



CEI Plan of Action 2018-2020

Elaborated by the CEI-Executive Secretariat, in cooperation with the CEI Member States, the CEI Plan of Action 2018-2020 is conceived as a flexible and dynamic tool to enable the CEI to quickly adapt to the evolving European landscape. It complements the CEI Guidelines and Rules of Procedure - the regulatory charter of the Organisation.

Acronyms and abbreviations

AII	Adriatic and Ionian Initiative
BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CBSS	Council of the Baltic Sea States
CEI	Central European Initiative
CEI-ES	Central European Initiative - Executive Secretariat
CNC	Committee of CEI National Coordinators
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEC	European Economic Community
EU	European Union
EUSAIR	The EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region
EUSALP	The EU Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSBSR	The EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	The EU Strategy for the Danube Region
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KEP	Know-how Exchange Programme
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
SEECF	South-East European Cooperation Process
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
TC	Technical Cooperation
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGA	UN General Assembly
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Introduction

The new Plan of Action has been developed as a focused and project-oriented roadmap for the period 2018-2020. Special attention has been paid to the real needs and proposals expressed by the CEI Member States, while also taking note of the evolving environment in the Region. Efforts have been made towards prioritisation and streamlining, aimed at avoiding dispersion of resources and at concentrating on actions where the CEI's expertise and working methodology represent a genuine added value.

It is composed of two parts: Part 1 highlights the CEI's mission, strategic objectives and working methodology. Part 2 comprehensively outlines its goals and objectives. The latter also includes a set of tangible actions elaborated by taking into account the results achieved in the recent past, thus ensuring coherence and follow-up.

This document intends to capitalise on the main strengths of the Organisation, based on its distinctive methodology for the promotion of regional cooperation through a combination of multilateral diplomacy and fund, programme and project management. While remaining a platform for political dialogue, in support of the European integration process, the CEI has developed a strong operational approach aimed at fostering cohesion and integration between EU and non-EU countries. Thanks to its broad membership covering Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the CEI is in the position to play a bridging role between macro-regions, thus making a contribution to the removal of existing barriers and divisions hindering European integration.

In practical terms, the CEI's main goal is to bring its Member States closer together in joint initiatives and encourage further regional cooperation in a structured and result-oriented manner. It aims at making tangible contributions towards sustainable and inclusive economies and societies. In order to reach this ambitious goal, the Plan of Action offers the necessary framework to steer the CEI's future activities, while committing the Organisation to a continuous improvement of its performance.

I. CEI Strategic Approach to Regional Cooperation

1. Mission

The CEI is a noble experiment of regional cooperation. In a time when Europe was still divided, it was among the first political fora joining countries with different statuses (Italy - member of NATO and EEC; Austria – neutral country; Hungary – member of the Warsaw Pact; and the SFRY – non-aligned country) ready to strengthen good-neighbourly relations and develop a manifold cooperation between their respective countries. Since its inception, although it has passed through numerous changes and challenges, the CEI has taken root, grown and finally blossomed into the largest regional intergovernmental forum in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

Its mission is *supporting European integration through cooperation among and between its Member States and with the EU, other interested public institutions or private and civil society organisations, as well as international and regional organisations.*

2. Strategic Objectives

The Initiative, currently counting eighteen Member States of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe with different a status vis-à-vis the EU (10 EU members - Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia; 4 candidates - Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia; 1 potential candidate - Bosnia and Herzegovina; and 3 countries involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy - Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine), has become a recognised *promoter of EU/non-EU-country partnership.*

The CEI has strongly contributed towards reaching open and democratic societies in Europe along with the great changes witnessed since the fall of the Iron Curtain. Indeed, *building sustainable economies and secure societies* are the most important elements of the broader work the CEI is still doing. In drawing up the new Plan of Action, the CEI underlined the two most important features characterising its Region, namely connectivity (the economic and environmental aspect) and diversity (the socio-political aspect).

3. Working Methodology

The greatest source of strength of the CEI stems from its membership, geographical position and the comprehensive scope of its mission. It also stems from its flexibility to promote intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary and business cooperation and working methodology, *combining multilateral diplomacy and fund, programme and project management.* While acting as a platform for political dialogue - helping to maintain cooperative relations and build confidence among its Member States - the CEI has also developed a strong operational, result-oriented approach to regional cooperation.

This latter approach entails two mutually reinforcing elements: the CEI is both a donor - providing funding from its own resources; and a beneficiary - competing at EU level in order to raise funds for actions (i.e. EU-funded projects), thus contributing to the implementation of EU policies in its Member States. The CEI channels its resources through the following funds:

- The **CEI Fund at the EBRD** – launched in 1992 and financed solely by the Italian Government with a total contribution up to now of €43.5 million - provides grant-type assistance for specific components of TC projects (prefeasibility and feasibility studies, project implementation, management training, capacity building and pre-loan audits in support of investments and operations of the EBRD). Since its inception, the Fund has provided over €27.5 million for funding 170 TC projects mobilising €6 billion of international investments in the countries of operations (for each euro provided by the CEI Fund, the EBRD and other financiers have invested €215). The Fund's main beneficiaries are the non-EU CEI Member States (Western Balkans and the three Eastern Partners – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine).
- The CEI Fund has also contributed to the **Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP)**. To date, 96 projects have been approved for a total CEI Fund contribution of about €2.7 million with an overall project value amounting to more than €13.5 million. The KEP is a development instrument aimed at supporting the transfer of experience from organisations in the EU to peers in the non-EU countries within the CEI region. The Programme, promoting the alignment of CEI Member States to EU standards, provides grants for projects related to capacity building and

transfer of good practices and contributes to the economic and social advancement of non-EU countries (Western Balkans and the three Eastern Partners – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine). It also supports the recent EU Members in their transformation from recipients to donors of development assistance and promotes principles of foreign development aid as well as international collaboration among institutions in CEI countries. In the period 2008-2015, the KEP has been financed also by Austria based on a Grant Agreement between the CEI and the Austrian Development Agency (ADA): in this way additional 31 projects were supported with €900,000. Between 2008 and 2011 the KEP programme also received funds from Poland (€50,000).

