



Iliana Ivanova
European Commissioner
Innovation, Research, Culture,
Education and Youth

Dear Minister Kocher,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I regret not to be able to be with you in Vienna today. It would have been a wonderful occasion to celebrate not just achievements, but the bright possibilities of the future.

Our world, facing continuous change and challenges, demands resilience in our societies, economies, and social frameworks. To effectively overcome these and prepare for the future, we must utilise our strengths and create new opportunities.

Europe is uniquely equipped for this journey. We have renowned scientists, cutting-edge infrastructure, innovative businesses and advanced engineering talent. Our brand of innovation is distinguished by its human-centred, fair and sustainable approach.

However, realising our potential as innovation champions requires more efficient deployment of these strengths for societal and economic benefits. To address this gap, last year we launched the New European Innovation Agenda, introducing 25 actions focused on finance access, creating experimental spaces, and enhancing talent development.

This initiative aims to empower Europe's changemakers – researchers, innovators, students – to harness their potential and address critical challenges in climate, energy and health.

The Danube Region, with its vibrant start-up community, holds substantial innovation potential. Maximising this requires increased investment in human capital and finance access, supported by business and research environment reforms. Success stories in Hungary, Poland, Croatia and Slovakia, where investments in innovation have grown significantly, serve as inspirational models.

The European Innovation Council plays a crucial role in nurturing innovation ecosystems. The EIC Accelerator has funded 102 projects from the Danube Region, highlighting its capabilities. Success stories such as GLYCANOSTICS from Slovakia, working in cancer diagnostics, and Tampon Innovations and LAM'ON from Bulgaria, working in biodegradable plastic extrusion, demonstrate the region's dynamic nature.

Recognising the role of regions in driving innovation, we aim to create a pan-European ecosystem, identifying up to 100 Regional Innovation Valleys. The enthusiastic response from 52 Danube Region areas to become such Valleys is encouraging.

In conclusion, fostering a conducive business environment for companies at all growth stages is imperative for Europe-wide benefits from innovation. I am optimistic that today's discussions will formulate effective strategies for your region's advancement.

Thank you for your dedication to innovation.