

Agricultural University - Plovdiv and the European Commission launched the Regional Innovation Valleys for bioeconomy and food systems in Europe

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On 13 October 2023, the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission and the Agricultural University – Plovdiv, in close cooperation with the BIOEAST Initiative, officially launched the “Regional Innovation Valleys for Bioeconomy and Food Systems”. This is an initiative of the European Commission that will contribute to the New European Innovation Agenda and its pilot activity for building 100 regional valleys for deep-tech innovations. These "valleys" have significant potential to support and accelerate the deployment of the bioeconomy in rural and urban regions, to reduce innovation disparities in the EU, with

greater attention being paid to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The event was held in a hybrid format and nearly 500 people from across Europe attended in person and online.

A special address was delivered by the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Ms Iliana Ivanova, and the Prime Minister, Acad. Nikolay Denkov, personally greeted the participants and met with the leading organisers. At the meeting he highlighted the role of the bioeconomy in strengthening local agri-food chains and in creating stronger links between business and academia. He emphasised that the state can support the establishment of an interministerial commission for the development of the bioeconomy in the country, as well as support a new initiative for a special partnership programme of the BIOEAST countries in the field of biotechnology, the bioeconomy and bio-based industries.



The need to support the eight Bulgarian universities partnering in European university alliances was highlighted by the Rector of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv, Prof. Dr Hristina Yancheva. She presented the UNGreen alliance, of which the Agricultural University is a member, and its representatives Prof. Julian Cuevas and Dr Marta Mendel. In her speech, Prof. Yancheva stressed that cooperation is a cornerstone of the Regional Innovation Valleys, as they engage key stakeholders from academia, industry and local authorities in addressing societal challenges.

The Director of the “Healthy Planet” Directorate of the European Commission, Dr John Bell, underlined that European legislation and directives are in place and now it is time for action, with the valleys creating new

opportunities for experimentation and deployment of innovations before innovation communities.

The Minister of Innovation and Growth, Ms Milena Stoycheva, outlined the state support for young entrepreneurs and innovators for their integration into Europe. Senior representatives of the European Commission and the European Investment Bank presented the EU instruments that are essential for creating a network of valleys, explaining the specific characteristics of the valleys and presenting successful examples from the Member States. The possibilities for investment support for innovative projects of companies, start-ups, universities and research centres through participation in the Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking – CBE JU were also discussed, with its Executive Director, Mr Nicoló Giacomuzzi-Moore, proposing the organisation of a special CBE JU discussion forum in Bulgaria.

Representatives of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology in Food, EIT Food, also took part, as well as European university lecturers, Bulgarian start-ups and young opinion leaders.



In conclusion, Prof. Dr Vladislav Popov, Vice-Rector of the Agricultural University – Plovdiv, stressed that the opportunities of the bioeconomy in Bulgaria and CEE depend on strengthening education and developing skills in the bioeconomy, and that the Regional Innovation Valley – Plovdiv will partner with the Agricultural University.