



Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative

Minsk, 22 June 2017

Communiqué

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI) held their annual meeting in Minsk on 22 June 2017. It was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus in cooperation with the CEI-Executive Secretariat.

The meeting was chaired by H.E. Mr. Vladimir Makei, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, and was attended by the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Slovakia and Serbia. Deputy Ministers for Foreign Affairs of Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Republic of Moldova and Poland, Secretary of State of Romania, Assistant Minister of Croatia as well as high representatives of Albania, Bulgaria, Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Slovenia and Ukraine also took part in the meeting. Representatives of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Union (EU) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) were present at the meeting as Special Guests. The CEI Alternate Secretary General also participated in the event.

The Ministers discussed the current state of play in the CEI Region, including in light of relevant international developments. They expressed strong concern on the detrimental impact of complex large-scale transnational challenges, such as the ongoing migration crisis and new security threats, including those of hybrid and cyber security character. While defying borders, these dangerous phenomena spur social tension and radicalisation, erode political cohesion and stability, hinder sustainable economic development and pose a serious test to Europe. The Ministers underscored the necessity of coordinated multilateral measures involving all countries in the CEI Region to effectively stand up to these menaces.

In particular, the Ministers noted with concern the decision of the UK to cease its membership in the EU, which represents a test to the European unity and could further lead to negative political and economic consequences. They expressed hope that such negative impact could be effectively minimised, eventually leading to a stronger and more consolidated European Single Market.

The Ministers stressed the pressing need for concerted efforts of all countries across Europe to tackle these challenges, including through reinforced pragmatic cooperation among various integration platforms on the continent. In this connection, they underscored the strong potential of the CEI as one of the oldest European fora, uniting a broad diversity of countries that participate in different integration and cooperation processes. The Ministers also noted the increasing role of the CEI Member States in supporting such tangible, efficient and mutually beneficial interaction. They affirmed their strong commitment to jointly work in this direction with particular focus on tackling the social and economic impact of large-scale migration, promoting connectivity through enhancing transport and logistics interconnections with an open and inclusive approach, harmonising trade- and transit-related standards and procedures, encouraging wider use of modern digital technologies and services.

The Ministers, furthermore, noted with concern the continuing crisis in and around Ukraine that poses a major threat to the regional security and has to be resolved on the basis of the UN Charter's norms, the Helsinki Final Act and principles of international law. They expressed their full support to the implementation of Minsk agreements and to the peaceful settlement of conflict. The Ministers acknowledged the important contribution made by the OSCE in addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine by making full use of its conflict cycle toolbox and commended the essential contribution of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in monitoring and supporting the implementation of all OSCE principles and commitments and assisting in the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The Ministers underlined the importance of streamlining the existing negotiation framework to result oriented discussions and expressed their strong support to a peaceful, sustainable and comprehensive solution based on full respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders.

The Ministers underlined the importance of the EU Enlargement process, especially for the Western Balkans, as a vital element in the consolidation of a durable and viable European architecture. In this respect, the Ministers reiterated that the future of the Western Balkans is within the European Union and that the enlargement process represents a strategic investment in the peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe. It has a positive impact on the speed and scope of political and economic reforms in the Western Balkans and represents a strong incentive for the strengthening of democratic institutions and adoption of standards needed in the alignment with the EU. The Ministers stressed the importance of good-neighbourly relations, rule of law, respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, which are the core democratic values of the EU and in particular of its Enlargement policy. The Ministers further highlighted the importance of the role played by the CEI countries, members of the EU, in supporting their non-EU CEI partners in their European integration aspirations as well as the crucial role played by other organisations in this field, such as the OSCE.

Furthermore, they expressed their support to those CEI countries which find themselves in various stages of integration with the EU or declared it as their main foreign and internal policy priority. They welcomed consistent efforts and structural reforms in those countries in fulfilling the criteria on the way to their European integration, and also expressed their support to the relevant authorities in establishing functional market economies. The Ministers also agreed on the necessity to promote developments consistent with the Trans-European Network (TEN-T), the Eastern Partnership and, as appropriate, with other important international policy frameworks such as the One Belt - One Road (OBOR) Initiative, China - Central and Eastern European Countries Cooperation (16+1), etc.

In light of promoting such pragmatic cooperation, the Ministers also emphasised the importance of the forthcoming Western Balkans Summit in the framework of the Italian Presidency of the Berlin Process (Trieste, 12 July 2017), which would further enrich the mechanisms of cooperation and assistance for the Western Balkans reconfirming their unequivocal support for its European perspective. The Ministers welcomed the ratification of the Western Balkans Fund by all participants and encouraged the starting of its operation. Furthermore, the Ministers stressed the importance of the upcoming Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit (Brussels, 24 November 2017), which should give a new political impetus to intensifying the relations between EU Member States and the six EaP Partner Countries. The Ministers welcomed the European aspirations and European choice of those EaP Partner Countries that seek a more advanced level of integration with the European Union. The Ministers called for continuing the CEI's engagement in supporting the implementation of the revised European Neighbourhood Policy, based on the principles of joint ownership, incentive-based approach and differentiation. In this regard, the Ministers called for reinforced cooperation between the CEI and the EaP in all areas of mutual interest, including in support of relevant EU policies and macroregional strategies.

In order to enhance the ability of the CEI to address new challenges and ongoing developments both within the CEI Region and at a wider international scale, the Ministers highlighted the importance of the process of adjusting the Organisation's statutory documents that regulate its core areas of activity and regular cooperation formats. In development of the effort launched by the BiH CEI Presidency in 2016 and based on the proposals elaborated by the CEI Member States, the Ministers took note of proposed amendments to the CEI Guidelines and Rules of Procedure. In this regard, the Ministers commended the efforts of the CEI Presidency, the Committee of National Coordinators (CNC) and the CEI - Executive Secretariat, designed to improve the efficiency of the Organisation.

