

Annual Report of the Secretary General 2022



CENTRAL EUROPEAN INITIATIVE

The Central European Initiative (CEI) is a regional intergovernmental forum established in 1989, gathering 17 Member States in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*.

It supports a united Europe with shared values embracing all countries, regions, peoples and citizens; and fosters the strengthening of capacities of its Member States towards good governance, rule of law and sustainable economic development for stability, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, security and prosperity.

One central mission: working towards European integration and sustainable development through regional cooperation.

**According to the CEI Guidelines and Rules of Procedure the CEI Member States are: Republic of Albania, Republic of Belarus (suspended in March 2022), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of Bulgaria, Republic of Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italian Republic, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Poland, Romania, Republic of Serbia, Slovak Republic, Republic of Slovenia and Ukraine.*

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MAIN ACRONYMS

All – Adriatic and Ionian Initiative
ALDA – European Association for Local Democracy
ARFVG – Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia
BSEC – Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation
BSEC PERMIS – BSEC Permanent International Secretariat
CEI – Central European Initiative
CEI-ES – Central European Initiative - Executive Secretariat
CEMAN – Central European Music Academies Network
EBRD – European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EC – European Commission
EU – European Union
ICRC – International Committee of the Red Cross
ICTP – International Center for Theoretical Physics
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OGS – Istituto Nazionale di Oceanografia e di Geofisica Sperimentale
OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RAI – Regional Anticorruption Initiative
RCC – Regional Cooperation Council
REMPEC – Regional Marine Pollution Emergency Response Centre for the Mediterranean Sea
SDG(s) – Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SEEHN – South-Eastern Europe Health Network
SEEMO – South East Europe Media Organisation
SMEs – Small and Medium Enterprises
TEN-T – Trans-European Transport Network
UfM – Union for the Mediterranean
UN – United Nations
UNDP – United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNGA – United Nations General Assembly
UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WHO – World Health Organization
WHO/Europe – WHO Regional Office for Europe

MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL



2022 was marked by the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, one of the CEI Member States. Leading the CEI-ES was extremely challenging due to the ripple effects the aggression caused on the entire CEI region. Besides the immense loss of lives and the economic and humanitarian crises it provoked, various sectors such as the energy and food industry or healthcare were exposed to severe disruptions.

The CEI, led by the Bulgarian Presidency, promptly intervened to support Ukraine. With the country being under direct military aggression and the rest of the members being geographically situated in the vicinity of the war, the CEI quickly acted in pursuing coordinated initiatives to address the unprecedented challenges (economic hardships, uncertainty of energy supplies, spikes in energy prices and rising inflation, coupled with increased security risks), thus showing remarkable unity and resilience to crises, as well as capacity to swiftly put forward solutions, by building upon solidarity and cooperation.

Indeed, the CEI's reaction was expressed by condemning the Russian aggression against Ukraine through political statements and by suspending the Republic of Belarus from its rights of representation because of its actions in support of the aggression. Moreover, concrete assistance was

provided to Ukraine and its people.

Acting on the issues linked to the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as pursuing topical matters of the CEI Plan of Action (PoA) 2021-2023 such as political dialogue, regional integration and innovation, the CEI's mission was more important than ever, and was, thus, vigorously promoted by the Governmental Dimension. In particular, since during 2022 all CEI Member States became either EU Members or EU candidates, the Organisation tried to step up its role in the European Integration process. The know-how helping EU and non-EU countries to cooperate and share experiences, represents an added value in this framework.

The discussions of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in New York in September and in Sofia in November, paved the way to new initiatives to provide further support to Ukraine and to continue to vigorously pursue the European integration process as a key priority of the Organisation, and an integral part of CEI's mission. The Ministers jointly stated that the European integration was more than ever the response needed to face the current challenges.

Furthermore, the CEI worked effectively to meet the green growth and just society goals embedded within the PoA, by promoting and supporting activities which aimed at enhancing climate awareness, transport connectivity and sustainable economies as well as reducing inequalities in the region. With the promotion and support of such activities, the CEI also contributed to the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 and the related SDGs.

The CEI-ES took part in the high-level discussions during the UNGA week in New York. I am proud of the results obtained in the dialogue between the CEI and the UN. In this regard, the adoption of the Resolution on "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Central European Initiative" by the General Assembly in November was a remarkable outcome. The document acknowledges that the CEI upholds the values of the UN and the important role the CEI plays at intergovernmental, parliamentary, economic and local levels, in strengthening multilateralism, promoting solidarity, building a united, cohesive, secure and stable Europe. It also highlights the help provided to Ukraine.

As to health, the collaboration with the WHO/Europe continued vigorously. A joint CEI-WHO event in the framework of the Bulgarian Presidency was organised in Trieste, back-to-back with an event on “Scaling-up Strategies for Primary Health Care”. The latter was held in the framework of the implementation of the “Roadmap for Health and Wellbeing in the Western Balkans (2021-2025)” and witnessed the participation of 50 delegates representing the Ministries of Health and National Health Institutes from the Western Balkans.

Cooperation in the framework of the Parliamentary Dimension was fostered through two main events: a Parliamentary Committee in Sofia in May, which focused on enhancing cross-border research and innovation; and a General Committee on Cultural Affairs in Krakow in September, which debated the UNESCO World Heritage Sites’ protection and administration. During the General Committee, participants outlined the support to the Ukrainian people affected by the Russian aggression especially referring to the shared values of peace and freedom, and protesting the severe damages to the Ukrainian cultural heritage sites.

The Economic Dimension also focused on keeping the pace with the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 pandemic. A CEI Economic Forum was organised by the Bulgarian Presidency in the margins of the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Sofia. The topic was “The Challenge the CEI SMEs are Facing and the Economic Recovery of the Region”.

The Local Dimension focused on the CEI Local Authorities Congress, held in Sofia in June, where a fruitful collaboration with the Council of Europe was established with some follow-up activities, including meeting of the Permanent Representatives to the Council of Europe of the CEI countries and the members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in October. In this context, they explored the possibilities to establish synergies and future cooperation between the work of the CEI Local Dimension and the Congress of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the increased focus on the development of the Local Dimension, brought about the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with ALDA in Trieste in March.

As to the EC, at practical level, contacts continued in the framework of the CEI EU-funded projects. Moreover, the CEI followed closely the implementation of the EU Macro-Regional Strategies and actively participated in a number of events in the context of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region.

Special attention was indeed paid to cooperation with other regional organisations, through various contacts and joint actions. Establishing common actions and joint events with these organisations was at the centre of attention. A joint event on connectivity with the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, the Bulgarian Presidency and the CEI-ES was organised in Brussels in December. Cooperation with SEEHN was stepped up. Last but not least, a Memorandum of Understanding with RAI was signed in Trieste in December.

Finally, the CEI-ES also participated in a coordination meeting of the Secretariats of the regional organisations in Istanbul in December, organised by BSEC. Cooperation with All, continued in the framework of the Call “IMAGINE” Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and All Areas.

In 2022, the CEI pursued the project cooperation to the broadest possible level through its usual funds and instruments for cooperation. On the whole, we managed to organise, implement and support numerous projects and activities.

Below I am mentioning only some of the results:

- CEI Cooperation Fund: in 2022, 45 Cooperation Activities tackling the objectives of the PoA 2021-2023, approved within the relevant Call for Proposals 2021, were implemented (out of which 25 were approved in May). Furthermore, the Call 2022 for the activities to be implemented in 2023 was launched in November.
- “IMAGINE” Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and All Areas: the winners of the competition were the Bulgarian “Goethe” German High School with its project idea “Active Young Citizens for Gender Equality in Bulgaria”, followed by “Aurel Vlaicu” Theoretical High School from Romania for its project idea “Become the best version of yourself, be non-formal!” and by Public Institution Technical School Center Zvornik in Bosnia and Herzegovina for the project idea “Educating young people on damage of environmental

pollution and ways to improve it, their impact on climate changes, an exhibition of sculptures made of recycled material". The three winning schools will respectively use their prize to take their students to the UN Headquarters in New York; to the UN Headquarters in Geneva; and to improve the school lighting system.

- CEI Prizes and Awards: the Serbian director Milica Tomović received the CEI Award at Trieste Film Festival, Oleg Vereshchagin from Ukraine won the CEI Award at the International Design Contest "Trieste Contemporanea", Croatian Luiza-Katica Bouharaoua won the CEI Award for Young Writers, and the Ukrainian Anna Babinets won the CEI SEEMO Award, during the South East Europe Media Forum in Sarajevo, for her long-lasting experience and commitment in investigative reporting as well as for her current engagement in providing evidence of war crimes against Ukrainian civilians.
- Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP): financed out of the CEI Fund at the EBRD funded by Italy, through this Programme the CEI provides support to bilateral/multilateral projects involving EU and non-EU CEI Member States and focusing on the transfer of know-how, exchange of best practices and capacity building activities, such as trainings, study visits, etc. Indeed, this Programme, has proven to be an effective and stimulating mechanism for promoting European integration through cooperation in many CEI areas of activity. In 2022, 8 KEP projects for a total commitment amounting to around 300,000 EUR were approved bringing together know-how providers and beneficiaries from the CEI region and covering a broad range of areas pertaining to institutional capacity building concerning the EU Cohesion Policy, migration, corruption, seismic hazard, regulatory frameworks related to in water, forest and food sector. Moreover, 8 KEP Projects were concluded in 2022.
- Technical Cooperation (TC) Programme: financed out of the CEI Fund at the EBRD, entirely funded by Italy, through this Programme the CEI offers grant-type assistance in support of specific components of investments and operations of the EBRD. TC operations include support for feasibility and pre-feasibility studies, sector and environmental engineering, management training, capacity building, pre-loan audits. In 2022, the CEI Fund at the EBRD provided financing for 8 TC projects for a total commitment amounting to over 3.1 million EUR, a record year in terms of commitments. In addition, 8 TC Projects were concluded.
- EU-funded Projects: the CEI, through its Executive Secretariat, makes use of EU funding programmes as a valuable tool for the attainment of the strategic objectives - the promotion of regional cooperation for European integration and sustainable development - as well as for the implementation of its tri-annual Plan of Action. In 2022, 14 EU-funded projects were implemented in the following sectors: connectivity, sustainable mobility, judicial cooperation, innovation, social innovation, health, circular bioeconomy, energy and environmental protection.