- The **CEI Cooperation Fund** - financed by annual contributions from all Member States - supports small-sized projects, such as seminars, workshops, conferences, training courses, aimed at fostering mobility and people-to-people contacts in the CEI region, in particular of the non-EU CEI Member States (Western Balkans and the three Eastern Partners – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine). Through these Cooperation Activities, the intra-CEI mobility rate has been increased by an average of 5,000 people every year. Since its inception in 2002, 1,039 activities have been co-financed with €9.4 million.
- In order to honour and encourage initiatives and activities of talented and often young people from the CEI Member States, several **CEI Prizes & Awards** are offered, in particular in the areas of culture and media.
- While providing resources through these funding tools, the CEI, since 2004, has also been active in the field of **EU project management**. By participating in EU Projects, the CEI is able to achieve tangible results, enlarge its cooperation networks and ultimately contribute to the implementation of EU policies in the broad area covered by its membership. 29 projects have been implemented so far with a total mobilisation of € 52,75 million, while 14 projects are currently under implementation for a total fund mobilisation of € 24 million, of which € 3 million administered by the CEI, in particular by the CEI-ES. The extensive expertise accrued over the years, in its capacity of both Lead Partner and Partner, qualifies the CEI as a credible and reliable player in the field of EU project design and management. Its long-standing activity in the promotion of regional cooperation and its well-established networks in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe represent an added value for the construction of transnational, cross-border and interregional partnerships and for the elaboration of concepts and constructive ideas to be translated into innovative EU project applications. The CEI's ability to design and implement EU-funded projects, involving partner institutions from candidate, potential candidate and partner countries, is a major CEI asset allowing it to provide a tangible contribution to a wider European integration, and in particular to the enlargement process.

This working methodology is crucial in order to address the CEI's core mission. It also makes the CEI unique among other regional organisations promoting cohesion and integration between EU and non-EU countries.

Moreover, thanks to its specific membership, the CEI is well placed to play a connecting role between and among the EU Macro-Regional Strategies active in this region (EUSBSR, EUSDR, EUSAIR and EUSALP)¹. It is the only regional organisation covering a vast and diversified geographical area connecting the Baltic, the Adriatic-Ionian and the Black Seas, with the Danube River, the Alps and the Carpathians as its natural backbones. Thanks to this position, the CEI is strengthening its links with all these dynamically developing and strategic regions as well as participating in the implementation of the relevant Strategies and their priorities.

In addition, the CEI is a natural player within three main EU Policies: Enlargement Policy (Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia); EU Neighbourhood Policy (Eastern Partners: Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine); Regional/Cohesion Policy (all its EU Members), thanks to its geopolitical context. It is the only organisation providing a peer-to-peer environment for sharing experience and synergising the new added values of the macro-regional approach to the complexity of transnational governance and programming.

The CEI's involvement in regional cooperation, as well as its bridging function, contributes to removing existing barriers and divisions, which are hindering the European integration process. The CEI has become a champion of regional cooperation and a trusted and respected partner in the region, fully engaged in and committed to providing significant, result-oriented contributions to strengthen the political, economic, and social systems of its Member States.

In order to fully accomplish its core mission, the CEI focuses on developing regional cooperation and is often working in partnership with the EU and many other international and regional organisations. The CEI has a strong institutional link

¹ The CEI's constituency connects: the EUSBSR - Poland; the EUSDR - Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine; the EUSAIR - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia; and the EUSALP - Austria, Italy, Slovenia.

with the EBRD, where it also holds a Fund - the CEI Fund at the EBRD, fully financed until now by Italy. Ties have been established with several Directorates and Agencies within the EC; with the UN, where the CEI was granted observer status in the UNGA on 9 December 2011, which opens a global perspective to the CEI's work; and with UN specialised agencies, i.e. FAO, IOM, UNECE, UNESCO, etc. Cooperation relations have also been established with the OSCE, the Council of Europe, as well as with several regional organisations such as the AII, the BSEC, the CBSS, the SEECP and the RCC.

Although a forum for intergovernmental cooperation, the CEI has also developed many contacts with NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), mainly in the context of project-related activities. With the aim of contributing to the process of democratisation and EU integration, the CEI intends to further strengthen cooperation with these actors, in particular through its Cooperation Fund, a main tool for promoting people-to-people contacts. The development of dynamic civil societies in non-EU CEI countries is a CEI priority, also taking into account that this is a pivotal aspect of the EU enlargement process and the Neighbourhood Policy. Regional cooperation for the development of civil societies constitutes a flexible and result-oriented effort.

II. CEI Agenda for 2018-2020

This Agenda covers a three-year period (2018-2020) and represents a roadmap aimed at promoting regional cooperation for enhancing democratic and inclusive societies and sustainable economies of CEI Member States. This strategic framework document – stemming from the collaboration between the CEI Member States and the CEI-Executive Secretariat - is a contribution to the promotion of mutual trust and cohesion of the region, aimed at enhancing the European integration process.

In drawing up the Goals and Objectives, taking into account the inputs forwarded by the Member States and the results achieved in the recent past, the CEI has identified two key medium-term priorities: **Connectivity** (mainly the economic and environmental aspect) and **Diversity** (mainly the socio-political aspect), which will underpin the CEI's core mission. The chapters dedicated to these two priorities address the core challenges and opportunities for CEI Member States and include goals and objectives reflecting a common vision of the economic, social and environmental prosperity of the region to be attained through joint actions.

1. Connectivity, focuses on strengthening the capacities of the Member States towards good governance, sustainable economic development, also through improved interconnected transport networks, and environmental sustainability as key prerequisites for democracy, stability, security and prosperity in the CEI region.

2. Diversity, focuses on promoting intercultural cooperation as a tool for stronger democratic participation and on the role of media in strengthening the awareness of common core values. Furthermore, it focuses on international scientific cooperation, brain circulation and quality education to develop knowledge-based societies within innovative-intensive economies.

The goals and objectives of the CEI Plan of Action are fully in line with the Europe 2020 Strategy, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the EU Macro-Regional Strategies also affecting the CEI area. These goals are interlinked, interdependent and represent the main areas of interest of the CEI Member States, as outlined in the CEI Guidelines and Rules of Procedure.

Despite the different levels of development among the CEI Member States, the proposed goals and objectives are relevant to all of them and will be pursued through goal-oriented multilateral co-operation, going beyond a purely intergovernmental dynamics, and collaborative, multi-stakeholder partnerships. These will involve both governmental and non-governmental actors – including civil society, business actors, scientific communities, academia and media. Furthermore, partnerships with other organisations is considered a part of normal working practice.

