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**KBBE Conference dinner at the Royal Flemish Academy of  
Belgium for Science and the Arts (Brussels)**

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Dear Secretary General Van Melkebeke,  
Minister Peeters,  
Commissioner Potočník,  
Distinguished guests,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you this evening to the opening dinner of the conference "The Knowledge Based Bio Economy towards 2020".

To start with, please allow me to extend, on behalf of the European Commission, our special thanks to the Belgian Presidency for your support in preparing a new European strategy and action plan for the Bio-Economy 2020 and for co-organisation of this important conference.

The Bio-economy concept can celebrate its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Five years ago, the first Bio-economy conference was held in Brussels in close collaboration with the UK Presidency, bringing together 400 key players from over 40 countries to discuss how life sciences could be best transformed into new eco-efficient and competitive products. In 2007, the second conference entitled 'En route to a knowledge-based bio-economy' was co-organised with the German Presidency, leading to the publication of the 'Cologne Paper' on the perspectives for bio-economy within the next 20 to 25 years.

What we need today is to bring the bio-economy to its full potential for achieving the goals of Europe 2020 strategy. The Europe 2020 strategy sets out a vision for Europe's social market economy based on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It also aims to build a more resource efficient and greener knowledge economy.

This is what the bio-economy is also about. It focuses on our most pressing societal challenges, the need to find sustainable solutions, and it aims at strengthening our research performance in biosciences as well as our innovation capacity.

The European Commission will put forward next year a new policy agenda for the bio-economy - a long-term and coherent vision that involves stakeholders coming from different scientific disciplines, different industries and different policy areas. We also need full public engagement and involvement of young generation – the future of Europe.

Furthermore, the multi-disciplinary and a life-cycle approach on bio-economy is gaining support also in the other parts of the world. I would like to welcome the

many international guests we have here today. Their presence is a testimony to the truly global nature of bio-economy.

Tomorrow, policy makers, scientists, representatives from industry and civil society from Europe and beyond will share their experience and perspectives on what the new vision should be and what contribution is needed from each bio-economy stakeholder for building a strong bio-economy for the benefit of our society.

How can we achieve the true bio-economy with more jobs, improved lives and a better and greener society? How can we turn world-class science into innovation economy? How can we remove bottlenecks which hamper innovative ideas from reaching markets? These are just some of the questions to think about today and tomorrow.

To set the scene for our discussions and to offer you a food, for thought, beside the dinner, we have with us several distinguished speakers this evening. I would first like to ask Mr Dirk Van Melkebeke, Secretary General of the Flemish Government to take the floor for a welcome note.