Last but not least, I wish to thank all my Executive Level collaborators at the Secretariat for their support and cooperation; the whole CEI-ES staff; the High Representatives of the CEI Member States; the CEI National Coordinators and all other CEI partners for their day-to-day contribution, thus enabling us to operate smoothly.

I want to express my gratitude towards the Bulgarian Presidency for its efforts to pursue the CEI's mission in this extremely challenging year.

To conclude, I wish the Moldovan CEI Presidency 2023 a lot of success.

CEI ACTIVITIES

Immediate condemnation by Secretary General of aggression by Russian Federation against Ukraine

On the first day of the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, 24 February, the Secretary General issued a statement to condemn it, expressing the CEI's solidarity with Ukraine and its people and support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

CEI-ES stands with Ukraine!

On 1 March, the CEI-ES, took note with great regret of the fact that the Russian aggression against Ukraine had severely hampered the CEI's mission, in particular with regard to promoting good-neighbourly relations and multifaceted cooperation between its Member States, which were safeguarding peace, ensuring stability and pursuing prosperity in the region. The Secretariat highlighted that the use of effective political dialogue and good multilateral diplomacy, coupled with a common sense, must be pursued, in order to arrive at an urgent cease of military activities, thus urgently stopping the bloodshed and loss of lives as well as helping the return to a constructive environment in which countries could jointly address the many challenges. The Secretariat – standing with Ukraine - also announced that CEI measures to support the country were under preparation, thus demonstrating the gains of regional cooperation and solidarity.

Humanitarian contribution through ICRC

On 25 March, in response to the extremely dire and worrying humanitarian emergency in Ukraine, the CEI decided to provide support to the people affected by the conflict in Ukraine. In this regard, a humanitarian contribution of 80,000 EUR was made to the ICRC from the reserves of the CEI Cooperation Fund, to which all Member States contribute, and from the budget of the CEI-ES.

Support to creation of Ukrainian Educational Hub in Poland

Supporting the integration into the local community of the Ukrainian refugees who had to move to Poland due to the war, is the mission of the Ukrainian Educational Hub opened in Warsaw on 25 July. The CEI contributed to the Educational Hub with 15,000 EUR, through its CEI Cooperation Fund. Part of the overall project "Creation of a network of Ukrainian Educational Hubs" promoted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, the Institute for the Modernization of the Content of Education and the Association of Innovative and Digital Education, this Hub assists students in maintaining continuity with their education in line with the Ukrainian system and offers various training opportunities to young people and adults in areas such as languages (Ukrainian, Polish, English), soft skills, information technology and career guidance. The Hub also serves as a communication platform, integrating Ukrainians into the Polish education institutions, offering psychological aid to war-affected people as well.





FOR UKRAINE

Suspension of Republic of Belarus from its rights of representation within CEI

On the basis of a proposal presented by the Bulgarian CEI Presidency, in cooperation with the CEI-ES, the CEI decided to suspend the Republic of Belarus of its rights of representation on 25 March, as a consequence of the country's actions in support of the aggression against Ukraine. These represented violation of the obligations under Article 2 of the CEI Guidelines and Rules of Procedure, the principles of the UN Charter, of the Helsinki process/OSCE and the joint commitment of the Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers of the CEI, thus of the mission of the Organisation.

Joint Statement by CEI Member States condemning Russian aggression against Ukraine

On 7 April, all CEI Member States strongly condemned the unjustifiable military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as a flagrant breach of international law. The CEI reconfirmed that it stood with Ukraine and its people and fully supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. At the same time, the CEI expressed solidarity with the people of Ukraine through a donation to the ICRC, aimed at urgently delivering humanitarian support to the most affected population. Ukraine was also exempted from the obligation of paying its annual contribution (19,800 EUR) to the CEI Cooperation Fund for 2022.

Support to the set-up of a mobile emergency service

In July, in the context of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, CEI support was provided for a mobile emergency service and medical equipment in Mikołajów to deliver emergency treatment and primary care to adults and children affected by the conflict. The action was recommended by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the WHO in the Humanitarian Response Plan, Terre des Hommes Italia, together with two partners: Polish Medical Mission and Red Cross Ukraine, supported by a formal request from the Governorate of Mikołajów. The CEI-ES contributed with 20,000 EUR from its budget.

Aid for basic necessities in Kharkiv, Sumy and Poltava in Ukraine

In July, thanks to funds for international cooperation amounting to 73,400 EUR made available by the Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region and administered by the CEI-ES, the AVSI Foundation contributed to alleviating the humanitarian emergency in Ukraine. In particular, in collaboration with the NGO EMMAUS based in Kharkiv, AVSI used the funds to purchase basic necessities and distributed them to at least 400 beneficiaries in the territories of Kharkiv, Sumy and Poltava.



PRESIDENCY

The Chairmanship of the CEI (CEI Presidency) rotates annually at the beginning of the calendar year and is based on the alphabetical order of the English names of the CEI Member States, unless decided otherwise. It convenes the meetings of the Heads of Government, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Committee of National Coordinators and other meetings of interest for the Organisation.

PRIORITIES AND PROGRAMME

Bulgaria took over the CEI rotating Presidency on 1 January 2022. In a particularly challenging year, marked by the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, Bulgaria demonstrated its responsiveness and abilities in tackling this issue with diplomatic skills and political clout. Moreover, the Bulgarian CEI Presidency continued to focus on the EU integration process, fostering regional cooperation especially between EU and non-EU CEI Member States, and on sustainable development.

Priorities

The Presidency's priorities were built on the common goals and objectives established by the Member States and the strategic documents of the Initiative, notably the CEI Plan of Action.

With the intention to achieve its priorities, Bulgaria relied on the well-established multilateral dialogue, the solid decision-making process and the proven instruments for cooperation of the Initiative to efficiently transform political goals into measurable results. In particular, within its activities, the Bulgarian Presidency worked thoroughly to consolidate the CEI's efforts to promote regional cooperation for European integration and in pursuit of the UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs - the two strategic objectives of the Organisation.

In this regard, the activities aimed at strengthening regional cooperation on topical issues such as economic and social recovery from the pandemic, which was approached from the perspective of sustainable development and economic stabilisation; health; enhanced connectivity to foster economic development; youth, in the framework of the CEI's Agenda for Youth, supporting the employability of young people and favouring the green and digital transition. Finally, the Presidency further promoted the CEI Local Dimension.

In the achievement of the priorities, the Presidency helped to strengthen the CEI's role as a reliable and peculiar intergovernmental forum.

In addition, Bulgaria worked on strengthening, maintaining and deepening cooperation with other international and regional organisations. In this context, events were organised in cooperation with the WHO/Europe, the Council of Europe and the Transport Community. Furthermore, the Presidency promoted the Resolution on the "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Central European Initiative", adopted by the UNGA in the framework of the biannual meeting among UN and Regional Organisations, in New York on 21 November.

Programme

Aiming at fostering regional cooperation and increasing the CEI's influence on political debates, the Bulgarian CEI Presidency worked to meet the priorities and face the demanding challenges through a number of traditional and new-initiated actions. This way, Bulgaria offered a constructive platform for exchanging views on strengthening the stability, security and competitiveness of the region, and dealing with challenges and exploring opportunities.

Overall, the Bulgarian CEI Presidency tackled pressing issues with an increased focus on activities that combine intensified political dialogue, project-oriented approach and cooperation with other international players. In this context, several high-level meetings, expert forums and other events were organised throughout the year.

Among the rich programme of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency, the activities and events implemented in 2022 are outlined in the Calendar of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency (Annex 1).



GOVERNMENTAL DIMENSION

Composed of Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers, National Coordinators, who provide an overall guidance to the Organisation, and other government representatives.

CNC MEETINGS

The CEI Committee of National Coordinators (CNC) met four times in 2022 (in Trieste on 23 February; 11 May; 14 December and in Sofia on 7 November). The CNC is the key body responsible for the definition, coordination, management and implementation of CEI cooperation as well as for the implementation of CEI programmes and projects through appropriate structures. It meets frequently in order to discuss and coordinate cooperation within the various bodies of the Organisation as well as in relation with other international and regional organisations. In 2022, the CNC meetings witnessed an active participation of the Member States in the deliberations. The Committee drafted and negotiated different documents for adoption from the high-level meetings and discussed the strengthening of relationships with international and regional stakeholders. A number of projects, ideas, and proposals were approved, then tackled by the Secretariat throughout the year.



MFA MEETING

The annual regular Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the CEI Member States (MFA Meeting) was held in Sofia on 7 November, under the topic "A united CEI region in support of Ukraine and addressing the wider ramifications of the war". The Ministers focused on the commitment of their countries to the strategic goals embedded in the CEI mission and highlighted the importance of a political vision for peace, confidence, stability, security, through effective multilateralism and political dialogue. The Ministers also took note of the valuable role of the CEI in fostering constructive regional cooperation among its Member States in support of its mission, which has become even more important in view of the pressing international challenges. Furthermore, the Ministers firmly condemned the aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the continued support provided by the Republic of Belarus to the aggression. The Ministers also highlighted the importance of the EU integration process and of the CEI's role in supporting its non-EU countries in this endeavour. Moreover, the Ministers welcomed the further consolidation of the position of the CEI on the international and global arena, taking into account the CEI Observer Status in the UNGA. They expressed support to the adoption of a UN resolution on the "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Central European Initiative".