1. Connectivity

GOALS: Good governance, economic growth and environmental protection

GOAL 1: Good governance

Good governance is a cornerstone of democratic stability and security as well as a conditional asset for achieving sustainable development. Indeed, it plays a key role in ensuring an environment in which business and jobs can flourish and investment climate improve. Good governance requires a transparent and accountable state organisation, bringing together multi-level approaches and different actors for adopting shared long-term development policies and programmes, properly harmonised with agreed transnational strategies such as the macro-regional ones. In this regard, regional cooperation plays an important role in supporting intergovernmental dialogue, in preventing and solving bilateral distress, facilitating common transnational planning and preserving long-term stability upon the values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

OBJECTIVES:

1.1. Processing and exchanging experience on large-scale migration

RATIONALE:

In order to tackle the economic and social impact of current migration on CEI countries, the challenge of organising effective reception capacity for asylum seekers, as well as assistance and active cultural and social integration of

migrants should be faced on the basis of a structural approach while respecting the CEI Member States national competences. Emergency fuels anger among citizens and creates uncertainty among potential investors, which can be reversed only by responsible, concrete answers from the Member States and their transnational collaboration, thus improving the international response to large movements of people. Among its Member States, the CEI has registered different typologies of migration flows: i.e. the Balkan and Mediterranean Routes of asylum seekers and irregular migrants; but also the massive flow of mostly skilled young people leaving the Western Balkan countries, Italy and Croatia; and the sensitive situation in the CEI Eastern Members (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova). Since mid-2015, on behalf of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the CEI Secretariat has deployed an action promoting the exchange of experience and networking among actors of its constituency, thus bringing together State Administrations, Civil Society Organisations and Local and Regional Authorities. The dynamics of knowledge sharing and that of setting new partnerships and initiatives has enhanced the understanding between the CEI and international organisations focused on migration such as the ICMPD, the IOM and MARRI and the relevant departments of the OSCE, the UNDP and the Council of Europe. The CEI commitment mostly focuses on institutional capacity building, in particular on fine-tuning the regulatory framework resulting from the cooperation between central and local public administrations. This is a result of the need to eventually help legally-arrived new comers to settle within the living conditions of local citizens and their cultural traditions. Also the challenges related to diaspora can be better dealt with in the framework of a comprehensive knowledge of migration governance. The role of civil society, a CEI priority since its inception, will also be supported to develop better frameworks for a public – private collaboration and to spread skills of social entrepreneurship.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Promote exchange of practice and knowledge among the public and non-governmental actors dealing with migration at central and local level;
- Support analysis and actions on demographic changes, brain-drain and diaspora feed-back, social entrepreneurship, rural depopulation recovery, etc.;
- Promote dialogue of the CEI Member States on the internal move of their people;
- Encourage cross-border cooperation of Public Authorities in combating trafficking in human beings, migrant exploitation and related crime and increase common understanding of integrated border management between CEI Member States;
- Encourage the development of partnerships between the main stakeholders in society – governments, civil society, private sector, members of the academia - within the framework devised by the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, prepared under the auspices of the United Nations.

1.2. Promoting safe and secure e-Government solutions

RATIONALE:

The basic role of this objective is to contribute to the development of sustainable societies based on knowledge in the CEI region by creating an environment for applications in a wide range of areas, including eGovernment, eTrade, eHealth etc. Indeed, the EU Digital Agenda envisages the promotion of the deployment and use of modern accessible online services. Modernisation of public institutions requires easier and faster access to public services and absence of bias, which will eventually lead to the improvement of the overall performance of the public sector. The focus has to be on governance reforms with the technological tools provided by ICT being utilised to bring about fundamental changes in the governmental processes. E-Government will make public services faster, more efficient and more effective. Besides being cost effective, e-services are also transforming administration into a citizen-oriented one which will better align with citizens' needs. Furthermore, the development and harmonisation of interoperable eTrade systems, where relevant, among CEI Member States and with the related EU *acquis*, will be taken into account. ICT solutions for innovation & startup ecosystems and eHealth will also be considered. Special efforts will be encouraged for initiatives and programmes with particular regard to the delivery of modern teleinformatic services in rural areas and for the benefit of those population groups more at risk of digital divide (elderly, less educated, etc.). In order to extend the use of electronic services, the CEI will reinforce its role in the improvement of digital literacy skills. Moreover, the CEI will stress the importance of data security (cybersecurity) and high level of trust and confidence when delivering online service. The cybersecurity issue is of growing importance both on national and international level. There are many important players in the field including Governments, businesses, NGOs and academic institutions. A huge potential of national academic and public R&D centres is still underused. Fostering cooperation and information sharing between these entities would be beneficial also for national Governments. A more secure and resilient digital environment requires a wider risk awareness. Digital literacy initiatives will also be aimed at spreading a basic cyber hygiene attitude, thus avoiding a huge percentage of cyber-attacks.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Develop international cooperation in the field of e-governance and the exchange of good practices aimed at identifying the best examples for the implementation of e-governance solutions as well as supporting the improvement of activities of national stakeholders on eGovernment, eTrade, eHealth, etc.;
- Promote e-services and enhance awareness of its benefits in order to make public services more transparent, efficient and accountable, providing for digital-by-default standards, inclusiveness and accessibility;
- Promote cybersecurity, thus increase the security and integrity of electronic communications and support the development of right-based legislative and regulatory frameworks on data protection;
- Improve digital literacy, enhance the capabilities of the people to use electronic services and raise awareness on cybersecurity risks.

