



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

Sofia, 7 November 2022

Joint Statement

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI) gathered in Sofia on 7 November 2022 under the topic "A united CEI region in support of Ukraine and addressing the wider ramifications of the war",

Expressing the commitment of their countries to the strategic goals embedded in CEI's mission,

Highlighting the importance of a political vision for peace, confidence, stability and security, through effective multilateralism and political dialogue, including through enhanced regional cooperation,

Underlining CEI's valuable role in fostering constructive regional cooperation among its Member States in support of its mission, noting that this role has become even more important in view of the pressing international challenges,

Reaffirming their commitment to the objective of a peaceful, strong, stable and united Europe, sharing the same values,

Reiterating the need to join efforts to foster respect for the principles of international law, including the guiding principles of the OSCE, notably the territorial integrity,

Condemning the ongoing armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine – a valued member of the CEI,

Expressing our solidarity with Ukraine and its people and *reiterating* our support to the country's sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders, including territorial waters,

Condemning the continued support provided by the Republic of Belarus to the aggression against Ukraine, which led to our decision on the suspension of the country from its rights of representation in the CEI,

Stressing that the Russian aggression against Ukraine represents a flagrant breach of international law and a critical threat to overall security, including the values of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, shared by all CEI Members,

Commending the contribution of the CEI to helping alleviate the dramatic consequences of the war in Ukraine through providing strong political support and assistance to the country and its citizens,

Acknowledging the wider ramifications of the war, which bring about grim geopolitical scenarios, economic uncertainty and hardships, disrupted supply routes, spikes in energy prices, growing uncertainty over energy supplies and increased security threats, including the risk of nuclear escalation; and *noting* with concern the massive pressure, posed by disinformation and false propaganda campaigns,

Underlining that continuing with a vigorous promotion of EU integration and sustainable development, also in the framework of the CEI, is the right response to the current situation, ultimately contributing to the consolidation of the rules-based multilateral order:

1. Condemn the organisation of the illegal so-called referendums held in Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions of Ukraine part of which are or have been under the temporary military control of the Russian Federation, in violation of the UN Charter and international law, and stress that these illegal actions have no validity under international law and do not constitute a basis for any alteration of the status of these territories of Ukraine;
2. Emphasise that the continuing use of force by the Russian Federation against Ukrainian civilian population and infrastructure, including residential buildings, energy, heat and water supply facilities, cause immense suffering of the civilian population and go against international humanitarian law;
3. Condemn the attacks by the Russian Federation against Ukraine's energy infrastructure and practices of using energy supplies to influence political and economic situation in Europe;
4. Underline that it is extremely important for the international community to stay united against the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine;
5. Reiterate Ukraine's inherent right of individual or collective self-defence in accordance with the UN Charter Article 51 and join the call for an immediate, as well as complete and unconditional withdraw by the Russian Federation and all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders, and for the Republic of Belarus to stop allowing its territory to be used by the Russian Federation for attacking Ukraine;
6. Highlight the need to strengthen CEI joint response to the aggression against Ukraine and its numerous grave consequences;
7. Welcome the intention to organise a ministerial Troika visit to Kyiv in order to discuss further support to Ukraine through the development, within the CEI framework, of forward-looking initiatives for restoration and assistance to Ukraine;
8. Agree on the need to coordinate the response of the Governments of the CEI Member States in addressing the unprecedented challenges linked to the ramifications of the war at regional level;
9. Highlight the vital contribution of the EU integration process to the peace, stability, security and prosperity in Europe and expressed support for the process of EU enlargement;
10. Note with satisfaction that all CEI Member States are now part of this strategic objective, enabling the CEI to pursue a much more ambitious European integration agenda;
11. Welcome the status of EU Candidate country to the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, expressing readiness to assist them in their path towards accession, based on own merits, including with the help of CEI's regional cooperation instruments;
12. Agree that the EU accession process of the CEI Member States from the Western Balkans must proceed further, based on own merits, confident that achieving EU membership is in the best interest not only of the countries concerned, but also of the EU itself;
13. Acknowledge the progress made so far, welcoming, in particular, the holding of Intergovernmental Conferences on the Accession with the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, while calling on the EU to grant Bosnia and Herzegovina the status of EU Candidate country, without further delay;
14. Encourage the CEI Member States in the process of their EU integration to demonstrate with determination and commitment their adherence to the European values, standards and principles;
15. Highlight the importance of further promotion of the links between sustainable development and stability and security;

16. Call for intensifying the activities, also in the framework of the CEI, focused on challenges such as climate change, disinformation, fake news and propaganda, growing inequalities and other issues that jeopardize the sustainable development - a process which should go in parallel with promoting better education and scientific cooperation, human rights, economic recovery, connectivity, good health and well-being and enhancing resilience through risk prevention;
17. Reaffirm the importance of the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, as the appropriate roadmap for pursuing these ambitions;
18. Welcome the further consolidation of 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 (UNGA) through joint commitments under the global multi-stakeholder partnership;
19. Express support to the adoption of a UN Resolution on the Cooperation between the United Nations and the Central European Initiative during the 77th session of UNGA;
20. Acknowledge that building upon and relying on regional partnerships and joint commitments was necessary to effectively tackle challenges that transcend national borders;
21. Welcome the growing cooperation with the WHO/Europe, established in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and continued on a series of topical health issues;
22. Call for pursuing similar cooperation initiatives with important international and regional players in other domains with a view of amplifying the impact of the respective activities;
23. Express our appreciation for the Bulgarian CEI Presidency throughout a particularly challenging period;
24. Welcome the Presidency's activities aimed at strengthening regional cooperation in areas, such as economic recovery, enhanced connectivity, young people and health;
25. Welcome also the Presidency's initiatives promoting CEI's local dimension, including through establishing synergies with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
26. Take note of the Joint Statement of the CEI Parliamentary Committee on developing talent, accelerating technological advancement and sustainability and prioritising investment in research and innovation;
27. Express satisfaction with the proactive approach of the CEI-Executive Secretariat, aimed at jointly tackling the current challenges through its own initiatives, as well as CEI's funds, programmes and instruments;
28. Encourage the CEI-Executive Secretariat to continue along this way by proposing solutions, developing activities and projects and promoting partnerships, in line with the strategic guidance of the CEI Plan of Action 2021-2023;
29. Confirm our confidence that the strengthened CEI Co-operation Fund will be instrumental to fostering regional cooperation in response to the pressing needs and for the benefit of the CEI membership;
30. Call for setting up a special line of action for Ukraine, through launching a specific Call for Ukraine with a share of the Fund;
31. Support the CEI's multistakeholder approach fostered within its dimensions – Governmental, Parliamentary and Economic - as well as within the developing Local Dimension. Moreover, encouraging further intensification of activities targeting youth;
32. Pledge our full cooperation and support to the Republic of Moldova for the CEI Presidency from 1 January to 31 December 2023;

33. Thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, in cooperation with the CEI-Executive Secretariat, for the excellent organisation of the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the CEI in Sofia.