Informal Meeting of Foreign Ministers in New York

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the CEI Member States gathered in New York on 22 September for their traditional meeting at the margins of the 77th Session of the UNGA. The Ministers focused on how to further support Ukraine, energy and food security in the CEI region, and European integration. Furthermore, the Ministers discussed the consequences of the war in the countries of the region because of their geographical proximity, affirming that an eventual escalation could jeopardise the overall security and directly affect the lives of the citizens. European integration and effective multilateralism were mentioned as possible answers to these challenges, and in order to better meet them the Ministers decided to increase the funds for CEI activities through the CEI Cooperation Fund.



HIGH-LEVEL EXPERTS MEETINGS

CEI-WHO/Europe Joint Meeting “Strengthening Health Systems to Improve Preparedness and Quality of Care”

Building on the close cooperation in the area of health between the CEI and WHO/Europe, a joint CEI-WHO high-level expert meeting titled “Strengthening Health Systems to Improve Preparedness and Quality of Care” was held on 28 September, in the framework of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency. Representatives of the CEI Ministries of Health and National Health institutes gathered in Trieste to discuss the strengthening of health systems to improve preparedness and quality of care, with special focus on primary health care. The representatives of the CEI Member States exchanged views, best practices and had the opportunity to share experience on the primary health care models with focus, in particular, on mental health and youth. Although country policies and strategies were quite varied and diverse, there was a shared opinion that more innovative (and digital), as well as integrated models for primary health care, were needed; and that early education on sustainable development with health as one of its key elements, to be regarded as a blueprint for future healthy generations, would be useful.



High-Level Expert Meeting “Youth as a Pillar for Building Resilient and Peaceful Societies”

The Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Bulgaria, in the framework of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency, organised a High-level expert meeting on the topic “Youth as a Pillar for Building Resilient and Peaceful Societies” in Sofia on 11 October. Delegations composed of high-ranking experts from the ministries or agencies responsible for youth and representatives of the national youth council or international non-governmental youth organisations of the CEI Member States (the latter between ages 15 and 29) had the chance to exchange views and good practices on how to better involve youth as key players in peacebuilding, as well as motivate them to take concrete action at local level or across national borders. Discussions touched upon social inclusion with a view of making young people active participants in confronting the barriers that prevent various disadvantaged groups from fully participating in political, economic, and social life. To this end, the Forum brought about a list of proposed solutions which are collected in a final document.



Expert Panel “An Integrated Concept of Connectivity for the CEI Region”

The Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Transport of the Republic of Bulgaria, non-governmental organisations and transport companies, gathered in Brussels on 8 December to attend the event organised under the Bulgarian CEI Presidency in the framework of its priority on “Improving the connectivity of the CEI region”. During the discussions, participants had the chance to examine concrete actions and projects realised by the CEI-ES regarding transport facilitation and the improvement of maritime-hinterland connectivity in the Western Balkans and between the Western Balkans and the EU; moreover, participants discussed how connectivity acts as a tool to unlock the potential of interconnected production networks and supply chains; how it contributes to the better economic development of the region and provides opportunities to alleviate the difficulties caused by the disruption of transport corridors and trade relations due to the war against Ukraine; they supported the idea of adopting an integrated regional approach to connectivity and, under the incoming Moldovan CEI Presidency 2023, actions will continue in this direction.



PARLIAMENTARY DIMENSION

Representatives of national Parliaments cooperate and meet in framework of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Committee and the General Committees.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE MEETING

The representatives of the Parliaments of the CEI Member States met in Sofia on 16-17 May on the occasion of the meeting of the Parliamentary Committee of the CEI Parliamentary Dimension (PD) under the topic “Fostering cross-border research and innovation in the CEI region”. The Meeting was chaired by Denitsa Simeonova, Head of the Bulgarian Delegation to the CEI PD. After exchanging views on fostering cross-border research and innovation in the CEI region, the participants issued their Joint Statement. In summary, the Committee invited national parliaments and governments to create and implement policies aimed at developing talent and accelerating the countries’ technological advancement and sustainability, as well as invest in research and innovation. In particular, they suggested that a new event format could be established, i.e. a ‘CEI Innovates Summit’ bringing together leaders in the innovation ecosystem.



General Committee on Cultural Affairs

Although not directly under the auspices of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency, a meeting of the General Committee on Cultural Affairs was called and hosted by Tomasz Głogowski, Head of the Polish Parliamentary Delegation to the CEI in Krakow (Poland), on 26-27 September. It was attended by the Parliamentary Delegations from various CEI Member States. All interlocutors actively contributed to the theme of the event “The administration and protection of sites of the UNESCO World Heritage List in the CEI region” with presentations of their national situations as regards the management and preservation of cultural heritage. The Delegations highlighted best practices as well as requirements for improvements, especially in terms of technical assistance and professional training. It was largely emphasised that World Heritage sites belong to humanity, regardless of the territory on which they are located. In particular, a moving intervention was made by the Ukrainian representatives who reported about the numerous sites of Ukraine history and cultural identity damaged or destroyed due to the war. Solidarity was expressed by all participants.



ECONOMIC DIMENSION

Promotes an active participation of the business communities fostering inputs, open discussions and recommendations for cooperation.

ECONOMIC FORUM

Stakeholders, entrepreneurs, and strategic foreign investors met in Sofia on 7 November, on the occasion of the CEI Economic Forum focused on the topic “The Challenges the CEI SMEs are Facing and the Economic Recovery of the Region”. The event, held back-to-back with the MFA Meeting, aimed at creating new networks in tune with the CEI’s central mission fostering regional cooperation for European integration and sustainable development. It focused on topics such as talent as a source of competitive SMEs and economic development; access to strategic capital in the domain of future building blocks; future role of SMEs. In this setting, participants had the chance to share attractive and far-sighted ideas to be transformed into concrete outcomes. The Forum was complemented by a Special Panel entitled “Supporting Ukraine and addressing the wider economic consequences of the war in the CEI region” for the Foreign Ministers and special guests participating in the MFA Meeting. The panel gave participants the chance to directly address the business and talk about their deliberations during the Ministerial Meeting.



LOCAL DIMENSION

Supports cooperation between local and regional entities in CEI Member States and their actions in addressing local challenges.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES CONGRESS MEETING

The Congress Meeting of the CEI Local Dimension took place in Sofia on 8 June. It was organised by the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria, in cooperation with the CEI-ES. Representatives of associations of local and regional authorities from the CEI Member States, Mayors and local leaders, among which the Deputy Minister of Environment and Water, Nikolay Sidzhimovas, had the chance to exchange views and make their voices heard on the topic "CEI Local and Regional Authorities in the post crisis Europe - prospects for sustainable and resilient future". They focused, in particular, on "Challenges in the field of ecological transition and transition to clean energy in the region" outlining key priorities, lessons learned and challenges faced especially in these difficult times.



Informal meeting at the Council of Europe

The Bulgarian CEI Presidency, in cooperation with the CEI-ES, and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, organised in Strasbourg on 26 October an informal event in the context of the Local Dimension. The meeting was a follow up to the discussions held during the CEI Local Authorities Congress in Sofia on 8 June. It aimed at exploring possibilities to establish synergies and future cooperation between the work of the Local Dimension and the Congress of the Council of Europe.



STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Strengthening relations with the EU and its institutions, the UN and its specialised agencies - deploying in this context on its Observer Status in the UN General Assembly - as well as with other international and regional organisations is considered a part of the CEI's normal working practice.

UN RESOLUTION ON COOPERATION WITH THE CEI

On 21 November 2022 the UNGA, recalling its resolution 66/111 of 9 December 2011 by which it granted observer status to the CEI, adopted the Resolution on "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Central European Initiative" by a recorded vote of 102 countries in favour (including numerous countries such as USA, Canada, Australia, EU Member States outside the CEI region, and others), 5 against and 28 abstained. This was the first time a Resolution was put to vote (previous resolutions were consensus-based), since, among other issues, the document reflects the consequences of the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The document, also promotes cooperation with regional groups, acknowledges the CEI's upholding the same values as the United Nations as well as the important role the CEI plays at intergovernmental, parliamentary, economic and local levels, in strengthening multilateralism, promoting solidarity and building a united, cohesive, secure and stable Europe; and as a promoter of political dialogue and flexible and pragmatic platform for regional cooperation and sustainable development of its Member States, and good -neighbourly relations also through the implementation of tangible projects and programmes.





SECRETARIAT

The CEI-ES was established in Trieste in 1996. It operates with the legal status of an International Organisation, based on a Headquarters Agreement concluded between the Italian Government and the CEI Presidency. The CEI-ES provides administrative and conceptual support to the CEI structures. It also manages funds and instruments and takes appropriate initiatives aimed at promoting the realisation of the CEI's mission.

ROLE AND FUNCTIONS

The seat of the CEI-ES in Trieste (Italy), via Genova 9, was made available to the CEI by the Italian Government through the ARFVG, free of charge and ties, under terms described in a Protocol concluded between the Secretariat and the ARFVG, signed in Trieste on 20 December 1999.

Role

The overall guidance and orientation for CEI activities in general and for the Secretariat, in particular, is embodied in the long-term CEI strategy, which is reconfirmed both at political level and in the CEI Plan of Action. It reflects the priority interests for cooperation among its Member States, as envisaged by the CEI Guidelines and Rules of Procedure.

The main role of the CEI-ES is, thus, to provide administrative support and conceptual assistance to the CEI structures - the Presidency and other decision-making and operational structures and dimensions of the CEI by providing continuous day-to-day support - while also taking appropriate initiatives to promote the accomplishment of the CEI mission, i.e., - European integration and sustainable development.

Indeed, besides providing a permanent structure necessary for a systematic approach to widespread CEI activities, the CEI-ES also makes sure a multiplier effect of the supported activities and participated leadership is secured. Indeed, by bringing together actors from the Member States in its activities, the CEI acts as a multiplier of human and financial resources. It encourages people and institutions to take on more responsibility and come up with more innovative activities, including their financing (through the co-financing rate). It also implies a more effective use of human resources within the activities. This role of facilitator is crucial for a small structure as the CEI-ES, also in terms of its own limited human resources and financing.