1.3. Strengthening institutional capacities and promoting effective anti-corruption measures and open data

RATIONALE:

A well-organised state organisation is the key element to achieve stability and security, ensuring a favourable environment where businesses and jobs can be created and investment confidence grows. Indeed, potential investors can only be attracted by transparent and responsible state organisations. Furthermore, the competitiveness of the private sector needs to be supported by enhancing value creation, improving access to finance, etc. On the contrary, weak institutions generate a lack of trust among potential investors, the business community and citizens. In particular, not only does corruption harm investments, but also the society as a whole. It undermines democracy and impedes overall economic growth. Fighting corruption contributes to democracy empowerment and improves competitiveness. Nevertheless, very often, public institutions do not have enough capacities to firmly enforce anti-corruption rules. In this context, the CEI will continue to support efficient and effective public administration through capacity building programmes and the inclusion of the civil society in this process. This will lead to more stable institutions able to implement anti-corruption agenda. Moreover, promoting open data, developing the re-use of public sector information (aiming at the “once only” principle), expanding public access to reliable and objective information will also be tackled. If appropriately balanced with privacy and correct processing of sensitive data, public sector information has a significant — still untapped — potential for the re-use of new products and services and for efficiency gains in administrations. Besides its economic value, opening up public data also fosters the participation of citizens in political and social life and contributes to various public policies. Actual openness of data is one of the key conditions for unblocking economic and social potential for a re-use of public sector information. Therefore, promoting good practice, facilitating coordination and experience sharing across the states is crucial for strengthening open data initiatives and the re-use of public sector information.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Support the establishment of common integrity standards of public administrations and the enhancement of institutional capacities/ competences of public administration at the central, regional and local levels to implement key reforms (in non-EU CEI Member States);
- Support trainings for public administration officers on effective anti-corruption measures;
- Raise awareness on fair public procurement;
- Promote the expansion of public access to reliable and objective information and support for introducing simple, clear and transparent rules of access to public services.

GOAL 2: Economic growth

Bringing people and countries closer together contributes to lasting stability and economic growth. Nevertheless, economic ties across the CEI region can substantially be improved. As national economies become increasingly interdependent, the need for enhanced harmonisation of the entrepreneurial environment, transparency and predictability of transport and customs procedures, energy connectivity and simplified regulations for trade and business is more and more important. The provision of quality jobs and decent working conditions is a requirement for socially sustainable economies. Research infrastructures and innovation delivery can further stimulate the economy and help the competitiveness of the CEI economies on the global market. The private sector, a pivotal player in the market economy, has to be properly involved in nourishing the quality of decision-making at intergovernmental level.

OBJECTIVES:

2.1. Strengthening transport networks

RATIONALE:

The CEI will continue to focus on the rehabilitation and development of transport infrastructure as a catalyst of international trade, investments and economic development. It will also continue paying attention to actions such as the extension of the TEN-T Network to the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership Countries, TEN-T guidelines, Motorways of the Sea Policy, green transport corridors and intermodal terminals policy, improvement of coordination in the development of transfrontier transport connections in the CEI region, One Belt - One Road (OBOR) Initiative, China – Central and Eastern European Countries Cooperation (16+1), etc. A well-developed and maintained transport infrastructure system linking various transport modes is essential to enhance countries' trade and overall competitiveness. The necessity to improve the transport infrastructure is especially valid for countries whose economic growth is trade-dependent. In order to boost international trade and investments, such countries must continuously improve the links between their trade gateways and extend their connections to the region and globally. In this context, the need for improving border crossings – an often neglected component of transport infrastructure and the weak part of TEN-T – is a major concern. Long delays in transiting international borders may cause inconveniences for passengers and drivers and, more importantly, hamper the transportation of goods, thus undercutting the CEI Member States' trade and causing unfavourable effects on the environment. In this context, the CEI will support the removal of bottlenecks in order to improve the speed of border-crossing procedures. In addition, the CEI will work on integrating rural/peripheral areas in main transport networks. A good connectivity network, including efficient transport nodes, ICT solutions and promotion of alternative fuels supply chain among transport modes and countries, is a precondition for carrying out commercial activities, delivering basic services such as education and health, as well as achieving social, environmental, economic and political goals.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Enhance transport policies of CEI Member States by including relevant national, regional and local authorities in a process oriented to improve freight and passengers transport, also taking into consideration the CEI countries' involvement in the Europe – Asia connectivity;
- Promote projects and activities to improve coordination and reduce barriers affecting CEI countries, through the development of methodologies for the analysis of physical and non-physical bottlenecks and through the promotion of ICT solutions & other soft measures, including initiatives towards the decarbonisation of transport;
- Promote capitalisation processes to increase accessibility of regional, peripheral and cross-border areas to the main regional/national and international networks (as TEN-T hubs) through a coordination of policies among the transport ministries of CEI Member States and relevant stakeholders;
- Promote inter-institutional cooperation among CEI Member States in order to coordinate the development of a common transport strategy also through the participation in EU project proposals.

2.2. Improving research and innovation systems

RATIONALE:

In order to build knowledge-based societies and unlock their economic potential, CEI Member States need to invest in the improvement of their research and innovation (eco-) systems. Within the CEI membership, relevant differences exist between a few strong and several moderate/modest innovators (European Innovation Scoreboard 2017): regional cooperation initiatives promoted by the CEI will basically aim at reducing this gap, which will have an impact both on the economic growth of the CEI region and on the EU integration process of non-EU CEI Member States. The latter will be supported in the elaboration of their Research and Innovation Smart Specialization Strategies (RIS3), and in the removal of bottlenecks and barriers, including legal/regulatory ones, for their future implementation. Moreover, actions will be promoted in order to enhance the participation of non-EU CEI Member States in Horizon 2020, the main tool for the implementation of the Innovation Union (IU) and for the consolidation of the European Research Area (ERA). The CEI will act as a platform for policy dialogue and knowledge circulation, as well as for facilitating the design of joint actions in fields such as capacity building, benchmarking and transferring of best practices. Specific attention will be paid to research-industry collaboration, which will be facilitated through an open innovation methodology to make sure industrial challenges are properly met by scientific solutions. This will enable the diffusion of technological innovation, as well as the creation of new hi-tech enterprises and start-ups. At the same time, it will support the valorisation of research results through knowledge and technology transfer to the business and industrial sectors. Efforts will be undertaken to support activities contributing to the development of innovation centres (science and technology parks, pre-seed and seed incubators, etc.) in CEI countries and the integrated use of Research Infrastructures. Within a

broader, “quadruple-helix” perspective, CEI cooperation will aim at encompassing all actors involved in innovation, from policy makers to researchers, from entrepreneurs to citizens, thus developing multi-stakeholder activities contributing to the enhancement of the CEI countries’ research and innovation systems.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Support technical assistance in the development and execution of Research and Innovation Smart Specialization Strategies (RIS3);
- Promote capacity building and training on technology transfer, valorisation of research results, innovation management and start-up generation, and support the development of innovation ecosystems in CEI Member States;
- Encourage the organisation of brokerage and open innovation events to facilitate interactions between scientific and business communities, including clusters;
- Enhance skills for successful participation of non-EU CEI Member States in Horizon 2020.

