

PARTNERING FOR THE FUTURE

‘BIOEAST and Beyond’ high-level conference on Central and Eastern European research and innovation priorities in the context of sustainable soil and freshwater resilience, food systems security and bioeconomy related policies

4-6 December 2024, Budapest, Hungary

Ádám Kiss, President of the Hungarian National Research and Innovation Office, closing speech 5 December 2024

Honorable Ministers, Directors, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honor to close this high-level conference, "BIOEAST and Beyond; Partnering for the Future" which has brought together more than 300 key stakeholders, experts, and policymakers from across Europe to address some of the most pressing challenges of our time. Over the past days, we have engaged in fruitful discussions on the critical themes of sustainable soil and water resilience, food system security, and the bioeconomy. These discussions are not only timely but also pivotal in shaping the European Research Area - the ERA and supporting its broader goals of sustainability, innovation, and inclusivity.

Allow me to reflect on a key milestone achieved during the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

Today's conference is a milestone in a process started on 4 July in Brussels, by organizing the policy forum on "Partnering for the Future", when the 10 BIOEAST countries announced that they were signing a common declaration on their commitment to develop a geographically focused Research and Innovation Initiative.

On 29 November the adoption of the Council Conclusions "on a potential Europe-wide R&I initiative on advancing sustainable natural resource management, food systems security and the deployment of the bioeconomy, harnessing the potential of Central and Eastern Europe" represents a significant step forward. These conclusions emphasize the importance of leveraging the bioeconomy to address societal, environmental, and economic challenges while focusing on the untapped biological resources' potential of Central and Eastern Europe.

The Council asked the Commission for a gap analysis that will assess the need, feasibility, and potential impact of a new pan-European Research and Innovation (R&I) initiative. This initiative holds the promise of advancing European Strategic Autonomy while ensuring the inclusion of Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, and other candidate countries.

I would like to extend our gratitude to the European Commission representatives, whose valuable input and continued support have been essential in shaping these achievements. In particular, I acknowledge the contributions of Director General Marc Lemaitre and Director John Bell from DG RTD, and Diego Canga Fano, Deputy Director-General, DG AGRI, the support of director Kristine Schreiber from DG GROW, all who have been steadfast in their commitment to advancing Europe's bioeconomy and research priorities.

Let me specifically thank for our guest speakers from Western Balkan, Ukraine and Georgia. The Hungarian Presidency wishes to closely and directly engage those countries and to bring the added value of the macro-region at European level.

The discussions today have deepened our understanding of four thematic areas: soil, freshwater, food systems and biotechnology. Our aim was to bring up thematic areas and their nexus from the Central and Eastern European perspective: to set up the first pillars of a future Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda.

On Systemic Shocks and Resilience:

We addressed the urgency of fostering resilience in our agri-food systems and bioeconomy sectors in response to challenges such as climate change and geopolitical tensions.

On Carbon-Water Cycles Nexus:

We explored the critical interlinkages between healthy soils and freshwater resilience, emphasizing the need for geographically focused governance models and specific R&I agendas that promote sustainable land and water management.

ON Nutrition-biomanufacturing Cycles Nexus:

We highlighted the importance of food system security and locally valorized biomass, showcasing how bioeconomy solutions can be both innovative and inclusive and could bring added value and new value chains at local level to rural areas.

On Policy Frameworks and Partnerships:

We discussed how collaborative efforts, such as the BIOEAST Initiative, can align regional and European priorities to foster a unified approach to sustainability and innovation.

These insights provide a strong foundation for guiding future actions at both the regional and European levels.

As we conclude this conference, I would like to look forward to the Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU, beginning in January 2025. The "BIOEAST file" will transition into their proficient hands, and I am confident that Poland will build on the momentum we have created.

Poland's leadership will be crucial in ensuring that the priorities set by the Council Conclusions and thematic areas identified here today are translated into actionable outcomes.

Under the Polish Presidency we can step on creating a consortium which could help to build up a strategic agenda and roadmap for a future Research and Innovation Initiative. On that road the BIOEAST Initiative should provide its position towards the upcoming negotiations. I wish all stakeholders to provide their full support to the Polish Presidency in preparing a BIOEAST position paper. This document could serve as a cornerstone for the upcoming negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and Horizon Europe's successor, FP10. It is vital that we articulate the macro-region's priorities and ensure they are fully recognized within the broader European framework.

As we close, I want to emphasize the importance of the Council Conclusions' call: to carry out a gap analysis on a potential new Europe-wide R&I initiative. This analysis must serve as the foundation for identifying research gaps and opportunities that are critical for achieving sustainability, resilience, and innovation across Europe.

Additionally, a future BIOEAST position paper must reflect the political priority, unique strengths and challenges of the Central and Eastern European macro-region. This document should provide clear recommendations and actionable priorities for future programming periods, ensuring that our collective efforts contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable ERA.

Closing Words

Let us leave here today with a shared vision, renewed determination, and a commitment to partner for the future in research and innovation. Together, we have the opportunity to make a lasting impact—not only for our respective nations but for all of Europe. I encourage you to carry forward the insights and recommendations from this conference and to work collaboratively to realize the full potential of the bioeconomy.

Thank you once again for your active participation, your insights, and your commitment. Together, we can ensure that this conference becomes a true milestone in the evolution of the ERA and a reference point for years to come.

Thank you and I now warmly invite you to join us for dinner, where we can continue our discussions in a more informal setting.