Likewise, the CEI-ES is not only a mere administrator of funds, programmes and instruments for cooperation, i.e.: the CEI Cooperation Fund, supported by all Member States, the participation in EU-funded Projects and projects in cooperation with ARFVG, but it also actively encourages new ideas and innovative solutions.

Functions

Through this function, the CEI has developed an important aspect, i.e. programme and project management, and has gained an additional role in the transnational and cross-border context. This represents an added value, in particular for the design, implementation and management of large projects, such as EU-funded projects. To carry out this task, the CEI-ES has a special unit through which it actively participates in various EU programmes, both as Lead Partner and Partner - thus, enhancing the involvement of its countries in EU-funded projects. The staff of the unit for EU-funded projects is financed out of the budget of the projects funded through EU Programmes.

In 2022, the Secretariat was led by a Secretary General (SG), Mr. Roberto Antonione, and three Deputy Secretaries General (DSG/s): Ms. Nina Kodolja, and the newly appointed Ms. Ivana Holoubková and Ms. Zsuzsanna Király. They make up the Executive Level of the CEI-ES. The Secretariat is also composed of various staff members engaged in institutional and project activities in numerous fields and administration (Annex 2). The CEI Secretariat's staff was actively involved in the implementation of the CEI Plan of Action 2021-2023 and other activities promoted by the Bulgarian Presidency. The contributions to the CEI-ES stemming from various resources are outlined in Annex 3.

The Office of the CEI Fund at the EBRD manages the Technical Cooperation (TC) Programme and the Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP) financed by Italy.

INSTITUTIONAL ACTIVITIES

The CEI-ES is actively involved in organising official visits and bilateral meetings, also with other international and regional organisations. It also participates in CEI-sponsored or other international events.

OFFICIAL VISITS

Among the scopes aimed at promoting the realisation of the CEI's mission, the CEI-ES takes appropriate initiatives, including the organisation of official visits to the Member States, with the aim to promote the activities of the Organisation and the CEI-ES.

Visit to Sofia

On 14 February, a delegation of the CEI-ES, led by SG Roberto Antonione, visited Sofia for consultations on the priorities and programme of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency. Foreign Minister Teodora Genchovska confirmed her country's commitment to the CEI and the Presidency's devotion to build on the CEI's core goals. In this regard, she highlighted the priorities of the Presidency with connectivity, recovery and local development in the limelight, as well as youth both through a dedicated event and as a common denominator among the priorities. Finally, a meeting took place with the institutions involved in the activities throughout the year including presentations of the topics and organisational modalities. The CEI-ES, among other things, provided information on the upcoming steps regarding tangible cooperation and flow of information for a successful outcome of the Presidency.



Visit to Skopje

On 15 March, a delegation from the CEI-ES headed by SG Roberto Antonione met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia, Bujar Osmani, in Skopje. Discussions primarily focused on the importance of regional cooperation in the European integration process, especially in supporting the CEI Western Balkan countries on their path to the European Union. Eventually, the interlocutors had the opportunity to exchange views on the dramatic situation in Ukraine, in particular, regarding the consequences this conflict could have on the region and, more in general, on regional cooperation. They also underlined the importance of enhanced direct communication and cooperation between the Secretariat and the CEI Member States, including the collaboration with national institutions.



Visit to Sarajevo

On 18 March, a delegation from the CEI-ES headed by SG Roberto Antonione met with the Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hazima Ražanica. The fruitful exchange of ideas focused on a possible cooperation in initiatives featuring sustainable economy, interconnectivity and digitalisation. The CEI activities fostering European integration were presented by the SG. In particular, a distinctive feature of the CEI was recognised especially along these lines, namely EU CEI countries helping non-EU CEI Member States by sharing and transferring knowledge.

Visit to Zagreb

On 14 June, a delegation from the CEI-ES headed by SG Roberto Antonione paid a visit to Zagreb to meet with the Prime Minister (PM) of Croatia, Andrej Plenković and Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Gordan Grlić Radman. Enhanced cooperation to tackle the fast-changing environment, recognising the added value of regional cooperation, was at the centre of the discussions. In this regard, the situation in Ukraine was discussed. Both PM Plenković and Foreign Minister Grlić Radman underlined the role Croatia was playing. The interlocutors agreed that only joint efforts in finding solutions would be beneficial to the worrying situation, and that regional cooperative formats such as the CEI, could play an important role in these processes.



Visit to Chisinau

A delegation from the CEI-ES, led by SG Roberto Antonione, visited Chisinau on 28-29 November for consultations on the 2023 CEI Presidency under the Republic of Moldova. They were received by the State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, Vladimir Cuc, who confirmed his country's commitment to the CEI and its core goals, stating that it would do its utmost to perform a fruitful Presidency. The interlocutors agreed that current circumstances had put two main political priorities on the table, i.e. furthering European integration and coping with the consequences of the aggression against Ukraine. On this occasion, meetings were also held with the Minister of Education and Research, Anatolie Topală; the State Secretary at the Ministry of Health, Svetlana Nicolaescu; the President of the Parliament, Igor Gorsu, and the Minister of Economy, Dumitru Alaiba.



COOPERATION WITH UN

A CEI-ES delegation headed by SG Roberto Antonione participated in the UNGA High-level week place in New York from 19 to 26 September. Firstly, they took part in the Education Summit 2022 on 19 September, which focused on the world-wide crisis in education and its impacts. The importance of elevating education to the top of the global political agenda was pointed out, especially to seek solutions to recover from pandemic-related learning loss and to transform educational methods and adapt them to the rapidly changing world. Then, they participated in the general debate of the 77th Session of the UNGA, where inspiring statements were made and fruitful debates on the current geopolitical situation took place; global responsibility to current challenges was invoked.



COOPERATION WITH WHO/Europe

The excellent cooperation with the WHO/Europe continued also in 2022. Several joint activities with this important partner were developed throughout the year and a joint event was organised in Trieste in September.

CEI-WHO Meeting on Scaling-up Strategies for Primary Health Care

Around 50 delegates representing the Ministries of Health and National Health Institutes from the Western Balkans gathered at the CEI Headquarters in Trieste, on 28-30 September, for the second CEI-WHO/Europe inter-country/area meeting on "Scaling-up Strategies for Primary Health Care". The three-day event served to make good use of the lessons learned linked to the topic since the outbreak of the pandemic, with specific focus placed on non-communicable diseases, digital health and mental health. The meeting also aimed at further implementing the "Roadmap for Health and Wellbeing in the Western Balkans (2021-2025)". In order to inspire concrete actions for better health in the Western Balkans, a study visit was organised at Trieste Healthcare Authority of the ARFVG, who shared their good practices. The event represented another building block in the CEI-WHO collaboration and a milestone in defining a CEI Health Agenda, in line with the countries' needs.



Participation in Special Session of WHO Regional Committee for Europe

In light of the cooperation established between the WHO/Europe and CEI-ES, the latter was invited to attend, as observer, the virtual special session of the Regional Committee for Europe on 10 May, to consider the health situation in Ukraine and the wider consequences of the ongoing war on health matters in the region and beyond. The main point of the agenda was a draft resolution proposed by a vast number of countries, focused on the health emergency in Ukraine and in the neighbouring countries, stemming from the Russian's Federation's aggression, to be brought to the attention of the World Health Assembly.

72nd session of WHO Regional Committee for Europe

The CEI-ES virtually participated in the 72nd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe held in Tel Aviv (Israel) on 12-14 September. The event gathered Health Ministers and high-level representatives of the 53 Member States of the WHO European Region to reflect on progress made so far and further steps needed to implement the European Programme of Work (EPW) 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”. Special attention was paid to the EPW's contribution to advancing health and well-being at the country level, on the main challenges for public health in the region, ongoing health emergencies, as well as on opportunities for closer subregional and inter-regional collaboration.

#Youth4Health Tirana 2022 Health and Well-being Forum for Youth

Upon the invitation of the WHO/Europe Regional Director, the CEI-ES participated in the “#Youth4Health – Tirana 2022 Health and Well-being Forum for Youth”, held in Tirana on 25–27 October. The Forum, focused on the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people as well as on their inclusion in the recovery and in building resilience to address future health crises and pandemics, brought together young people, public health experts and other partners. It was an opportunity for young people to lead and discuss health issues that matter to them and to share their experiences, hopes and concerns for the future. It also aimed to mobilise commitment to youth engagement at regional, national and subnational levels; to bring attention to youth health and well-being issues in the Region; and to agree on the design of the WHO Regional Office for Europe's youth engagement going forward, laying the foundation for our youth network #Youth4Health.



COOPERATION WITH OSCE

Cooperation with the OSCE continued within the E-MINDFUL project. The project, supported among others by the European Commission – DG HOME - Migration and Home Affairs (the CEI also support's it as a regional partner), aims at contributing to the communication about migration. Over a period of 24 months, the activities implemented in Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Italy, North Macedonia and Serbia provided: stocktaking exercise, i.e. a set of lessons learnt from communication campaigns already carried out; co-creation process, a package of pilot and innovative prototypes of communication campaigns tailored and tested on key audiences; early-impact assessment, systematised assessment of effective communication strategies, resonating with key audiences; capitalisation, a comprehensive, evidence-based, action-oriented set of guidelines and tools to steer future communication strategies on migration and migrants.

COOPERATION WITH OTHER REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Establishing closer partnerships with other regional players is a CEI focus. Cooperation with included the reciprocal participation in events and joint activities of mutual interest. In this regard, numerous bilateral meetings took place in order to prepare the basis. Moreover, two new Memoranda of Understanding were signed.