Furthermore, the Ministers agreed on the need of an on-going review and assessment to ensure the Initiative's proper role and effectiveness and to avoid duplication of efforts with other international and regional organisations and structures. The Ministers expressed their view that the CEI should continue the internal reform process in order to define areas of specific competence where future work should be focused. In this process, they encouraged the CEI to concentrate its activities in areas of common interest and benefit to all countries in its constituency. The Ministers agreed that the Plans of Action should remain the basic document for outlining the key priorities of the Organisation in the medium-term perspective. The Ministers, thus, tasked the CNC and the CEI-Executive Secretariat to ensure that the Plan of Action being prepared for the years 2018-2020 is focused on specific areas and projects with good prospects of implementation.

The Ministers praised the project-oriented approach of the Initiative, which - combined with multilateral diplomacy - represents a unique model of regional cooperation needed for the support of the CEI's main aim and mission. In particular, they praised the CEI Fund at the EBRD, established and fully financed by the Italian Government - to which they expressed their deep appreciation for pledging an additional replenishment of 2 million in 2016, totalling about 43.5 million EUR since the Fund's inception - mainly focused on technical assistance and on the Know How-Exchange Programme (KEP), thanks to which the organisation has been able to develop a strong project-oriented dimension in its core operations. Moreover, thanks to this Fund the CEI was able to establish a strong and long-lasting partnership with the EBRD. In this context, they expressed appreciation for the continuing commitment by the EBRD in supporting the

economies of the CEI countries and their regional integration, as well as to the EBRD's efforts to help them more in policy dialogue.

The Ministers commended the results achieved within the project activities of the CEI Cooperation Fund and adopted the scale of national contributions of the Member States for 2017. They reiterated that in order to strengthen the role of this important Fund, a review of the current scale of contributions should be considered and encouraged voluntary contributions to the Fund.

Furthermore, the Ministers took note of the important results achieved through the growing involvement of the CEI-Executive Secretariat in EU-funded projects. They stressed that such projects constituted one of the most important cooperation tools of the Initiative. They took note of the high number of applications submitted to several EU Programmes and looked forward to starting new projects, reaffirming the commitment of their countries in assisting the Secretariat.

The Ministers reiterated the need to streamline and consolidate the CEI funds and instruments, focusing them on the fields of the Organisation's expertise and stimulating synergies with programmes and instruments of other international donors, above all the EU. To this end, they encouraged closer engagement of the CEI with EU institutions, including through use of the CEI Troika format. At the same time, the Ministers called for further increasing the CEI's outreach to other international and European sub-regional stakeholders. In this regard, they welcomed the joint conduct of the OSCE-CEI High-Level Panel Discussion "Beyond the Emergency: Improving the International Response to Large Movements of People" held in Vienna on 9 June 2017, in cooperation with the IOM and ICMPD, as well as proposals for reinforced project cooperation between the two organisations. The Ministers also emphasised the opportunities which can be created through closer engagement, communication and coordination on economic subjects of mutual interest with the emerging integration entities further to the East. In this connection, the Ministers praised the conduct of the CEI Ministerial Conference on Connectivity on 8 June 2017 in Minsk, with participation of representatives of the European Union, the Eastern Partnership countries, the Eurasian Economic Union, China and international financial institutions such as the EBRD and the EIB.

They also reiterated the need for the CEI to closely cooperate with other regional bodies in this endeavour. They acknowledged the excellent work done by the CEI to promote such cooperation, in particular with the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AII), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the CBSS, the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and its executive arm, the RCC, as well as with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), by bringing them together in a Coordination Meeting held in Trieste on 27-28 March 2017. Through this cooperation the CEI can strengthen its links with all the dynamically developing and strategic regions, *inter alia* the Baltic Sea, the Danube basin, the Alps, the Adriatic Ionian Sea and the Black Sea in view of CEI's involvement in EU macro-regional strategies and priorities in force, including the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and the EU Strategy for the Alpine Region (EUSALP).

The Ministers encouraged further strengthening of the cooperation with the United Nations (UN). They welcomed the Resolution on Cooperation between the UN and the CEI adopted on the occasion of the Biannual Meeting between the UN and the Regional Organisations, in the framework of the General Assembly, on 5 December 2016. In this regard, they agreed to continue the practice of informal meetings in New York on the side-lines of the UN General Assembly. Moreover, they welcomed the signing of Memorandum of Understanding with the IOM, which has recently become a UN System organisation, on the occasion of the CEI Summit in Sarajevo on 13 December 2016.

The Ministers expressed their satisfaction at the enhanced cooperation with the Parliamentary Dimension. The Ministers acknowledged the important role which the Parliamentary Dimension plays in advancing democratic decision making in Member States and expressed their conviction that the Parliamentary Dimension was well placed to make valuable contributions to the work of the Organisation as a whole.

The Ministers were supportive of the recent steps taken to fully integrate the Chambers of Commerce into the work of the Organisation. The Ministers considered that this business component of the CEI activities was an important complementary field of activity of the Organisation and deserved to be encouraged.

The Ministers extended their best wishes to the incoming CEI Presidency of Croatia in 2018, pledging full cooperation and support.

The Ministers also expressed their gratitude to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus and the CEI-Executive Secretariat for the excellent organisation of the Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the CEI Member States in Minsk.