

Meeting of the Heads of Government (CEI Summit)

Budva, 3 December 2021

Joint Statement

The Heads of Government of the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI), assembled in Budva on 3 December 2021,

Reviewing the situation within the region in the light of the current circumstances linked to manifold political, social, economic and environmental aspects,

Acknowledging, in particular, the challenging period marked first and foremost by the COVID-19 pandemic, with enduring health and socio-economic consequences, including proliferation of disinformation,

Bearing in mind that under these circumstances, the CEI can have an important task to accomplish thanks to its adaptability and comparative advantage,

Reaffirming the importance of regional cooperation in this endeavour, and of their annual Summit in the spirit of solidarity and responsibility and for the goal of common purpose and cohesion,

Attaching, in this regard, particular significance to the exchange of experience and transfer of know-how among CEI Member States, in particular between its EU and non-EU Member States,

Reconfirming their commitment to the CEI mission: the political project of European integration and regional cooperation for the sustainable development of the CEI Member States, underlining common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and the importance of ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all,

Believing that, in the accomplishment of its mission, the CEI should continue to act through its well-established platform for political and inter-governmental dialogue, reinforced by parliamentary and economic dimensions, as well as by its multi-level and multistakeholder approach involving local actors and civil society and media,

Considering that a flexible project-oriented cooperation is adding value to the manner in which the CEI operates,

Reiterating the importance of strategic partnerships and enhanced cooperation with the EU, UN and other relevant stakeholders and of their joint commitments to effectively tackle challenges that transcend national borders, thus restoring the political vision of multilateralism, confidence, stability and sustainable economic growth,

Conclude the following:

European integration

- acknowledge the progress made by the CEI Member States from the Western Balkans so far and their commitment to continue the reform process, as well as express unequivocal support for the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans CEI Member States, welcoming the Brdo Declaration of 6 October 2021, that reiterates the common will to further pursue a credible prospect of the EU membership of

these countries and confirms the Economic and Investment Plan enhancing their market integration with the EU Single Market and the guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda aiming these countries' transition to modern, carbon-neutral, climate-resilient and resource-efficient economies;

- stress the importance for the Western Balkan CEI Member States to continue with determination and commitment the process of European accession, including their adherence to the European values, standards and principles and alignment with EU foreign policy positions, as well as to intensify the implementation of the necessary reforms through own merits and through regional cooperation and good-neighbourly relations, not only as a fulfilment of the EU accession process requirements, but above all, for the prosperous future of their societies and citizens;
- believe that clear public messages and tangible progress from all actors on the vital contribution of the enlargement to the peace, stability, security and prosperity of Europe, are of strategic interest to the EU and the Western Balkan CEI Member States with positive effects for both sides, and stress the role that CEI could have in this regard;
- highlight the importance of strengthening and further developing cooperation between the EU and the Eastern European CEI Member States;
- recognize and highlight the efforts and reform path of those Eastern European CEI Member States which see integration with the EU as their strategic goal, and reiterate the importance of their commitment to further pursue with the full implementation of the Association Agreements/DCFTA with the EU and related reforms.

Sustainable development

- agree to explore opportunities to present joint CEI views on current relevant regional and international issues, in order to further consolidate the position of the CEI on the regional, international and global arena, also taking into account the CEI Observer Status in the United Nations General Assembly;
- believe that the sustainable development of all CEI Member States can only be achieved through joint commitments, regional partnerships under the global multi-stakeholder partnerships, shared responsibilities and collective efforts for making tangible contribution to the UN Agenda 2030, and its SDGs, which provide the right roadmap to overcome the current and future crises;
- encourage further stock-taking activities related to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda in the CEI Member States, such as the recent conference organised by the CEI-Executive Secretariat, in the framework of the SDGs Decade of Action, and exchange experience and best practices for mutual learning and tackling challenges;
- stress the opportunity to intensify the CEI's activities targeting the challenges to security, climate change, disinformation, inequality and other issues jeopardizing the sustainable development as well as activities promoting education, human rights, economic development, good health and well-being and connectivity;
- highlight the importance of strategic cooperation and joint investments in infrastructural projects for sustainable development, notably the development of transport and energy networks, and agree on the opportunity to reinforce the CEI project dimension in this regard, believing that the EBRD could be pivotal in this endeavour.

COVID-19 response

- take note of the growing collaboration and partnership between the CEI and the WHO/Europe, facilitated by the CEI-Executive Secretariat, starting a new, wider and long-term collaboration on health and preparedness, and welcome the Joint Statement of Action regarding the Roadmap for Health and Well-being in the Western Balkans (2021-2025);

- appreciate the activities in the economic field related to the post-COVID recovery, organised by the CEI-Executive Secretariat, including through cooperation with relevant international economic players and positive outcomes of the Economic Forum organised in the framework of the Montenegrin Presidency;
- share the view that the exchange of experience through dialogue and focus on a more dynamic cooperation between EU and non-EU CEI Member States, with the aim to strengthen a coherent framework for assistance, thus creating a significant potential for focused intellectual exchange and know-how transfer, is now needed more than ever in order to curb the multiple negative effects of the crisis, including resilience building as well as strengthening preparedness for dealing with future crises, and welcome EU's health and economic support to the non-EU CEI Member States as well as these countries' successful cooperation with each other throughout the pandemic.

CEI agenda

- reiterate the strong interest to promote CEI activities, adapted in accordance with the Plan of Action, with due regard to the political, social, economic and environmental realities in the region;
- take note of the first year of implementation of the CEI Plan of Action 2021-2023, underlining that the focus areas aimed at fostering sustainable economies, innovative approaches, climate awareness and overall connectivity by stimulating green growth as well as at reducing inequalities, accelerating progress, promoting social inclusion and accountable institutions thus building just societies, should be further pursued, while also aligning with trends such as technological advancements, green investments, international scientific cooperation, digitalization;
- believe that forging strong partnerships and intensifying cooperation around these issues among governments, parliaments, businesses, local actors, civil society, as well as with relevant organisations sharing same principles and goals, could optimize the benefits for the region, strengthen good-neighbourly relations, build trust and foster positive synergies among the stakeholders;
- acknowledge that youth and their perspective is a common denominator for the future of societies in the entire CEI region and, therefore: praise the CEI-Executive Secretariat for the development of "CEI Agenda for Youth", in cooperation with the Montenegrin CEI Presidency, in particular through the development of tailor-made activities such as encouraging active young citizens, commend the voluntary resources provided by the Italian Republic to this activity and welcome further cooperation with the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative in this endeavour, including in the framework of the Albanian AII Presidency;
- agree to engage in further strengthening the CEI's project dimension, as a common understanding is fostered through joint project cooperation, and reiterate the need to consider to improve, gradually, the financial contributions to the CEI activities and projects.

- thank the Montenegrin CEI Presidency for its two-year engagement and CEI guidance as well as for organising numerous events and activities in the fields of economy, environment, transport, science diplomacy, parliamentary cooperation and local dimension;
- commend the active role of the CEI-Executive Secretariat in developing new initiatives and ideas for fostering regional cooperation and providing fresh thinking;
- extend best wishes to the Republic of Bulgaria for a successful CEI Presidency in 2022 and look forward to a continued cooperation under this new chairmanship.