Cooperation with Transport Community

On 15 February, DSG Nina Kodelja met in Belgrade with the Director of the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community, Matej Zakonjšek, to exchange views on joint cooperation. The discussion focused on how to ease the transit of persons and goods via infrastructure investments in the Western Balkans, as well as multimodal transport, reducing waiting at borders, and regional cooperation as precondition for connectivity in the region. It was also agreed to work together in the framework of the Bulgarian CEI Presidency. In this context, the basis for the joint event in the framework of the Presidency were established. The joint event - Expert Panel "An Integrated Concept of Connectivity for the CEI Region" - was then held in Brussels on 8 December.



Cooperation with SEEHN

On 15 March, SG Roberto Antonione and DSG Nina Kodelja met in Skopje with the Director of SEEHN Secretariat, Mira J. Dasic, to discuss regional cooperation in the health sector. Participants agreed upon the fact that health is a strongly uniting element among countries and must be tackled in all its aspects within the CEI region. In this regard, a number of activities of common interest have been identified, and the CEI was invited to participate in SEEHN high-level meetings. Furthermore, the CEI contributed, through the CEI Cooperation Fund, to the implementation of the Health Diplomacy meeting.

SEEHN High-level Meeting

On 7 June, the CEI-ES, headed by DSG Nina Kodelja, participated in the high-level meeting of SEEHN in Belgrade, under the title "Together for Health-Integrative Leadership in the Western Balkans and Beyond". The event was hosted by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia and the SEEHN Secretariat and witnessed the participation of representatives of ministries of health and health institutes, the special envoy of the WHO Regional Director for the Western Balkans and of WHO representatives. Regional/international organisations that are also active in the area of health were present as well, as they had a crucial role to play in promoting common activities for strengthening the preparedness of national health systems. In this regard, the CEI activities for health promotion in the Western Balkans, aimed at bridging the gap between the latter and the EU, were presented.

Health Diplomacy meeting

More than 30 delegates from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Health of CEI Member States gathered in Sofia on 28 November to attend the three-day Health Diplomacy Course on Building health resilience in South East European region through bridging science, policy and diplomacy to advance the SDG: Health Unites People. Among the specific issues addressed, the basics of global health diplomacy, such as governance, actors, multilateral interactions and dimensions of global health diplomacy, negotiation tools and frameworks, protocol and etiquette. The sessions also focused on challenges related to lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO's international tools for pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, and interactions between regional and global health diplomacy.

Cooperation with ALDA

On 4 March, SG Robert Antonione and the President of ALDA, Oriano Otočan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Trieste. The upgrading of a long-standing cooperation came into force at a critical moment for the region due to aggression against Ukraine - the latter being a CEI Member State which hosts two ALDA agencies. Through this agreement - aimed at underlining the importance of local democracy for the functioning of the rule of law and the achievement of its goals for progress as summarised within the UN 2030 Agenda - both parties will cooperate to implement their respective missions.



International Event “Euroscepticism at the Gates of Europe”

The day after the signing of the MoU with ALDA, an International Event in cooperation with ALDA, DebatingEurope, EuropaNova, WiseEuropa, Political Capital, Malmö University, Friends of Europe, and ARFVG, was organised in Trieste and online on 5 March. The discussion focused on Euroscepticism, immigration, and the relationship between Balkans and Europe. The participants assisted to a round table with EU sceptic OBSERVE project partners, the Secretary General of ALDA, a member of Municipality of Centar and member of ALDA Governing Board, the Counselor Special Advisor to the CEI Secretary General and coordinator of the CEI Local Dimension, and an Associate Professor of the University of Trieste, also coordinator of the Centre for Migration and International Cooperation on Sustainable Development. Finally, a citizens workshop was organized, where the main topics were migration, refugee flows, and European laws.

Cooperation with RAI

On 1 December, the CEI-ES reiterated its cooperation with RAI with the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding. SG Roberto Antonione and Desislava Nikolaeva Gotskova, Head of the RAI Secretariat, jointly signed the agreement, which will strengthen the partnership between the two institutions through an appropriate framework for developing joint actions on topics of common interest. In particular, the agreement aims at promoting effective regional cooperation in the field of anti-corruption, taking into account the geographical scopes and institutional missions of both Organisations.



Summer School for Junior anti-corruptioners from Southeastern Europe

The 17th edition of the Summer School for Junior Anti-corruption Practitioners from Southeast Europe, co-financed through the CEI Cooperation Fund and endorsed by the Bulgarian CEI Presidency, took place on 4-8 July in Sofia. The event organised by RAI, together with the National Institute for Justice, gathered practitioners, junior judges and prosecutors, as well as legal advisors from the courts and prosecution offices in nine CEI Member States. They had the opportunity to gain practical on-the-field experience and obtain advanced knowledge from judges, prosecutors, lawyers and representatives of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the Judicial Integrity Network and the OECD. The participants specifically received expert-level information on judicial integrity, i.e. key processes to identify the correct methods and mechanisms to prevent corruption and promote transparent and reasoned decision-making.

Cooperation with REMPEC

Starting from the implementation of the NAMIRS (North Adriatic Maritime Incident Response System) project, co-financed by the European Commission, DG ECHO, and aiming at enhancing prevention of, and protection from, the effects of maritime disasters, in particular deriving from oil-spills, in the North Adriatic Sea, the CEI-ES kicked off a new line of cooperation with another organisation under the UN family, the REMPEC. REMPEC is one of the Regional Activity Centres of the Mediterranean Action Plan (United Nations Environmental Programme, UNEP/MAP) and is administered by the International Maritime Organization (IMO). In line with the CEI-ES activities in the framework of NAMIRS project, in 2022 REMPEC relaunched the cooperation for extending the 2005 Sub-regional Marine Oil Pollution Contingency Plan between Croatia, Italy and Slovenia to other Adriatic Countries (now involving also Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro): thanks to the European Commission, synergies between CEI-ES and REMPEC were established during the year.

Participation in First Meeting of Competent National Authorities for Development of Sub-regional Marine Oil Pollution Contingency Plan

The main objectives of the meeting were to present the project for the Development of the Adriatic Sub-regional Marine Oil Pollution Contingency Plan (SCP) between Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Italy, Montenegro and Slovenia; to agree on the programme of the development of the Adriatic SCP; and to examine the first Draft of the Plan's concept and its content. The meeting was convened by REMPEC in Durres on 8 and 9 November. It was hosted by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania and financed by the Italian Ministry of Environment. Representatives of the competent Ministry in each of the 6 Countries, the REMPEC Secretariat and the CEI-ES discussed and defined the programme to develop the Adriatic SCP, to be drafted by autumn 2023 (two additional meetings were scheduled in May and October 2023).



Participation in First Coordination Meeting on Mediterranean Strategy for Prevention of, Preparedness and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2022-2031)

The First Coordination Meeting on the implementation of the Mediterranean Strategy for the Prevention of, Preparedness and Response to Marine Pollution from Ships (2022-2031), was organised in Malta by the REMPEC on 29 November - 1 December, in accordance with the "Mediterranean Strategy (2022-2031)", adopted by the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention in Antalya (7-10 December 2021). The main objectives of the meeting were to: report and assess the progress made in the implementation of the Strategy; define priority actions and propose related activities for the next biennium; and define roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the proposed activities as well as establish operational and strategic synergies, through specific partnership agreements. The meeting was attended by delegations from 16 countries, representatives of IMO, UNEP, the European Commission and representatives from other organisations as well as CEI-ES.



Coordination Meeting of Regional Organisations

On 8 December, the CEI-Executive Secretariat participated in the 16th Coordination Meeting of Regional Organisations held at the BSEC PERMIS, in Istanbul (Türkiye). The event, held on a rotating basis, was also attended by the AIJ and the UFM Secretariat, with the UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub as special guest. It gave participants the chance to present their respective activities in promoting regional dialogue and cooperation and exchange views and good practices with focus on blue economy activities, climate change and UN SDGs' implementation. Participants agreed that there were numerous possibilities for enhancing cooperation, and to continue the exchange on a regular basis also in-between meetings; they also decided on the venue of the meetings for the next two years: in Ancona, hosted by the AIJ in 2023 and in Trieste, hosted by the CEI in 2024.



YOUTH AGENDA

With the aim to encourage the contribution of young people in the promotion of its mission the CEI-ES promotes its own initiatives with focus on youth.

Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AIJ Areas

The CEI, through the CEI-ES, joined forces with the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (AIJ) and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and launched the second edition of the Call for Ideas Competition "IMAGINE" - Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AIJ Areas, by awarding the best presented ideas. The first-place winner of the competition this year was the Bulgarian "Goethe" German High School with its project idea "Active Young Citizens for Gender Equality in Bulgaria", followed by "Become the best version of yourself, be non-formal!" of "Aurel Vlaicu" Theoretical High School from Romania and by "Educating young people of damage of environmental pollution and ways to improve it, their impact on climate changes, an exhibition of sculptures made of recycled material", presented by the Public Institution Technical School Center Zvornik from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The three winning schools will respectively use their prize to take their students to the UN Headquarters in New York; to the UN Headquarters in Geneva; and to improve the school lighting system.

Youth@cei.int: a permanent communication channel with youth across CEI Region

In order to give young people in the CEI's Member States the chance to submit their ideas and suggestions on activities of their interest at any given time, the CEI-Executive Secretariat set up a new youth@cei.int mailbox. Students aged 15-24 years can take part in our Open Consultation and inform us on their specific needs for training, organising certain events, addressing certain subjects, or even to support youth mobility. The CEI-ES will collect and assess the inputs received.

CEMAN Orchestra performances

On 22 October, after one week of joint training at the Conservatory of Music Giuseppe Tartini in Trieste, 35 young musicians of the CEMAN Orchestra from eleven CEI countries performed at the Trieste Opera House "Teatro Lirico Giuseppe Verdi" for the Trieste Next Festival. This music event was organised in the framework of the CEMAN, established in 2016, and under the patronage of the CEI. This year the Orchestra was conducted by the Bulgarian Director Deyan Pavlov with the participation of the young cellist Momchil Pandev. The orchestra performed also in Grožnjan/Grisignana (Croatia) and in Ljubljana (Slovenia).

