

Your Excellency Ambassador Dai Qingli,

Dear Professor Ivanov, Director of the Institute of Agrarian Economy,

Dear Professor Dimitrov, Rector of the University of National and World Economy,

Dear Professor Bozhanova, President of the Agricultural Academy,

Dear Associate Professor Ivanova, Rector of the Plovdiv Agrarian University,

Colleagues, Guests and Partners from the People's Republic of China,

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Firstly, I would like to thank all the attendees and participants for joining us and the China-Bulgaria Climate Change and Rural Revitalization Forum, part of the Belt and Road Joint Laboratory Annual Symposium. It is a pleasure and honour for me to be here.

The preceding speeches were pleasant to hear and they raised great points concerning this significant topic.

The climate change is one of the major challenges of our lifetime and it is not restricted to a single territory or region. Hence, a transnational and trans-border approach to solving it is a necessity. This challenge requires international cooperation in which we help each other to overcome our drawbacks. It is no surprise that as many as seven of the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations are implicitly or explicitly linked to climate change and preservation of the nature.

There are many studies and reports on the effects of the climate change on the rural areas and agriculture. In fact, the rural areas are in the highest risk of being damaged by climate change. Therefore, it is an imperative to work on solutions, so we can ensure their preservation, safety and development in the upcoming decades.

We always should start with the man in the mirror. Every significant improvement begins with personal reflection and great efforts at local and regional level. Therefore, the Association for the Promotion of Agricultural Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European countries is actively working to engage more young people in implementing innovative green solutions in business and agriculture. This is one of the key reasons behind the launch of our new initiative—the Academy for Entrepreneurship in Agriculture—which started in 2024 and has already successfully completed its first three editions in the cities of Varna, Bourgas and Plovdiv. During the Academy, the participants have the opportunity to meet, work and collaborate with mentors and lecturers from the academic and business circles from CEE countries. On the last day of each edition, the contestants present their own project ideas, some of which were focused on sustainable water resource management and food waste reduction.

Moreover, the winner of the Plovdiv edition of the Academy in December 2024 secured first place with a project concept dedicated to beekeeping and honey production. As we know, beekeeping plays a vital role in supporting ecosystems, preserving biodiversity, ecological balance, and even humanity itself – it is told that ‘if the bee disappeared off the face of the Earth, man would only have four years left to live.’

In 2025, we will organize the next two editions of the Academy for Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in the cities of Vratsa and Dobrich.

Another example for our efforts in this field is the successful pilot edition of the Accelerator Programme for Agricultural Startups from China and Central and Eastern Europe. Among the other aims, the Program was aimed to encourage solutions that will help to decarbonise the HoReCa and the agricultural sector, to reduce food waste, and to improve the efficiency of the irrigation systems. The next edition of our Accelerator Program is scheduled for 2026, maintaining participation from both CEE nations and China.

As a business support administration, our target is namely to be a linkage between the private sector, academia and state administration,

in order to close the circle among the respective parties and enhance the cooperation between them for a better and smooth initiatives, which might have positive effect on the society.

The recently inaugurated Permanent Pavilion of CEE countries in Ningbo, China and our participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> China-CEEC International Expo stand as testaments to the active efforts of APACCCEEC in promoting CEE companies on the Chinese market. Our initiatives regularly engage producers of organic, eco-friendly, and vegan products – enterprises committed to maintaining a limited carbon footprint. By doing so, we actively promote the distribution and consumption of healthy food products that comply with all current standards and requirements for eco-friendly production, aimed at environmental preservation and advancing sustainable practices in agriculture.

On June 26, APACCCEEC will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the International Conference '10 years APACCCEEC: Bridge for Cooperation between China and CEE countries' in Grand Hotel Sofia. I would like to take this opportunity to thank our partners for their longstanding support. With many of you, APACCCEEC has signed Memorandums of Cooperation – agreements that have repeatedly demonstrated their practical value over time, enabling us to achieve fruitful results together.

Again, thank you for having me.

I wish all of you successful work, health and prosperity.