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From: Slovak delegation
To: Delegations

Subject: Common declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Research of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia on the future role of the BIOEAST Initiative in the context of Horizon Europe
- Information from the Slovak delegation on behalf of Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia

Delegations will find in the Annex a note from the Slovak delegation presenting a common declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Research of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia on the future role of the BIOEAST Initiative in the context of Horizon Europe, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the "Competitiveness" Council on 28 May 2019. This common declaration is expected to have been signed by the delegations mentioned above, by the afternoon of 28 May 2019 when this "Any other business" item is on the agenda.

Common declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Research of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia on the future role of the BIOEAST Initiative in the context of Horizon Europe

Information from the Slovak delegation on behalf of Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia

The BIOEAST Initiative has been established in 2016 by the agriculture ministers of the Visegrad group, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia. BIOEAST is the Central and Eastern European Initiative for knowledge based, agriculture, aquaculture and forestry in the bioeconomy. Currently the Initiative boasts 11 Members and will be extended by the membership of Serbia in the coming weeks. The main aim of the Initiative since its establishment was to bring together CEE countries facing similar issues in the bioeconomy with an aim of mutual support, knowledge exchange, exchange of best practices and most importantly to promote research and innovation and increase the participation of the CEE countries on the research and innovation framework programmes (H2020 and HEurope).

Taking into account the progress achieved so far within the Initiative, it is necessary to continue with the ambition, gaining more acknowledgement and achieving faster growth in the field of bioeconomy with funding from the Research and Innovation Framework Programme Horizon Europe. Bearing in mind that bioeconomy is a horizontal and cross-ministerial issue it is necessary to foster horizontal national cooperation and to align the priorities of the Initiative not only from the agricultural but also from the research perspective. The main aim of the declaration is to show the progress of the BIOEAST Initiative, to show commitment for the future and to stress the importance of wider participation in the new framework programme HE.

Please find attached the Common declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Research of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia on the future role of the BIOEAST Initiative in the context of Horizon Europe.

Common declaration of the Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Research of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia on the future role of the BIOEAST Initiative in the context of Horizon Europe

The Ministers of Agriculture and Ministers of Research of the Visegrad Group, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovenia and the Baltic States under the auspice of the Slovak Presidency of the Visegrad Group have, in relation to the Central and Eastern European Initiative for knowledge based agriculture, aquaculture and forestry in the Bioeconomy – BIOEAST Initiative,

HAVING REGARD to the goals, objectives and measures set by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Environment Action Programme, Common Fisheries Policy, Food Law legislation, Maritime Policy, Circular Economy Action Plan, EU Bioeconomy Strategy, Biodiversity Strategy, EU Forest Strategy, 2030 climate and energy framework and the EU 2050 long term vision for climate neutrality,

EMPHASIZING that reaching those goals will require national efforts combined with the effective and geographically balanced implementation of the next research and innovation framework programme HORIZON EUROPE and TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the specific needs of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, which have benefited disproportionately less from the last two framework programmes, agreed on the following:

- (1) THEY SUPPORT the updated EU Bioeconomy strategy of October 2018 and HIGHLIGHT the importance of the bioeconomy when it comes to ensuring food quality and safety, sustainable management of natural resources and waste, gradual transition from fossil-based towards circular-based economy, mitigating and adapting to climate change, creating jobs and new value chains as well as maintaining EU competitiveness.

- (2) **THEY UNDERLINE** that primary production sectors such as agriculture, forestry and fresh water aquaculture are in need of modernisation, so importance needs to be given also to the use of innovative technologies and digitalisation. **THEY EMPHASIZE** that due to the low industrialization of rural areas and low resource intensive agriculture in the past decade, there is still potential to be grasped in the environmentally sound management and use of natural resources in the CEE region, also in the field of renewable energy. The regional natural capacity has a massive carbon storage potential in biomass, which could help mitigate greenhouse gas emission and facilitate adaptation to climate change. **THEY STRONGLY BELIEVE** that the bioeconomies of CEE countries require a boost in which research and innovation should work hand in hand with the future CAP.
- (3) **THEY RECALL** that the BIOEAST Initiative, consisting of 11 Member States from CEE, was established in 2016 with the aim to improve implementation and knowledge sharing, involvement in European research and innovation programmes, promote the bioeconomy, establish a macro-regional network of stakeholders and to improve evidence-based policy-making.
- (4) **THEY HIGHLIGHT** that the BIOEAST Initiative continues to strive towards its initial goals as set out in its Roadmap and Vision paper effective as of 2018. The work on the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) has been ongoing since 2018. The BIOEAST countries are currently also working on finalising the Initiative's governance and developing national structures to support the exchange of knowledge, best practices and boost awareness of the benefits of the bioeconomy.
- (5) **THEY POINT OUT** that within the Initiative 5 thematic working groups are established with a focus on the following key areas and sectors: forestry, sustainable yields and agro-ecological intensification, fresh water bioeconomy, food systems, biomass value chains and bioenergy, aimed at building up thematic partnerships and reinforcing the European Research Area.

- (6) THEY VALUE the European Commission's support of the Initiative so far and WELCOME the introduction of the specific thematic Policy Support Facility (further only as "PSF") for bioeconomy, which was highlighted in the updated EU Bioeconomy strategy. THEY PERCEIVE the PSF as a good strategic point of departure for developing knowledge-based actions and ensuring knowledgeable use of HORIZON EUROPE instruments at later stages. In this regard and based on the results achieved with the PSF, funding might be necessary also from the next research and innovation framework programme HORIZON EUROPE.
- (7) THEY EMPHASIZE the importance of a wider participation of entities from CEE countries in the European programmes, including HORIZON EUROPE. THEY HIGHLIGHT the importance of networks such as the BIOEAST Initiative and BELIEVE it could serve as a role model in setting common research and innovation priorities within the thematic areas of the HORIZON EUROPE framework programme while also maintaining an excellence-based approach.
- (8) THEY AIM to contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals and therefore to build up sustainable and resilient agricultural production systems that can at the same time help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change, while providing quality food and nutrition security. This will be possible with increasing yields, reducing food losses, sourcing waste streams for bioenergy and applying agro-ecological processes that safeguard agro-biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- (9) THEY ARE COMMITTED to enhance and strengthen the cooperation based on the BIOEAST experience in the field of bioeconomy within the next research and innovation framework programme HORIZON EUROPE, using all the instruments available. THEY HIGHLIGHT the great value and potential of the cooperation that the CEE region has to offer across various formats. THEY REGARD the aim of joint cooperation to be the synergy between the gaps and the existing expertise across partner countries. THEY also BELIEVE that particular focus needs to be given to circular sustainable production methods and should exploit the already existing bioenergy infrastructures.

(10) THEY CALL on the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament to consider this declaration during the Strategic Planning Process of HORIZON EUROPE.