Visit of Civil servants from Bosnia and Herzegovina

On 10 November, more than thirty civil servants from various public administrations of Bosnia and Herzegovina, visited the CEI-ES in the context of the project EU Scheme for Young Professionals in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUSYP). EUSYP, funded by the EU and implemented by the British Council, aims at assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina in developing a professional, de-politicised and merit-based service system through professional development, mobility and training. The gathering offered an opportunity to discuss regional cooperation and its contribution to the EU enlargement process, as well as the role of the CEI as a promoter of regional cooperation bridging EU and non-EU countries. To this end, focus was placed on CEI opportunities for regional cooperation, with detailed presentations on the CEI Cooperation Fund, the CEI Fund at the EBRD and the CEI's active involvement in the field of EU project design and management. These tools can be useful to implement actions in support of the EU accession path of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a common objective of CEI Member States.



SCIENCE DIPLOMACY

The CEI-ES strongly supports the science-policy interface and the facilitation of the inclusion of CEI scientists in transnational research groups.

CEI and ICTP joint research assistance initiative

The CEI and the ICTP launched a Joint initiative 'CEI-ICTP Researchers' Mobility for Sustainable Development'. The project encouraged early-career scientists from seven non-EU CEI Member States in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans i.e. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Moldova, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine - to participate in ICTP's Programme for Training and Research in Italian Laboratories (TRIL). TRIL offers valuable, hands-on experience to early-career scientists by placing them in one of the hundreds of Italian laboratories that participate in the ICTP programme. Both organisations saw this initiative as a joint contribution to the International Year of Basic Sciences for Sustainable Development, approved by the United Nations General Assembly for 2022.

Building resilience in a changing environment - launch of ResiliENHANCE platform

Working together towards building disaster-resilient societies as a fundamental prerequisite for achieving sustainable development was the main goal of the ResiliENHANCE Platform - jointly promoted by the CEI-ES, the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region and the UNESCO Chair on Intersectoral Safety for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience of the University of Udine - which was launched during an international workshop in Udine (Italy) on 24-25 October. This new knowledge-sharing and knowledge-bridging tool - created to specifically support the achievement of the 2030 Global Agenda, and actively counter the effects of multi-faceted problems caused by the current widespread health, socio-economic and environmental challenges (i.e. climate change, the Covid-19 pandemic etc.) - will be achieved through a series of activities aimed at linking diverse perspectives, expertise, and knowledge of different disciplines contributing to resilience; it will be carried out through an interdisciplinary network among experts from scientific institutions from CEI Member States, such as the UNESCO Chairs, UN agencies in particular UNESCO, EU institutions and local, regional and national institutions, by promoting a holistic approach to increase the resilience to disasters.

Climate refugees and role of science diplomacy

The CEI supported, through the CEI Cooperation Fund the Project CREATE “Climate Refugees Exist: let’s stArt to Talk about it”, led by the OGS, which tackles the issue of climate change as a root cause for migration both from an international and scientific point of view. Through specific workshops and lectures, the activity - in line both with the UN 2030 Agenda and the CEI strategy - especially focused on fostering Science Diplomacy involving research institutions, universities and international bodies operating in the field of climate change, migration and international cooperation; on awareness-raising about climate change and refugees involving the scientific and local communities; as well as on creating an information-tool based on the role-play approach in order to understand different perspectives and interests. The final CREATE conference, held in Trieste on 15 December, and included the presentation of an innovative role-playing game developed within the project.



CEI-ES PARTICIPATION IN CEI SPONSORED EVENTS

The CEI-ES continued taking part in various activities organised by long-standing cooperation partners, sponsored by the CEI Cooperation Fund.

CEI Venice Forum

The 10th CEI Venice Forum for Contemporary Art Curators, organised by the Trieste Contemporanea Committee, took place at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice on 22 April. This year’s Forum focused on the contemporary art practices in times of crisis, particularly referring to the challenging events that have highly impacted people’s lives during the last two years – the global pandemic and the war in Ukraine – with consequences also on the arts and culture at large. The Forum is the result of the successful cooperation between the CEI and the Trieste Contemporanea Committee which promotes very effectively a dialogue in the field of contemporary art among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Young Bled Strategic Forum 2022

Young leaders and experts from 20 countries across and outside the Central European region gathered in Ljubljana, at the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia, and Bled, Slovenia, on 26 -28 August, to attend the 11th edition of the Young Bled Strategic Forum under the title “Democracy fit for the new age”. The Forum enabled the participants to engage in lively dynamic panel discussions, workshops, training, and interactive working methods on topics such as diversity and transnational cooperation, media literacy and information society. The debates and exchange of views followed a three-stage format with a panel discussion at the beginning, a world café and working-group debate which allowed closer and more dynamic interactions among experts and the participants.



Vilenica International Literary Festival

The 37th Vilenica International Literary Festival, organised by the Slovene Writers' Association and the Vilenica Cultural Association in Sežana (Slovenia), took place on 6-11 September under the title "How far away is home?". The event was meant to analyse the reality of our times where Europe is undergoing dramatic change and unpreparedness before a reality made up of climate change, refugees, families fleeing war, or dire economic conditions; it focused on refugeeism also as a question of language as well as on the learning of new languages, the latter being a key tool of any writer. Moreover, the Festival gathered writers from Central European countries and beyond, promoting dialogue in an area with a common history, but cultural diversity.



XXII Summer Seminar for Young Public Policy Professionals

The XXII edition of the long-standing regional forum "Summer Seminar for Young Public Policy Professionals", organised by the Economic Policy Institute, Sofia, was held in Albena Resort (near to the city of Varna, Bulgaria) on 5-10 September. The event entitled "Future Scenarios for Central and Eastern Europe: Navigating Uncertainty" served as a platform for expert discussions (young public servants, early or mid-career diplomats, policy-oriented researchers, think-tank professionals and representatives of the academia) and exchange of views on the most pressing issues (security, digitalisation, connectivity, good governance, and others). It also served to gain a strategic outlook for the development perspectives ahead of the economies and societies in Central and Eastern European countries in times of uncertainty. The 5-day event was composed of: lectures, key notes, interactive group activities and informal networking opportunities.

Boosting social inclusion in SEE: policy hackathon for municipalities

Local councilors and members of civil society organisations from CEI Member States took part in two online modules (15, 16 September) and one offline module (Novi Sad, Serbia on 3-8 October) within a series of courses titled "Boosting social inclusion in SEE: policy hackathon for municipalities", organised by the Robert Schuman Institute. The sessions aimed at addressing problems of social inclusion and at assisting the development of user-centered, data-driven, workable solutions to these problems in the region at municipality level. They also aimed at contributing to a quality change and supporting democratisation through capacity building in the Western Balkan countries. The hackathon format and a design thinking approach to policy making were utilized for drafting innovative, effective, human-centered policy solutions, as well as a design thinking approach to policy making, aimed to boost informed engagement in all stages of policy shaping.



XVIII International Forum of Aquileia Euroregion

The International Forum of the Aquileia Euroregion under the title "From barbed wire to the thread of history", was held in Udine, Trieste and Gorizia (Italy) on 28-30 September. It aimed at providing a valuable platform for reflection and discussion among public representatives. It was organised by the Mitteleuropa Cultural Association, in cooperation with the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region and a consortium of public and private stakeholders, institutions, diplomats, politicians and academics from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkan area. On 29 September, the CEI-ES welcomed the participants of the forum at its Headquarters. They received an overall presentation of the CEI and its activities from the staff members. The Friuli Venezia Giulia Region as well as other authorities were present and delivered presentations as well.

South East Europe Media Forum

More than 250 participants attended the XVI South East Europe Media Forum (SEEMF) held in Sarajevo on 16-17 November under the title "The role of media in times of global uncertainties". The event was attended by journalists, media experts, politicians, representatives of international organisations and academia who debated topical issues such as wartime journalism, investigative journalism, cross-border cooperation, responsibility of media in times of crisis. The war in Ukraine was at the core of various contributions, especially referring to media freedom and freedom of expression, quality journalism, information manipulation and disinformation, fake news, propaganda, in-the-field journalism, access to information, journalists' safety. The participation of various journalists who covered the Balkans war in the 1990s, offered the opportunity to highlight similarities and differences with nowadays war reporting in a remarkable exchange of experiences and practices.



CEI-ES PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS OF INTEREST FOR THE CEI

The CEI-ES participated in a number of events covering crucial issues for the region.

Trieste Investment Forum

Analysing the implications of the Ukrainian war for financial cooperation and development as well as the role of the EU for enhancing security, stability and growth in the Pan-European region were the main debating topics of the online Trieste Investment Forum held on 23 June under the title "Pan-European and Euro-Mediterranean Financial Cooperation in the New Geopolitical Scenarios". DSG Zsuzsanna Király participated as a speaker in Panel 1 "The War in Ukraine and the New Geopolitical Scenarios in Eastern Europe", chaired by Goran Svilanović, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and RCC Secretary General from Serbia. She highlighted the role the CEI played throughout the years and under the current geopolitical circumstance and its possible contributions to the re-establishment process. Király's fellow panellists were representatives from the Asian Development Bank, the EBRD, the Association for Financial Markets in Europe and the Institute for Human Sciences.

Dubrovnik Forum 2022

DSG Nina Kodelja represented the CEI-ES at the Dubrovnik Forum 2022 on the “Quest for balance in a world disrupted”, held on 8-9 July in Croatia. The four-panel event focused on: Predictability – High in Demand, Low in Supply – which analysed the impact of the aggression on the international rules-based order and international law; Raw Power of Raw Materials, considering the effects of the pandemic and Russian aggression and their consequences on the world’s economy and trade, with emphasis on energy and food security, supply chains disruptions, and their overall impact on global relations; Disinformation – Readers’ Digest – focusing on the impact of today’s accrued challenges on the reliability of information, the credibility of journalism and communication in general; Decision Time in Europe’s “Soft Underbelly” and Beyond, which treated the consequences in the Western Balkans of the aggression-induced tremors regarding, inter alia, energy, food safety and information credibility.



