



Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central European Initiative

By CEI Secretary General Roberto Antonione

It is a great pleasure to meet you in Trieste, a city with a true Central European dimension, the right geographical context and a rich historical, cultural and ethnic background: the ideal setting for the CEI's headquarters.

I wish to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to the President of the Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, Massimiliano Fedriga, not only for hosting us here in this beautiful venue, but especially, for the huge support the Region has always given us since the very beginning, also by providing our Seat here in Trieste, as well as the CEI Representation Office in Brussels.

Dear Ministers,

Taking stock of our 30 years, we can proudly say: the CEI is a success story!

Together we have managed to adapt to major historical changes in Europe and devise tools to support our mission. During these years, we have created a unique composition for political dialogue, where Prime Ministers and Ministers of Foreign Affairs, only to mention the most relevant, have a platform to discuss topical issues.

On the ground, our tangible results (let me say impressive results), can be understood by providing you with some aggregate figures, resulting from our instruments:

- The Cooperation Fund, with about 10 million Euro, supported more than 1100 events, involving around 5000 people a year.
- The CEI Fund at the EBRD, invested almost 47 million Euro and mobilized a total of 6 billion Euro of international contributions (200 Euro for every Euro invested).
- Furthermore, our EU projects have mobilized around 24 million Euro.

We have to thank our founding Fathers for their enlightened vision, that has allowed us to reach these achievements. In this regard, I am confident I am expressing a shared feeling by thanking Italy for its valuable support since the CEI'S establishment. At the same time, I would like to sincerely thank all our Member States who, with their efforts, have helped us to improve and become the most experienced and largest Regional Organization in Europe. But now let's look ahead!

We have to face new challenges. Thanks to the Italian Presidency and to the strong commitment of Minister Moavero Milanesi, we can say we have started the best possible way and are on the right track.

Allow me, dear Chairman, to add my personal thanks, not only for what you have done and are doing, but especially for your strong encouragement to explore future avenues.

We have followed your suggestions, by starting to analyze how to better tackle the challenges and achieve our goals.

We consider, the brainstorming promoted by Italy on these issues, in London, a few months ago, a good step in this direction.

From our part, to better understand and meet the needs and requests of our Member States, and to be able to improve our performance, we decided to organize a mission in every Country.

So far, we have visited 14 countries and had very fruitful talks with many of you. I wish to thank all of you for your personal commitment in supporting our organization and for giving us many useful inputs.

The strategic vision and the main suggestions we have collected during this process, including the extraordinary inputs from our last Parliamentary meeting, are an essential part of the Trieste Declaration you are going to adopt later on. In this context, let me thank Marco Maggioni, President of the Italian Parliamentary Delegation, not only for being here today, but also for his engagement.

I consider this Declaration a vital and tangible contribution towards our future development.

From a political point of view:

we have a strong commitment from all our Countries, members of the EU, to support the European aspirations of our WB Countries. In this regard, to my mind, we have to continue to improve our job on the ground. Several times during my missions I heard: There is never too much regional cooperation! At the same time, we should explore the possibility to focus our attention on the EU MS, where we observe the so called Enlargement fatigue.

I strongly believe that nowadays, working to improve the aquis comunitaire of our Countries, aspiring to become members of the EU, is crucial but, unfortunately, not enough. It must be said: it is hard to imagine any

future EU enlargement soon without the support of the public opinion of all EU Member States. I am confident the CEI could play an important role in this regard.

Moreover:

we have a shared view to cooperate for strengthening relations between the EU and our Eastern Partnership countries, having in mind they are a special added value of our Organization.

We also recognize the importance to enhance cooperation with the other Regional Organizations, and their presence here today, proves our mutual interest.

In this respect, a concrete step is the agreement signed with the Adriatic Ionian Initiative, last month in Budva. Let me thank, once again, Minister Darmanovic, President in charge and Ambassador Castellaneta, SG of the Adriatic Ionian Initiative, for their commitment.

From a tangible point of view:

Recommendations to elaborate a proposal for creating a new Dimension focused on the involvement of local Authorities in cross border cooperation could provide a new impetus to our activities through a bottom up approach, considering they are the closest Institutions to our citizens;

Suggestions to develop a Youth Agenda able to take into account the needs of our young generations: our future driving force!

All the afore-mentioned, and much more, is included in the Trieste Declaration, that I consider an important success of the Italian Presidency.

For this reason, I am sure: if we can be proud, and we are proud, of the past 30 years, we can also look to the future with the optimism and the enthusiasm of the people who feel a strong will to transform challenges into opportunities!

Last, but not least, I would like to thank all the people who help us daily and, without whom, we would not be able to meet our challenges: the CEI staff. On my side: Antal Nikoletti, Alternate SG, from Hungary, Nina Kodelja, Deputy SG from Slovenia and Zoran Jovanovich, Deputy SG from Serbia. Thank so much for your fundamental support and for your kind friendship.