2.3. Supporting transition to Circular and Bioeconomy and promoting Blue Growth

RATIONALE:

The shift towards a circular economy is one of the most important issues Europe is currently facing as well as the rest of the world. It is not sustainable to continue exhausting our planet’s limited resources, many of which are non-renewable. The only solution is to further develop the countries’ economies without overusing natural resources, while changing people’s attitudes towards consumption and waste. Bioeconomy is a very important part of the circular economy. The cross-cutting nature of Bioeconomy brings about an opportunity to address complex and inter-linked issues, while fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, thus enhancing competitiveness and growth. Knowledge exchange between various stakeholders to transform the increased demand of biomass into sustainable solutions in the entire value chain - from biomass to bio-based products and to the consumer – ought to be encouraged. Based on its experience and achievements, the CEI will support the definition of bioeconomy strategies in the CEI Member States, including the creation of regional biomass markets and the promotion of the Danube River as a corridor for sustainable mobilisation of biomass and by-products. Particular attention will be devoted to supporting the implementation of Smart Specialization Strategies and to the principle of the knowledge triangle as applied to bio-based product value chains. Moreover, nowadays, more and more coastal nations are looking at the sea as the next frontier for sustainable economic development. As seas provide natural resources, keeping them healthy is crucial. Even more, by harnessing the marine and coastal resources, not only would countries be able to boost growth, but they would also be able to tackle some of the key challenges faced by these economies including unemployment, low growth, and food security. For these reasons, the CEI will pay special attention to the promotion of the blue economy, more precisely regarding the enhancement of administrative and institutional capacities in the area of maritime governance and services.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Consolidate institutional dialogue between countries and support for defining bioeconomy strategies and full-scale development of relevant value chains and promote regional markets for biomass and bio-based products;
- Promote biotechnologies and know-how transfer among CEI Member States.
- Communication and awareness-raising of research, innovation and business opportunities in blue economy sectors;
- Stimulate the strengthening of blue technologies and the improvement of maritime governance and services, including the development of human skills to foster inclusive growth and job creation within blue economy, in sectors such as blue energy, aquaculture, marine mineral resources etc.

2.4. Strengthening rural and area-based development

RATIONALE:

With over one third of the population in the CEI Member States living in rural areas, rural development remains among the most important fields of the CEI’s activity. Particular attention will be paid to people living in isolated and underdeveloped regions or in specific areas, in order to help them meet economic, environmental and social challenges and improve their quality of life. Special attention will be paid to non-EU CEI Member States as they need more assistance in the field of agriculture, especially in terms of harmonisation of agriculture national law with the EU acquis and by strengthening the institutions involved in agricultural development. The CEI aims at enhancing sustainable agricultural development by improving farm efficiency and competitiveness, increasing farm incomes, food security; improving information sharing, promoting the use of associated technologies in the sector as well as by expanding access to adequate infrastructure and services in the agricultural sector. The attention should also be paid to further

development of rural tourism as well as to the development of new and enhancing the existing tourism offer/products in rural areas with the aim of keeping the population in these areas. The CEI will also foster knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture and rural areas. In particular, the promotion of the Bioeconomy potential will be taken into consideration. Moreover, social economy which is crucial for the convergence of disadvantaged regions, where market forces fail to revive the economy, will also be promoted. Social Enterprises are key actors in social inclusion and work integration in these regions. However, they face many common barriers at their birth, operation and growth. Therefore, support mechanisms tailored to the local needs and specificities of social businesses are necessary: social enterprises, if helped by a supportive environment, can be real drivers of economic and social change and can turn innovative social ideas into viable and sustainable business models. Since agriculture depends on ecosystem services and has an important impact on these ecosystems, it is worth underlining the importance of using environmentally-friendly agriculture practices in accordance with the principles of the Circular Economy.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Support the expanding of access to adequate infrastructure and services in the agricultural sector and promote projects and activities in order to improve the quality of life of the rural population, including the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas and small towns as well as rural/local tourism;
- Support actions that will contribute to the transformation of resources into economic assets, thus improve farm efficiency and competitiveness and increase farm incomes and non-agricultural share of farm income;
- Support the application of EU standards and regulations (including food-safety and good-quality standards) and application of geographical indications for locally produced food products;
- Foster activities in order to promote traditional land use, especially farming, and foster innovative and more efficient technologies in agriculture to counter the effects of climate change.

GOAL 3: Environmental protection

Environmental protection and climate change remain top CEI priorities for moving towards sustainable growth. The CEI fully recognises the two-way relationship between environment and security. Good environmental governance not only contributes to a sound investment climate, but can help in addressing the concerns and interests of all stakeholders, helping prevent tensions and conflicts. Indeed, dealing with environmental issues requires enhanced cooperation within a framework for consultations and knowledge sharing, and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the implementation of actions and activities. The CEI strives to transform environmental security risks into opportunities for cooperation that can enhance stability and contribute to sustainable development. Environmental considerations need not be an obstacle to economic development. Instead, they can be a catalyst for innovation, increased productivity and job creation.

OBJECTIVES:

3.1. Fostering adaptation to climate change

RATIONALE:

Climate change is a global challenge affecting people worldwide. Atmospheric gases, especially carbon dioxide are creating the greenhouse effect, which today has reached the highest level in history. It, therefore, influences climate changes contributing to the creation of extreme weather conditions, including powerful hurricanes and floods which have affected the Western Balkans in recent years as well. The abundant consumption of fossil fuels and the inefficient use of natural resources is also threatening our economic security. In order to address climate change, the countries need to adapt and become resilient to its current and future impacts and foster public and private investments in clean energy. Investments made today will result in future benefits both from a financial and environmental point of view. An efficient use of natural resources will save money and significantly contribute to economic growth. Considering the impact of daily life, this concept should be taken from a comprehensive point of view, covering all aspects of life, starting from early education to favouring cultural and sustainable habits in the daily life of all segments of population. Taking into account the increased frequency of the adverse effects of climate change, their consequences in CEI Member States and the need for appropriate policies and measures in all sectors, one of the CEI's priorities will be the assessment of vulnerability to climate change. It will also include support to the implementation of the results of the recent COP 23 of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (Bonn, 6 – 17 November 2017) and contribute actively to the good preparation and favorable outcome of next COP 24 hosted by Poland, in Katowice.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Foster the incorporation of the value of ecosystem services into socio-economic policy-making at local, regional and national levels across the CEI region;
- Contribute to the activities of ecological restoration, aimed at improving ecosystem services and ecological connectivity in the CEI Member States;
- Promote and support activities related to green infrastructure;
- Contribute to climate change vulnerability assessment in the CEI Region, focusing on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, disaster prevention and on the adaptation to climate change.

