



27 September 2021

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Dear speakers and participants of the BIO-east Conference.

At the beginning I would like to thank to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food of the Republic of Slovenia who invited our Ministry to cooperate at this conference with the conclusions. A strong inter-sectoral cooperation in the field of bio-economy (as well as in other areas of society) is essential.

At the moment - we are in the middle of the re-conceptualisation of the European Research Area. Its governance and efficiency are crucial factors for its success. New ERA is introducing several new elements, among which I would like to stress smart directionality as a principle for a transformative research. Smart directionality is one of the priorities of the Slovenian EU Presidency and will be among the Council conclusions of the ERA conference during our Presidency.

It is crucial, that research and innovation are an important element of different sectoral policies. And a COVID-19 example shows us, how important research is for tackling great challenges from different fields of the society.

It is very important that we connect all the national and European strategies in the research and innovation eco-system. We have to further promote the importance of the sustainable circular bio-economy in the society and prepare national bio-economy strategies that will be in line with the European and global ones on this issue. The BIOeast initiative made a HUGE contribution to push this process at the national levels in CEE countries.

In mean time (until we introduce BIOeconomy national strategies), we have to address the issues of BIOeconomy, circular economy, renewable materials (like wood) and

others in our Smart Specialisation Strategies that are the basis for the research and innovation, financed from the European Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, and in our National Resilience and Recovery Plans for green transformation.

At the same time, it is important, that the united voice of our (BIOEAST) countries is heard in preparation and implementation of the European Research & Innovation policies and programmes. Not only the central research Horizon EU programme, but an active joining of our countries in preparation of the relevant European partnerships (EP) that are starting now, is crucial.

It is known that country success at the EU calls for research projects is directly related to the national investments in R & I. Investments of CEE countries in European Partnerships can be first indicator of our countries' commitments for sustainable green and digital transition at national and European level.

As the CEE countries joined to act together through the BIOEAST initiative – also due to the awareness and the need for change of our low success performance at the 7th Framework Programme and at the Horizon 2020 calls for research projects (especially in the Bio field) – we can expect that our efforts for change and development of a more strategic approach to sustainable use of our huge natural resources and development of bio-economy will be reflected in our achievements, not only at national level, but also at the future European calls.

Thanks to all organisers, speakers and participants for the fruit-full presentations and debates, and we are looking forward to our further cooperation and development.

**mag. Damjana Karlo, Head of Unit for Structural Funds in the field of Research and Development, Science Directorate, Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia**