

***Written Address by Mariya Gabriel
Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth
on the occasion of the 40th Conference of Rectors and Presidents of European
Universities of Technology, 23-24 September 2022 (TU Wien, Austria)***

Dear Rectors and Presidents, Ladies and gentlemen,

I cannot be there with you, but I could not miss this chance to send a written message of support for your work in this Conference.

Especially as the topic of your Conference, this year, is so important.

You are discussing the purpose of Universities of Technology. You are taking stock of the 40 years of existence of this network, looking to the past, to the present, but most of all setting a direction for the future.

And this is precisely the moment to do so. We have just launched two landmark initiatives – the European Strategy for Universities and the New European Innovation Agenda – that set the direction towards a more innovative society. A society that empowers people to create. To find solutions to the challenges we face.

These are powerful, ambitious documents, with concrete support to your role, creating and circulating new knowledge, equipping students with much needed entrepreneurial skills and mind-set, and contributing to our innovation ecosystems.

First, the European Strategy for Universities.

The Strategy aims at equipping young people as well as lifelong learners with the right competences and skills to nurture creative innovative mind-set.

To make sure your institutions can provide the best foundation for your learners, we are supporting innovative approaches to learning and teaching, such as ‘living labs’.

To add real-world experience to all your students, we are boosting Erasmus+ traineeships abroad, reaching 100,000 trainees every year.

And to make sure the best ideas coming out of your amazing communities can hit the ground running, we are helping higher education institutions create incubators in close cooperation with the entrepreneurial sector.

All while fostering diversity, inclusiveness, gender equality – sticking by the fundamental values of fairness, respect for each other, and above all the right to shine through talent and hard work.

That is why the Strategy also tackles the underrepresentation of women in STEM fields. In fact, it will be a priority for the 2023 Erasmus+ calls to focus on this issue.

All, of course, while supporting your institutions to continue to work together.

We will continue to roll out the European Universities initiative, increasing the number of alliances to 60 by 2024. We will continue to work towards institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. We are also examining options and necessary steps towards a joint degree. And we will continue to scale up the European Student Card initiative.

This, of course, with the continued cooperation of many of your institutions. After all, many universities of technology are engaged in pioneering the European universities initiative. They demonstrate how, through transnational cooperation, universities are stronger and more creative. Some are also engaging in our discussion on a European joint degree label and the legal status for alliances. And I am looking forward to follow up on their work and read their recommendations.

Second, we have the New European Innovation Agenda.

Because the next wave of innovation will be in deep tech areas like artificial intelligence, biotechnology or clean energy, we need to invest substantially in the whole deep tech life-cycle. And Universities of technology will have a fundamental role to play here: as educators of deep tech talents, in pushing the boundaries of scientific research in their research labs, and in transferring applied research to industry. Not to mention the fact that many Universities of Technology have also pioneered interesting models for acting as start-up hubs.

In order to increase the supply of graduates and workers with the necessary skills to work in deep tech companies and start-ups, we have proposed in this Agenda a “Deep Tech Talent Initiative”. Its goal is to educate 1 million talents in deep tech areas by 2025.

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology will take a central role in this initiative, scaling up its programmes in areas such as cybersecurity, smart manufacturing or digital health. This will be the case, for example, through many EIT-labelled Master and PhD programmes in which many Universities of Technology are already involved.

Beyond this, the EIT will reach out to all training providers, including many of your institutions, to amplify and scale-up their educational offer, connecting them with the “demand side” for skills, that is, industry and start-ups. This will take the form of Pledges – a mechanism that the EIT will present at its annual EIT Summit on 11 October. I invite you all to get in contact with the EIT and contribute to making this ambitious target a reality.

We count on you to take these opportunities offered by our EU instruments and create a more innovative Europe. A Europe that can bring together bright young people and proficient, innovative companies, capable of tackling the difficult challenges ahead through innovative solutions.

I wish you a very fruitful conference!