Barcolana Sea Summit

In the framework of the 2022 edition of the Barcolana Sea Summit in Trieste on 5-7 October, which looked at the need for a holistic and integrated approach to face the complexity of ensuring the sustainability of the Mediterranean, the CEI-ES coordinated - for the second year in a row - the workshop “Water without Borders II” on shared risk and emergency management at sea introducing the EU-funded project “NAMIRS”, one of the major joint initiatives in this sector. North Adriatic Maritime Incident Response System (NAMIRS) project, co-financed by the European Commission in the framework of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism, invests in new technologies to concretely act for the prevention and protection of our sea from oil spills and environmental challenges through coordinated cross-sector and cross-border cooperation between three neighbouring countries: Italy, Croatia, and Slovenia.



Balkan Economic Forum

On 18 November the CEI-ES participated in the high-level Balkan Economic Forum “For a brighter future” in Skopje. The event – gathering academics, students, media and other figures of the public and private sector – focused on the development and implementation of innovative strategies and creative solutions to the current economic challenges facing the Balkan countries to stimulate economic growth which, in turn, should strengthen regional cooperation, peace and security. DSG Zsuzsanna Király virtually contributed to the discussions of Panel 1 on “regional economic cooperation – myth or reality”. Balkan energy prospects for faster energy transition; financing development and regional cooperation; reskilling and upskilling of the Balkan labour force; and policy making innovations in the Balkans were the other topics of discussion of the event.

PRIZES AND AWARDS

The CEI-ES promotes a number of Prizes and Awards on the occasion of some of the traditional events supported by the CEI.

CEI Award at Trieste Film Festival

The CEI Award 2022 at the Trieste Film Festival was given to the Serbian director Milica Tomović for her film *Kelti* (Celts), during the awarding ceremony held in Trieste on 24 January. The award is intended to highlight a filmmaker from the CEI area whose work contributes to enhancing dialogue between countries and peoples. It also touches upon universal topics, relevant to all regardless of identities and geographical background.



CEI Award at the International Design Contest “Trieste Contemporanea”

Oleg Vereshchagin from Ukraine won the CEI Award at the 14th International Design Contest “Trieste Contemporanea”, with his project “Surface Friendly Carrier System”. The awarding ceremony took place in Trieste on 13 July and this year’s edition - called BASIC - invited applicants to propose an original and innovative object of contemporary design taking into account the SDGs. Its focused on the new meanings and purposes, objects and tools could have when addressing sustainable goals or facing emergencies.



CEI Award for Young Writers

Luiza-Katica Bouharaoua from Croatia received the CEI Award for Young Writers 2022 on the occasion of the literary event held at the CEI Headquarters on 6 September, in the framework of the Vilenica International Literary Festival. The award, offered in cooperation with the Slovene Writers’ Association, aims at promoting the translation and circulation of literary works of young, outstanding writers from the region.



CEI SEEMO Award for Outstanding Merits in Investigative Journalism

During the South East Europe Media Forum held in Sarajevo, on 16-17 November, Anna Babinets received the CEI SEEMO Award for her long-lasting experience and commitment in investigative reporting as well as for her current engagement in providing evidence of war crimes against Ukrainian civilians.



PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The CEI-ES continued to implement and support various projects out of its funds, programmes and instruments for cooperation.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT OFFICE

The design and implementation of projects and activities, of either cross-border or transnational nature, is a powerful tool for the attainment of the goals and objectives included in the CEI Plan of Action, as well as for fostering the CEI's main mission: European integration and sustainable development in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Within the CEI-Executive Secretariat, the Project Management Office (PMO) is the structure responsible for the implementation of projects and activities funded by external sources, in particular by the European Union and the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. The PMO takes care of the whole project cycle, from fundraising to networking and partnership building, from project design and drafting to implementation, from reporting to follow-up and capitalisation. So far, the PMO has contributed to the realisation of about 50 regional projects, acting both as Lead Partner and Partner, in fields such as transport, energy, bio & blue circular economy, research & innovation, culture, environmental protection, social innovation, economic development and health. This has enabled to turn shared priorities into concrete regional actions and to establish a broad cooperative network with more than 250 stakeholders throughout the CEI area and beyond, for the ultimate benefit of our Member States and their citizens.

EU-funded projects

Since 2004, the CEI-ES has been developing specific expertise in the design, management and implementation of projects co-financed by the European Union under its sectoral, structural and external programmes. EU co-financed projects represent an important tool for attaining the goals outlined in the CEI Plan of Action. Member States benefit from further progress and expansion of this field of work, which proves to be a strategic instrument to fulfil the CEI core mission of promoting "regional cooperation for European integration". Indeed, numerous workshops, conferences, trainings, as well as experimental/pilot actions are organised in the framework of these projects, with the aim to share experience and elaborate joint solutions between and among relevant regional and national stakeholders and explore further opportunities for mutual development and growth. Furthermore, scientific research and data collection are often undertaken as well as development of strategies aimed at supporting the elaboration of joint actions on important issues. In the time frame 2004-2022, the CEI participated in the successful implementation of 46 projects (both as Lead Partner - LP and Project Partner - PP), with a total value of about 82 million EUR, of which about 17 administered by the CEI-ES. In 2022 alone, 14 projects were under implementation (7 were closed in the course of the year) with a total value of about 27 million EUR, of which over 2.7 million EUR were administered by the CEI-ES. The following projects were implemented throughout 2022:

project name	implemen- tation date	EU Pro- gramme	area	role	total cost (€)	CEI budget (€)	PoA ob- jective/s	SDGs
ITHACA Innovation in Health And Care for All	01/2017 - 06/2022	Interreg Europe	Health	SC	2,263,152.61	98,300.00	1.6, 2.2	3, 8, 10, 17
INTER-CONNECT PLUS Inter-modality Promotion and Rail Renaissance in Adriatic-Ionian Region plus	01/2022 - 06/2022	Interreg ADRIION	Mobility	PP	173,400.00	28,250.00	1.1	3, 9, 11, 17
ICARUS Intermodal Connections in Adriatic-Ionian Region to Up-growth Seamless solutions for passengers	01/2019 - 03/2022	Interreg Italy-Croatia	Mobility	PP	2,200,000.00	170,000.00	1.1	9, 10, 13

project name	implemen- tation date	EU Pro- gramme	area	role	total cost (€)	CEI budget (€)	PoA ob- jective/s	SDGs
ACSELL Accelerating SmE innovation capacities with a Living Lab approach	08/2019 - 07/2023	Interreg Europe	Innovation	PP	1,726,686.00	161,600.00	1.2, 1.6	8, 17
PRE-RIGHTS Assessing impact and performance of preventive measures on EU Directives and Framework Decisions	10/2019 - 07/2022	Justice	Judicial cooperation	LP	806,673.00	207,152.00	2.1	16, 10
TAAFE Towards an Alpine Age-Friendly Environment	10/2019 - 06/2022	Interreg Alpine	Social innovation	PP	2,168,317.23	135,399.84	1.6, 2.2	1, 3, 11, 12, 17
SUSTOURISMO Sustainable Tourism & Mobility Hand by Hand Development	02/2020 - 01/2023	Interreg ADRIION	Mobility	PP	1,798,950.00	228,750.00	1.1, 1.6	3, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 15
FORTIS Institutional cooperation for improving cross border public transport services	03/2020 - 08/2022	Interreg Italy-Slovenia	Mobility	LP	759,290.00	225,815.00	1.1	1, 9, 11, 13
MIMOSA Maritime and multimodal sustainable passenger transport solutions and services	01/2020 - 06/2023	Interreg Italy-Croatia	Mobility	LP	7,140,000.00	477,000.00	1.1	3, 9, 11, 13
ADRIPASS PLUS Integrating multimodal connections in the Adriatic Ionian Region	01/2022 - 06/2022	Interreg ADRIION	Mobility	LP	176,370.00	31,970.00	1.1	3, 9, 11, 13
IDEAHL Improving Digital Empowerment for Active Healthy Living	05/2022 - 04/2024	Horizon Europe	Health	PP	2,847,000.00	203,625.00	2.2	3, 17
GREEN ME UP Green Biomethane Market Uptake	08/2022 - 07/2025	Horizon Europe	Energy	PP	1,999,935.00	121,563.00	1.4	7, 11, 17
BIOLOC Biobased and social innovation to revitalise European local communities	10/2022 - 09/2025	Horizon Europe	Circular bioeconomy	LP	2,499,638.00	428,750.00	1.5	7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 17
NAMIRS North Adriatic Maritime Incident Response System	03/2022 - 02/2024	DG ECHO/ European Union Civil Protection Mechanism	Civil/ Environmental Protection	LP	950,398.00	175,913.00	1.3	3, 8, 12, 14

EXAMPLES OF RECENT EU-FUNDED PROJECTS

ADRIPASS Plus

The ADRIPASS PLUS project, co-financed by the Interreg ADRIAN Programme, aimed at improving maritime - hinterland freight connections to boost growth and economic development of the transport sector in the ADRIAN region. The CEI-ES coordinated a multilevel partnership, made up of research institutions, Port's Authorities, regional and international public bodies from the ADRIAN region, which focused on the identification of soft measures to streamline and enhance the connections on the TEN-T Network extended to the Western Balkans, where most border-crossing points are located. It also tested specific ICT solutions (Port Community Systems) for streamlining freight transport in ADRIAN ports. With the developed ADRIPASS Transnational Strategy and Cooperation Network, planning capacities of transport stakeholders and national and European policymakers were significantly improved. They received help to face shared challenges concerning multimodal transport accessibility and network efficiency on the TEN-T Corridor sections in the ADRIAN region. ADRIPASS PLUS was, in fact, a capitalisation project which upgraded the key outputs of the ADRIPASS project, by: a) promoting stakeholders' involvement to update the ADRIPASS transnational strategy, with a special focus on ensuring its resilience to COVID-19 and the consequent economic crisis; b) capitalising, upgrading and enhancing already developed ICT platforms (Port Community Systems and similar ICT Applications) as a powerful and cost-effective tool to support dematerialisation of processes in the Ports, improving ports efficiency with positive and concrete impacts on the efficiency of maritime-hinterland connectivity; c) further disseminating project results at regional, national and transnational level, increasing awareness of the solutions developed within European Territorial Cooperation projects among transport stakeholders, regional and national authorities.