3.2. Promoting sustainable energy and energy efficiency

RATIONALE:

The CEI region is still facing drawbacks with regard to sustainable energy production. In this context, enhancing international cooperation is essential for promoting renewable energy sources, energy research and technology and investments in energy infrastructure and clean energy technology. Energy supply and demand will have to focus more on energy-efficient methods and make a greater use of renewable energy sources. The use of low-emission technologies will make a favourable impact on the environment and will contribute to the development of new businesses and job creation. Meeting energy goals is not only about financial savings. It is crucial for our energy security. In this regard, the CEI has identified - as core issues of its activities - the promotion and development of energy efficiency, security of energy supply as well as research and development of renewable energy sources. Bioenergy appears to be the most promising target for at least two reasons: a) the huge amount of organic by-products provided by agriculture and forestry related activities and b) the possibility for the countries to use conventional technologies which cannot count on a highly developed energy industry. In this framework, the CEI wishes to act as a platform for the adoption of sustainable development related policies, to strengthen co-operation among Member States and to support measures to facilitate investments and enhance dissemination and information in this field. In particular, priority is given to the industry and housing sector (energy performance of buildings and buildings with almost zero energy consumption); and to the transport sector, by supporting activities in sustainable mobility, i.e. promoting environmentally-friendly transport, with focus on optimisation of urban mobility, in view of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and of raising the quality of life in urban areas. Bearing in mind that investing in cleaner, low-emission technologies will contribute to fighting climate change and to creating new business and employment possibilities, the CEI will continue to support projects related to sustainable energy development covering both energy production and energy consumption in all sectors.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Raise awareness of the importance, benefits and potential of renewable energy sources;
- Promote the implementation of the Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan which aims at accelerating the development and deployment of low-emission technologies;
- Facilitate the exchange of best practices of CEI Member States in the area of promoting renewable energy and reduce the weight of hydrocarbons in the national balance of energy sources;
- Support activities promoting energy performance of public or residential buildings and of buildings with almost zero energy consumption, energy efficiency for corporate sector as well as environmentally-friendly transport.

3.3. Preserving natural capital, especially biodiversity

RATIONALE:

Regional economic prosperity and well-being is underpinned by its natural capital, from fertile soil, multifunctional forests and productive land and seas to fresh water and clean air – as well as by the biodiversity that supports it. Protection, conservation and enhancement of the EU's natural capital are the first key objective of the new European Environment policy (7th EAP), which predicts protected biodiversity and the enhancement of the society's resilience by 2050. Healthy forests and fertile soils, as major natural sinks of greenhouse gases, are vital for achieving climate neutrality. This could only be possible by maintaining and enhancing ecosystem resilience, because social, economic and ecological sustainability are interdependent. Despite the strong legislation framework, most ecosystems are seriously degraded. The increased human pressure on the environment – such as the conversion of natural habitats into agricultural areas, the overexploitation of fisheries, urbanisation, unsustainable farming – is diminishing natural capital at a faster rate than it can be replenished. Therefore, despite benefits and despite the importance of biodiversity for humans, it continues to be lost, mainly due to pressures caused by human activities. Based on the Living Planet's Index, the number of vertebrate species has on average, decreased by more than 50% in slightly more than 40 years. These

global problems are also present in CEI Member States and are very often transboundary. For these reasons, there is a need for dedicated management of natural capital as a mean of integrating environmental priorities and the many sectoral interests depending upon them, in order to increase environmental, economic and social resilience. In this context, the CEI will support actions aimed at improving ecological resilience and at maximising the benefits environment policies can deliver for the economy and society, within the planet's ecological limits. It will also reinforce the overall cooperation in nature and biodiversity conservation among its Member States also with reference to the Natura 2000 Network; and assist in enhancing the environmental asset and the nature capital of green areas and forests across the CEI region. Furthermore, it will encourage the CEI Member States to submit Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) as part of the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Raise awareness and enhance public information on natural capital;
- Support appropriate policy measures to support biodiversity and improve human well-being; support the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy and other strategic documents related to the natural capital in order to meet its targets;
- Promote the Natura 2000 network as an effective instrument for safeguarding valuable species and habitats and Habitats Directive which obliges EU countries to protect the habitats of endangered species of plants, animals and habitats;
- Support activities and projects in the field of natural resource management, e.g. ensure sustainable forest management, etc.

2. Diversity

GOALS: Intercultural cooperation, media freedom and scientific cooperation and education

GOAL 4: Intercultural cooperation

Respect for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue as well as for equal opportunities are essential elements of conflict prevention and sustainable human, social and economic development. The CEI region has a great potential in terms of traditional values, diversity of expression, artistic creations and dynamic creative sectors. Thus, fostering intercultural cooperation through constructive dialogue and cultural exchange in all their tangible and intangible components is a key factor to contribute to mutual understanding between peoples, communities and countries. Active participation and coordinated efforts at various levels of society – involving governmental, business and NGO dimensions – are essential elements of this process.

OBJECTIVES:

4.1. Promoting intercultural dialogue and preserving cultural diversity

RATIONALE:

The CEI region enjoys remarkable cultural treasures, resources and values which play a major role in shaping its identity. Promoting intercultural dialogue and the respect for the diversity of cultures and arts remains a CEI priority. Strengthening core values such as mutual understanding presents an effective approach to preventing cultural, linguistic and ethnic divisions as well as to enabling people to deal with different identities constructively and democratically. In promoting intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity, media, NGOs, cultural networks and platforms have an important role to play in fostering respect and sharing of common values. In this regard, an active involvement of all groups of the society in the cultural life is necessary. According to the Regional policy of the European Union, territorial cohesion should contribute to enabling equal opportunities without excluding any vulnerable group of people from cultural life as culture contributes to building experiences and to the identity of each territory. This concept is extended to the different aspects regulating social life, and is particularly relevant when speaking about access to culture, which is fundamental for personal growth and self-realisation. Applying a holistic approach to accessibility into the reality of a museum/cultural institution is yet a challenge. It needs more awareness raising, continuous analyses and debates, but the valorisation of cultural heritage through an improved accessibility and know-how in managing the diversity can contribute to sustainable long-term socio-economic development. The CEI will pay particular attention to the cultural policies of the non-EU CEI Member States and will continue to foster intercultural dialogue and preserve the cultural and linguistic identity of minority groups. It will also support the sharing of lessons learnt from the past for better tackling the future.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Enhance integration through culture by increasing human contacts aimed at enhancing the understanding and respect for cultural diversity;
- Improve access to culture to vulnerable groups of people;
- Preserve cultural and linguistic identity of minority groups;
- Promote language exchanges.

