



**Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs
of the Member States of the Central European Initiative**
24 September 2020

Communiqué

The annual Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI) was held via videoconference on 24 September 2020, under the Montenegrin CEI Presidency and in cooperation with the CEI-Executive Secretariat (CEI-ES).

The Meeting under the topic *CEI Region – Transition to a New Normal* was chaired by H.E. Mr. Srđan Darmanović, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro, and was attended by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs, State Secretaries as well as high representatives of all CEI Member States. The Meeting was also attended by several Special Guests of the Presidency.

The Ministers reiterated CEI's valuable role in fostering constructive political dialogue and project-oriented cooperation among 17 Member States, supporting European integration and sustainable development of the region.

They commended CEI's continuous commitment in contributing to the political stability and economic progress of the region and strengthening mutual cooperation and dialogue, by carrying out concrete actions and implementing tangible projects and programmes in strategic areas of regional interest.

The Ministers, in particular emphasized CEI's efforts in providing timely and efficient responses aiming to mitigate devastating health and socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Ministers emphasized the need to uphold democratic values and the norms of international law, and to combat disinformation. They agreed that respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights should serve as guiding principles in their actions against the pandemic.

The Ministers welcomed CEI's Extraordinary Call for Proposals launched to address the needs in the fields of education, healthcare and telemedicine and support to small and medium enterprises.

The Ministers commended the activities of Montenegrin CEI Presidency, in particular the organisation of the Extraordinary Virtual Meeting of CEI Heads of Government, held on 15 May 2020 and the adoption of the Joint Statement that recognizes and reaffirms cooperation, solidarity and trust as the most efficient responses to the pandemic.

They welcomed the growing collaboration and partnership between the CEI and the WHO/EURO aimed at strengthening the preparedness and response capacity of health and social care systems and overall health governance capacity, acknowledging the work of the joint CEI-WHO Task Force in response to COVID-19 emergency, which serves as a platform for sharing information, experiences and good practices among Member States.

They agreed that the establishment of similar CEI partnerships in other areas of common interest may be needed. These partnerships should take into account the strategic goals and objectives which are going to be highlighted in the CEI Plan of Action 2021-2023, to be adopted by the Heads of Government of the CEI Member States in December 2020.

The Ministers acknowledged that there is a need for a strong and innovative leadership to manage the crises such as COVID-19 on local, national and international level, including through empowering women leaders.

The Ministers agreed to consider strengthening the potential of the CEI Co-operation Fund in order to intensify CEI's capacity and activities to tackle common challenges and reach common objectives, also through the possibility of reviewing the current scale of annual contributions.

The Ministers committed to the importance of strong multilateral cooperation and coherence with all initiatives at a regional level in transition to a "new normal", using the recovery phase as an opportunity for a better future for our societies, empowering the CEI as an important forum of regional cooperation.

The Ministers expressed their best wishes to Montenegro for the continuation of the Presidency in 2021.