



CONCLUSION BIOEAST HUB CR POLICY EXPERT DISCUSSION

ON BIOECONOMY,
RESEARCH & INNOVATION

ADVANCING BIOECONOMY EDUCATION,
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION COOPERATION
IN THE BIOEAST MACRO-REGION



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05/2026

INTRODUCTION

The BIOEAST HUB CR Policy Expert Discussion on Bioeconomy, Research & Innovation took place on 21 May 2026 at the University of Life Sciences “King Michael I” Timișoara, Romania, in hybrid format. The discussion was organised by BIOEAST HUB CR, the BIOEAST Thematic Working Group on Bioeconomy Education and BIOEAST UniNet, in connection with the broader BIOEAST mission to strengthen bioeconomy research, innovation, education and stakeholder cooperation across Central and Eastern Europe.

The event followed an international conference organised by the university and provided a space for policy exchange among universities, research organisations, ministries, practitioners, industry-related actors, students and international stakeholders. Its purpose to reflect on the new EU Bioeconomy Strategy, in particular the new R&I Initiative envisaged for the BIOEAST macro-region, Ukraine, Moldova and Western Balkan countries and demonstrate the need for such initiative to support research and innovation eco-systems in the BIOEAST macro-region and the neighboring countries.

POLICY EXPERT DISCUSSION

The policy expert discussion was framed by the presentation of Dr Peter Wehrheim, Head of Unit for Bioeconomy and Food Systems at [DG Research and Innovation](#), European Commission, on the new EU Bioeconomy Strategy. In his opening speech of the conference, he underlined that the EU bioeconomy is moving from a primarily research-driven agenda towards deployment, competitiveness and real-world implementation. The strategic priorities presented — scaling innovation and investment from lab to deployment, developing lead markets for bio-based materials and technologies, securing sustainable biomass use, joining forces with Member States, regions, industry, investors and civil society, and strengthening global partnerships — provided the central reference point for the discussion in Timișoara.

The peer review discussion was opened by a presentation by Marie Kubankova on behalf of BIOEAST HUB CR and the BIOEAST Thematic Working Group on Bioeconomy Education. She introduced both networks, previous policy discussions that are important tools on how to engage policy makers and experts in discussion to boost bioeconomy education and research and support the growth of BIOEAST macro-region. She also presented the outcomes of the biggest international conference organised the week before in Bulgaria. Organised by the Bulgarian Agricultural Academy

- Peer review topic discussed
- 250+ participants from research organisations and universities
- Strong interest in international collaboration on education
- Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ as key opportunities
- Limited financial capacity for networking and brokerage events
- High appreciation of networking opportunities
- Different research funding structure than in the Czech Republic
- Agricultural Academy distributes research funding in Bulgaria
- Higher share of institutional funding

The Timișoara discussion was therefore a continuation and deepening of this process. It moved the exchange from identifying common challenges towards clarifying how peer review can support mutual learning, policy advice, educational mapping and the further development of BIOEAST UniNet.

George Sakellaris introduced the **BIOEAST UniNet** as a key platform in this process. Since its launch during the Czech Presidency in 2022, the network has grown to more than ten universities and remains open to further members from the BIOEAST macro-region and beyond. The discussion confirmed its value as a bottom-up, university-driven structure that connects education with research, innovation, ministries, students, practitioners, industry and international stakeholders. In cooperation with the **TWG BE Edu**, BIOEAST UniNet can support curriculum development, educational mapping, peer review, student engagement, research cooperation, mobility, lifelong learning and the preparation of future bioeconomy skills pathways.

Dorin Carmen added the Romanian perspective and highlighted the importance of the implementation dimension.

Participants recognised progress in agriculture, ecology and food systems, as well as the growing role of universities and research organisations in advancing bioeconomy knowledge. At the same time, the discussion pointed to the continuing need to consolidate interministerial coordination and national strategy implementation. This reflects a wider challenge across the BIOEAST macro-region: bioeconomy policies require cooperation between ministries responsible for agriculture, education, research, environment, economy, labour and regional development. Without this coordination, strategic documents risk remaining disconnected from funding instruments, curricula, innovation support and stakeholder practice. Participants reflected that these priorities have particular relevance for the BIOEAST macro-region. The region holds significant potential in agriculture, forestry, food systems, freshwater resources, biomass availability and rural innovation. At the same time, the discussion confirmed that this potential can only be realised if research and innovation capacities are better connected to education, market uptake, policy coordination and regional knowledge ecosystems. Horizon Europe, the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking and other EU instruments were recognised as important enablers, but

participants also stressed the need to improve the participation and leadership of BIOEAST actors in competitive European research and innovation programmes.

Micro-credentials emerged as one of the most strategic topics for the next phase of bioeconomy education. Participants underlined their potential to provide flexible lifelong learning opportunities for students, professionals, farmers, public administrators, entrepreneurs and practitioners who need to upskill or reskill in response to fast-changing bio-based value chains.

Especially for the Industry, Particular attention should be given to the active involvement of SMEs, bio-based industries and innovation intermediaries to ensure that education and research activities respond to labor-market and industrial needs.