4.2. Safeguarding cultural heritage and supporting creative industries (CCIs)

RATIONALE:

Cultural heritage and creative industries play an important role in achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Culture cannot only strengthen relationships and enhance social progress, but it can also help promote job creation and competitiveness. Promoting cultural heritage attracts tourism and boosts economic growth, but it is considered very fragile and often threatened by natural disasters and man-made destruction. For this reason, the CEI will continue to support actions and activities aimed at finding new solutions for the preservation and management of cultural heritage in its Member States. Moreover, cultural and creative industries have become high-capacity engines for economic growth. Over 70 EU regions have chosen culture and creative industries as a priority for their smart specialisation strategies, recognising these industries as drivers of regional growth. Beyond their significant economic contribution, CCIs have built a bridge between arts, culture, business and technology. In addition, CCIs have the potential to foster an inclusive European identity and support social cohesion, though poorly exploited. Thus, the CEI is highly committed to supporting the development of CCIs, especially by encouraging networking and the exchange of experiences among cultural stakeholders, also promoting innovation and the use of modern technologies.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Advance capacities in managing and safeguarding cultural heritage, in particular regarding the restoration and maintenance of the sites of historical and cultural importance;
- Exploit the potential of cultural heritage to develop cultural tourism and contribute to territorial growth and create joint tourist offers based on shared cultural heritage thematic routes;
- Develop actions and policies to reinforce entrepreneurship within the cultural and creative sectors to develop creative clusters or incubators in order to facilitate access to financing and establish an appropriate business environment.

4.3. Fostering cultural diplomacy

RATIONALE:

Cultural diplomacy as a channel for promoting diversity through international cultural relations is an integral part of the core European values. In an increasingly globalised world, cultural diplomacy is essential for fostering and preserving stability, encouraging the exchange of ideas, values, and traditions, and promoting mutual understanding and respect for fundamental rights. Cultural diplomacy reflects and promotes the EU's fundamental values, such as human rights, gender equality, democracy, cultural and linguistic diversity, but it also addresses some of the major global challenges such as conflict prevention and protection of human heritage. As the CEI region represents a diversity of traditional and cultural expressions, cultural policies are seen as drivers for peace and socio-economic development. Cooperation with Member States and their cultural institutions should be based on intercultural dialogue and capacity building and should be supported with specific financial means. In this respect, the countries of the region are increasingly aware of the need for joint efforts from all relevant actors at national and international level. Therefore, the CEI will further promote awareness-raising, especially by means of establishing and facilitating networking activities, disseminating best practices, seeking for funding opportunities.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Promote networking and exchange of experience among cultural stakeholders;
- Organise joint cultural events, festivals, exhibitions, etc.;
- Support mobility, such as artists/writers-in-residence programmes, especially addressed to young people;
- Promote the distribution of cultural goods and services outside national contexts, especially in the fields of audio-visual production and artworks.

4.4. Improving social integration of people from groups at risk of exclusion

RATIONALE:

Social integration is closely linked to the level of cultural growth and civic sense. In every society it is necessary to have a better understanding and respect for each other in order to move towards sustainable and inclusive societies through peaceful social relations of coexistence, collaboration and cohesion among people. In every country, certain groups of people face barriers preventing them from fully participating in the political, economic and social life. These groups are excluded through a number of practices due to a diverse gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, age, educational background, sexual orientation or disability status. In this context, the CEI will contribute to developing “diversity management” capacities, by identifying means and methods of integrating these groups into the society. A special focus will be placed on the creation of a multi-perspective environment through educational and training programmes promoting diversity, right-based conditions, affordable housing, gender-sensitive learning, etc. Even more so, diversity management activities and policies on equal opportunities should stress, in particular, the inclusion of vulnerable groups into the labour market. Furthermore, the CEI will share and promote the “age-friendly environment” principles, in line with the objective of the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIPoHAH) that is to contribute to creating a more inclusive societies and communities across Europe by empowering the elderly through scaled-up solutions.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Contribute to initiatives and activities aiming at strengthening interethnic, intercultural and intergenerational solidarity and cooperation, as well as solidarity and cooperation with/between disabled people and other vulnerable groups across the CEI region;
- Foster disability-, ageing- and overall diversity-supportive environments at different levels, thus promote awareness raising and policy influencing activities aiming at enhancing the inclusion of vulnerable groups in all segments of life, work and society;
- Tackle the issue on the demographic changes and health.

GOAL 5: Media freedom

Open and free media landscape with divergent opinions and ideas is a key aspect in democratic and stable societies. Media diversity is the degree to which media content is heterogeneous. However, the concept includes a number of aspects. For media to be most effective in serving their communities, the range of broadcasters, print and online platforms must reflect the diversity and range of opinions of their audiences. It also means fostering the participation of ethnic and linguistic minorities, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups, to have their voices heard and actively contribute to media content creation and policy planning.

OBJECTIVES:

5.1. Promoting media pluralism, transparency and independence

RATIONALE:

Freedom of expression as an essential fundamental right can only be exercised in a free and pluralistic media environment, through an independent media governance. Maintaining media pluralism as well as safeguarding media transparency and independence are essential conditions for preserving the right to information and freedom of expression that underpins the democratic society. The CEI strives to promote and protect media pluralism, transparency and independence through cooperation with other regional and international organisations, especially with regard to the legal framework guaranteeing these principles. A continuous debate, monitoring and awareness raising with the involvement of the different segments of the society is required and therefore the CEI will act as a platform for implementing appropriate activities in this respect.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Stimulate networking and exchange of experience among media owners, journalists’ associations, universities, NGOs and other competent institutions, also in view of monitoring media developments in the region, taking into account national, EU and international legal frameworks;
- Promote the knowledge and implementation of EU standards and directives, such as the Audio-visual Media Services Directive (AVMS), as well as discussions on future developments in the field of media regulations;

- Develop cooperation with the European Audiovisual Observatory (EAO) in view of enhancing participation of CEI countries; increase the availability and quality of data and analysis, thus broadening the picture of the media landscape in Europe.

