



Extraordinary Virtual Meeting of CEI Heads of Government 15 May 2020

Joint Statement on solidarity and cooperation of the CEI Member States in the face of the challenges posed by the novel coronavirus disease COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic represents an unprecedented challenge for Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and the whole world. It is a public health emergency, but it is also an economic, social and human crisis. To prevail against the pandemic we need to undertake urgent, decisive and comprehensive action at national, regional and global level.

We agree that the emergency measures must be strictly related to the ongoing health crisis, well-coordinated, proportionate, transparent and should always respect the fundamental rights of each and every individual. We are particularly concerned about the potential impact of the crisis on women, the elderly, youth, small and medium sized enterprises, the informal sector and other vulnerable groups and individuals, including the population in conflict-affected areas.

We underline the importance of independent media and the free exchange of accurate and reliable information. We are concerned, however, that false or manipulated information on the spread of COVID-19, can put people's lives at risk and we are determined to combat the proliferation of disinformation about the virus as well as hate speech.

The severe socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic call for unprecedented measures along with determination, unity and solidarity. We commit to focusing on improving socio-economic performance, business and investment friendliness so that our economies can recover faster by strengthening trade and unobstructed flow of goods, boosting connectivity, attracting more foreign investments and tourism.

We reiterate that cooperation, confidence and solidarity are the most efficient responses to this pandemic. While underlining that respect for international law remains our guiding principle, we are determined to respond decisively, in an innovative way and together, especially through strong partnerships, so as to address the socio-economic challenges that COVID-19 is posing in our region.

We appreciate and encourage the efforts of the Central European Initiative (CEI) and other regional and international organisations as they provide a coherent and coordinated response to the wider implications of the different dimensions of the crisis.

We support the World Health Organization (WHO) in leading the global public health response to the pandemic, while we emphasise the importance of measures at national level. We welcome the technical proposal of the CEI-Executive Secretariat and the WHO Regional Office for Europe to tackle the health aspect of the crisis, through a dedicated Task Force.

We welcome the mobilisation and reallocation of more than EUR 7 billion through various EU instruments in support of the Western Balkans and the Eastern partner countries to address the immediate health and humanitarian needs as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, as well as to help limit the economic fallout of the pandemic.

We also welcome the EBRD's response and recovery measures to help our countries counter the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

While strongly supporting the implementation of the previously established priorities, we agree that the fight against COVID-19 and its socio-economic consequences should remain high on the Agenda of the CEI, the Montenegrin CEI Presidency, as well as of all Member States.