At the same time, the discussion acknowledged important challenges: legal recognition differs between countries, quality assurance systems are not yet fully aligned, and cross-border comparability remains difficult. A common BIOEAST macro-regional approach to micro-credential recognition and quality assurance is therefore needed, building on university pilots, consultation with industry and practitioners, and alignment with national qualification processes.

The debate also highlighted the need to move knowledge transfer beyond academia. Bioeconomy education must reach farmers, students, vocational learners, advisors, SMEs, public officials and local communities. In this context, **EIT KICs** and Knowledge Valorization Center approaches were discussed as possible instruments for scaling workshops, roundtables, training formats and practice-oriented knowledge transfer through BIOEAST entities. Such mechanisms could help translate research results into usable tools, support entrepreneurship and strengthen the connections between universities, innovation ecosystems and regional stakeholders.

Where the discussion touched on fertilizer costs and the **EU Fertilizer Action Plan**, participants linked the issue to the broader transition towards circular and resilient farming systems. Training for farmers and students can support the uptake of circular solutions such as organic fertilisers, biogas, composting, nutrient recycling and the valorisation of agricultural residues. This confirms that bioeconomy education is not limited to academic curricula: it is directly connected to farm-level decisions, input costs, resource efficiency, environmental protection and policy alignment.

The international dimension of the discussion was particularly significant. Participants from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean expressed interest in cooperation with BIOEAST. The discussion confirmed openness to knowledge exchange, public sharing of project deliverables and educational tools, invitations to conferences and workshops, and possible involvement of international actors as stakeholders, observers or partners where appropriate. Participants also recognised that cooperation should be two-way and should value indigenous and local knowledge,



especially in relation to climate resilience, sustainable land use, biodiversity protection and community-based learning.

The discussion therefore translated the EU Bioeconomy Strategy into concrete macro-regional priorities. For BIOEAST countries, scaling bio-based innovation means strengthening the full pathway from scientific excellence and university-based knowledge to demonstration, investment, entrepreneurship, farmer uptake and industrial deployment. It also means ensuring that innovation remains within ecological and planetary boundaries, with sustainability, biodiversity, circularity and responsible biomass use treated as core conditions for competitiveness rather than as separate policy objectives.

CONCLUSION

The Timișoara policy expert discussion reaffirmed that education, skills and research capacity are central to the implementation of the EU Bioeconomy Strategy in the BIOEAST macro-region. Bioeconomy education is not a secondary or downstream policy area. It is enabling infrastructure for deployment, competitiveness, sustainability, labour-market adaptation and regional resilience.

The discussion confirmed the need to move from strategic ambition to practical implementation through coordinated action across education, research, innovation and policy and use the opportunity of the new R&I Initiative noted in the new EU bioeconomy strategy. For BIOEAST countries, this means connecting universities with ministries, research organisations with industry, students with real-life value chains, and national strategies with macro-regional cooperation. It also means developing tools that can be used in practice: peer review methodologies, curricula, micro-credentials, stakeholder platforms, training formats, public knowledge resources and mechanisms for international exchange.

These initiatives can further contribute in achieving substantial goals and priorities such as Expansion of BIOEAST UniNet membership, access to funding through Joint Horizon Europe proposals and other priorities of the adopted Action Plan.

BIOEAST UniNet and the BIOEAST Thematic Working Group on **Bioeconomy Education** provide a practical platform for this work. Together, they can support policy dialogue, peer review, curriculum development, micro-credential design, quality assurance discussions, stakeholder engagement and international cooperation. Their role is strategic because the bioeconomy transition depends not only on technologies, biomass resources or investment, but on people and institutions capable of connecting them.



Overall, the policy expert discussion concluded that there is no scalable bioeconomy transition without people, skills, institutions and cooperation across regions. The BIOEAST macro-region can become a living laboratory for practice-oriented, inclusive and sustainability-driven bioeconomy education. **By strengthening BIOEAST UniNet, consolidating the work of the TWG BE Edu and connecting education with research, innovation and policy implementation, the region can contribute directly to a competitive, circular, regenerative and resilient European bioeconomy.**

The peer review utilised the discussion in Bulgaria and also on policy expert discussions organised in [2025](#) and [2024](#). BIOEAST HUB CR will continue with organising these discussions, next hopefully together with EBU in November 2026 in Brussels to support keeping this agenda as a priority of policy makers in the current circumstances affected by both conflict and climate. It looks that the work of BIOEAST Thematic Working Group resonates beyond the region and stakeholders from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean can support the effort.

Policy dialogues are key elements for an effective implementation of adopted strategies and action plans. Equally important is also concrete monitoring. Progress on the above-mentioned priorities should be periodically reviewed through BIOEAST policy dialogues and peer-review exercises to monitor implementation and identify emerging needs.

BIOEAST HUB CR will continue supporting interministerial coordination and policy alignment in countries where national bioeconomy strategies and action plans are still developing. Synergies with [EIT KICs](#), Knowledge Valorization Centers and related communities of practice should be explored to strengthen training, knowledge transfer and innovation uptake. Through these actions, BIOEAST UniNet and the TWG BE Edu can continue to turn policy dialogue into practical macro-regional implementation.