5.2. Enhancing quality journalism

RATIONALE:

Priority will also be given to media literacy education, considering that the major transformation of the media environment resulting from numerous reasons, including technological innovations, requires adequate skills and competencies. Critical questions linked to the use of Internet and digital media, in particular its legal and ethical dimensions, will also be at the core of CEI cooperation in this field. Special attention will be paid to the support of professional training to promote highest standards in journalism to the media in order to fulfil their role in democratic societies with respect to ethnic and linguistic minorities, persons with disabilities and marginalised groups. This will include cross-border exchange of information and good practices through seminars and workshops organised by the CEI Member States.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Support professional training to promote highest standards in journalism to the media in order to fulfil their role in democratic societies;
- Promote workshops and roundtables to provide media experts with the necessary background information and tools to understand the mechanisms, impact and challenges of the European integration process and provide a comprehensive and objective report on these matters;
- Encourage dialogue between and among legislators and journalists regarding the strengthening of the position of journalists in the newsroom;
- Find new schemes of public funding of quality journalism.

GOAL 6: Scientific cooperation and education & training

Scientific collaborations among nations are nowadays more and more important to tackle increasingly global challenges, which stand at the interface between science and policy. In this regard, Science Diplomacy is emerging as a useful tool to build bridges and strengthen relations, which CEI Member States can further develop and exploit. Additionally, the CEI will aim at enhancing science education in its region as a contribution to the consolidation of the European Research Area (ERA). One of the ways of increasing employability is to raise the overall quality of education and training. Special attention will be paid to the life-long learning concept. There is a continuous need in the CEI area for programmes supporting mobility of students, researchers and teachers, as well as for study visits, staff exchanges and networking opportunities. As the CEI strongly supports European integration, focus will be placed on the implementation of EU educational and employment policies in non-EU CEI Member States, thus increasing the share of highly-skilled people. Education and training will also address groups at risk of exclusion in order to integrate them into the labour market, while focusing on youth unemployment as a growing problem the CEI region is facing.

OBJECTIVES:

6.1. Promoting international scientific cooperation and initiatives in support to science diplomacy

RATIONALE:

The CEI has historically been involved in the promotion of international scientific cooperation, also thanks to the tight collaboration with high-quality Trieste-based research centres composing the CEI Science & Technology Network. Scientific cooperation has an important role in tackling global science challenges and developing political and business links between countries. It also raises awareness among the scientific community in non – EU countries on the EU values, visions and priorities. The CEI believes that good bilateral and multilateral relations can facilitate highly effective cooperation in research and innovation. There is a need for developing a common proactive research and innovation approach. Moreover, communication among scientists and the public should be enhanced and a responsible use of science in public policy should be promoted. The CEI strives to strengthen the support for the science and technology enterprise and to promote a responsible use of science in public policy. Using science to build bridges between countries and to promote scientific cooperation as an essential element of foreign policy by raising the profile of science diplomacy, creating a forum for thought and analysis, and initiating bilateral activities.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Promote a comprehensive CEI approach towards Science Diplomacy to support interactions between the scientific community and decision-makers;
- Bridge between ERA and non-ERA countries by supporting the participation of non-EU/ non-ERA CEI countries in international research projects;
- Support transnational mobility of researchers in line with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment;
- Facilitate access to the institutions of the CEI Science & Technology Network through the promotion of specific pilot projects of advanced research and technical transfer.

6.2. Implementing life-long learning and developing competencies through mobility

RATIONALE:

The CEI will continue fostering high-quality education at all levels by facilitating the participation and the recognition of qualifications. Exchange of best practices between different education and training systems is of crucial importance. Efforts will also be made to counter the unfavorable effects of early school leaving, thus contributing to increasing the inclusiveness in life-long learning. Mobility is an important instrument for supporting high quality education at all levels. Cooperation among universities and institutions of higher education will be encouraged in order to support joint post graduate-level courses, seminars, workshops or summer courses. Major attention will, therefore, be devoted to enhancing the involvement of universities and institutions of higher education from the non-EU CEI Member States. In this context, mobility will be enhanced through university and research programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon H2020 MSCA, with the final goal to promote brain circulation and mitigate the negative effects of “brain drain”. Mobility should also be provided for young professionals and vulnerable groups. E-learning has also enormous potential to equalise opportunities and promote social mobility through access to quality higher education.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Promote cooperation among Higher Education Institutes with a focus on mobility/exchange of students, teachers and staff;
- Expand opportunities for learning mobility by vocational education institutions;
- Set up e-learning and distance learning facilities.

6.3. Enhancing scientific literacy and technological knowledge and capacity

RATIONALE:

The CEI has always attached great importance to strengthening educational institutions and building expert capacity. This calls for strengthening the capacities of higher education institutions in teaching, research and management. Well-educated people meet the local need for a qualified workforce and are prepared to face the demands of the global knowledge society. The CEI will continue to support the modernisation of the education systems, as it needs to be in line with the requirements of the fast changing job market and business innovation. Challenges posed by globalisation, demographic changes, rapid technological development require better performance of education systems and highly skilled people. This includes enhancing cooperation with education and training institutions, promoting learning at the workplace, etc. To increase capacities of the labour force and enhance employability, cooperation between education, academic and research institutions and employers (private and public bodies) should also be fostered. The CEI will pay particular attention to facilitating links between academia, business, government and community in line with the “Quadruple-Helix Model. Enhancing entrepreneurial literacy through education and training for the vulnerable groups will also be promoted. In particular, the activities will aim at promoting the dissemination of the concept and contemporary methodologies in the field of lifelong learning, including vocational training and adult education and training for innovation, economic growth and job creation. Furthermore, development of instruments / mechanisms to monitor the employment of graduates after graduation is also necessary.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIONS:

- Promote collaboration among education, employment and industry stakeholders in order to improve work-based learning experience;
- Organise training activities on skills and competences needed for the 21st century job market, with a special focus on enhancing entrepreneurial and innovation-oriented mind-sets and skills for all;
- Promote the inclusion of ICT in all learning systems;
- Promote actions to facilitate the transfer of scientific knowledge to the civil society.