labs and lighthouses by 2030 to lead the transition in Europe towards healthy soils. I can only encourage bioeconomy actors to join this endeavour.

In addition, still in this area of research and innovation the Horizon Europe cluster 6, encompassing Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment will be key to support the researchers, innovators and startups needed to foster a sustainable and circular bioeconomy. For the next two years, we will dedicate 1.8 billion euro to the sector through these calls.

And in the case of BIOEAST countries, it is always important to keep in mind the 3.4 billion euros committed to the widening participation of Central Easter Europe Countries into Horizon Europe calls.

Besides the actions related to the EU Bioeconomy strategy and to research and innovation, there is another group of actions that are important to take into consideration where referring to bioeconomy.

I am referring to the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Circular Economy Action Plan and the EU Forest Strategy that provide the framework conditions and certainty needed to move towards bioeconomy.

Before concluding, I would like to pay special attention to the young generation in BioEast countries in view, also, to the Year of European

Youth in 2022. Only with their energy, hard work and creativity, we can reach the objective of a fair, competitive and green Europe. I would make a special call today to all youngsters, being inventors, startups, students or any other situation, to act to ensure that Europe becomes the world leader in the area of bioeconomy based on innovation and startups.

I would like to conclude thanking the BIOEAST initiative for their excellent work in the past years.

To achieve a fair and just transition to climate neutrality across the EU, it is important that we support the BIOEAST countries in their preparation to tackle climate and environmental challenges using the power of innovation, research and education.

I would like to encourage and call upon the participants from Member States from Central and Eastern Europe to make best use of these three sets of initiatives to deploy a sustainable and circular bioeconomy in your countries.

It is only by working together that we will ensure that Europe becomes a leader on the new bioeconomy area while achieving the twin transition and an economy that works for all.

Thank you for your attention.