PRE-RIGHTS

The CEI-ES completed the PRE-RIGHTS project, co-financed by the European Union's Justice Programme (2014-2020). Addressing the issue of prevention of radicalisation, it aimed at achieving better coordination to promote judicial cooperation concerning the legal prevention of crime in the framework of fundamental rights, towards a more efficient and coherent application of the EU mutual recognition instruments in criminal matters (such as the European Investigation Order – EIO and the European Arrest Warrant – EAW). The CEI-ES was responsible for project coordination, as well as for the implementation of dissemination and training activities. PRE-RIGHTS activities increased the capacity of legal practitioners and authorities to address issues related to judicial prevention in criminal investigations and furthered competences of prison judges and police to address prevention from a legal and procedural point of view. To do so, an innovative platform (supertoolkit.eu) has been developed to provide professionals with the chance to access training contents, best practices, and advice from relevant experts.



Projects financed by ARFVG

The CEI-ES has established a close cooperation with the ARFVG with the aim to develop relations between the Region and the countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, also in line with the scope of the CEI Local Dimension. Through this enhanced partnership, the CEI contributes to increasing the ARFVG international links and reinforcing the role of the Region in the Adriatic-Ionian macro-regional strategy. It also develops new economic relations with the Balkans and the Danube area, and the countries bordering the Black and Baltic Seas. In this regard, various activities implemented or promoted by the CEI-ES, including at institutional level (e.g. CEMAN Orchestra, ResiliENHANCE) and in cooperation with other international and regional organisations (e.g. WHO/Europe, ALDA), are financed out of the budget provided by the Region. The CEI's longstanding experience in promoting regional cooperation as well as the solid expertise in managing EU projects especially serve this purpose. In this framework, the CEI-ES has developed a structured cooperation through the realisation of a number of projects and cooperative actions, the latter are included in agreed Joint Work Programmes (JWPs), with a total value of about 1 million EUR in 2022. The projects and cooperative actions implemented in 2022 are outlined below:

project name	CEI-ES role	implementa- tion date	PoA objective/s	SDGs
Project SILK2FVG plus	CEI-ES Implementing partner	May 2018 – April 2023	1.1, 1.2, 2.1	8, 9, 17
Joint Work Programme 2020 - 2021	CEI-ES Implementing partner	July 2020 – June 2022	1.1, 1.5, 2.2, 2.5, 2.6	3, 8, 12, 17
Joint Work Programme 2021-2022	CEI-ES Implementing partner	January 2022 – April 2023	1.1, 1.5, 2.2, 2.5, 2.6	3, 8, 12, 17

CEI FUND AT THE EBRD

Established in 1992 and financed by Italy with a total contribution amounting to 55 million EUR, the CEI Fund at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) mainly provides grants for the Technical Cooperation Programme in support of investments and operations of the EBRD. The Fund also supports the CEI Know-how Exchange Programme which fosters capacity building and transfer of good practices from EU to non-EU CEI Member States. Both Programmes are managed by the Office of the CEI Fund at the EBRD.

Technical Cooperation Programme

The Technical Cooperation (TC) projects constitute the largest part of the activity funded by the CEI Fund at the EBRD. TC is traditionally offered in the form of grant type assistance. Operations include support for feasibility and pre-feasibility studies, project implementation, management training, capacity building and pre-loan audits. These activities target a number of priority areas, including agribusiness, business and finance, energy, institutional development, municipal infrastructure and services, SME support, and transport. Since its inception, the CEI Fund at the EBRD has committed about 33.5 million EUR towards 196 TC assignments. These projects have been coherent with the framework and general objectives of the EBRD and other international financial institutions and have represented a fundamental mean of development for the countries of operations of the CEI Fund that are non-EU CEI Member States. One of the objectives of TC projects is to support the Bank's investments and loans either at the project preparation or at the project implementation phase. It should be underlined that the CEI has undertaken projects which yield high co-financing ratios. Indeed, these projects are expected to mobilise over 7.8 billion EUR of international investments. The EBRD alone is expected to contribute to those investments with around 5.8 billion EUR. A Total Investment Ratio (TIR) can be calculated to show how many euros the international community is expected to invest for each euro granted by the CEI Fund for TC projects. Between 1993 and 2022, the TIR is estimated to be 1:233. The EBRD's share, alone, is expected to reach approximately 173 EUR for each euro of the CEI Fund dedicated to TC projects: this represents the EBRD Investment Ratio (EIR). In 2022, the CEI Fund at the EBRD committed over 3.1 million EUR for 8 new TC assignments (the full list of the TC projects approved in 2022 is attached as Annex 4). In addition, 33 TC projects were implemented and 8 closed throughout the year, as outlined in the table below:

project name	committed €	country of operation	sector of op- eration	commitment stage	PoA objecti- ves	SDGs
North Macedonia: Railway Corridor VIII - Energy Management System for PERI	175,000.00	North Macedonia	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
Montenegro Local Roads Reconstruction and Upgrade: Strategy and Model Contracts for Performance-Based Maintenance, and Road Safety Regulation	137,516.00	Montenegro	Transport	implemen- ted and closed	1.1	11
Moldova Railways: Assistance in preparation and implementation of tender for rolling stock rehabilitation	250,000.00	Moldova	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
Serbian Roads - Road Rehabilitation and Safety Project. Capacity Building on Road Safety	70,000.00	Serbia	Transport	implemen- ted and	1.1	11
North Macedonia: National Roads Programme - Project Implementation Unit support	450,000.00	North Macedonia	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
North Macedonia: Railway Corridor VIII (second phase): PIU Support	350,000.00	North Macedonia	Transport	committed	1.1	11
Project Preparation along the Silk Road in CSEE: Assessing and Tackling Policy Obstacles to Infrastructure Investment in the Region	90,000.00	Regional	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11

project name	committed €	country of operation	sector of op- eration	commitment stage	PoA objec- tives	SDGs
Independent System Operator of Bosnia and Herzegovina - Consultant for the Project Implementation Unit	399,530.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Energy/ Cli- mate	implemen- ted and closed	1.4	7
Implementation of the Corporate Governance Action Plan (CGAP) for "Korporate	300,000.00	Albania	Energy/ Cli- mate	disbursing	1.4	7
Albania Secretariat to the Investment Council	175,000.00	Albania	Institutional Development	disbursing	2.1	8
CEI Support to Small Business Initiative: Expansion of Origination and Execution Capacity Program for SME Direct Finance and Risk Sharing in	90,000.00	Belarus	SME support	implemen- ted and closed	1.2	8
Green Economy Transition (GET) Project Preparation and Implementation Framework	65,572.00	Regional	Energy/ Cli- mate	disbursing	1.4	7
Corridor Vc in Republika Srpska - Quality Management System and obtaining ISO Stan-	70,000.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
Moldova Railways - Fleet Renewal Project	50,000.00	Moldova	Transport	committed	1.1	11
Green Economy Transition - Project Preparation and Implementation Framework	185,000.00	Regional	Energy/ Cli- mate	disbursing	1.4	7
Albanian Railways - Asset Management Plan and Track Access Charges Methodology	350,000.00	Albania	Transport	implemen- ted and closed	1.1	11
Albanian Railways - Development of Accounting and Reporting Systems for full International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) Compliance	149,050.00	Albania	Transport	implemen- ted and closed	1.1	11
Albanian Railways - Assistance with Civil Society Engagement	120,000.00	Albania	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
Preparation of the Study on improvement of public transportation and preparation of tender for a multi-year public lines distribution	150,000.00	Montenegro	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
FBIH Roads: Flood Repair and Upgrade - Introduction of Quality Management Systems and obtaining the ISO 9001 standard	70,000.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transport	committed	1.1	11
Serbia Route 7 Highway - Lender's Monitor	125,000.00	Serbia	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
Serbia Voz Rolling Stock Acquisition	75,000.00	Serbia	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11
Moldova: Support for the Competitive Procurement of Renewable Energy	200,000.00	Moldova	Energy/ Cli- mate	committed	1.4	7
Analysis of Climate Change Risks to Critical Transport Infrastructure Networks in Ukraine	149,910.00	Ukraine	Transport	disbursing	1.1	11, 13
Investment Climate and Governance Expert for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro	145,000.00	Regional	Institutional Development	disbursing	2.1	13
Advice for Small Businesses in Moldova (Youth and Skills)	300,000.00	Moldova	SME support	disbursing	1.2	8
Mostar North to Mostar South Motorway - Environmental and Social Impact Assessment	72,790.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transport	implemen- ted and closed	1.1	11

project name	committed €	country of operation	sector of op- eration	commitment stage	PoA objec-	SDGs
Serbian Climate Resilience and Irrigation Project (SCRIP) - Development of irrigation strategy	152,508.00	Serbia	Agribusiness	committed	1.3	13
Increasing market opportunities for high-quality food products	122,814.00	Regional	Agribusiness	disbursing	1.2	8
COVID-19 Crisis Response: Environmental & Social Contractor Management	119,450.00	Regional	Institutional Development	disbursing	2.1	8
Methane Emissions Reduction Programme in Gas Supply Chains	110,200.00	Ukraine	Energy/ Cli- mate	disbursing	1.4	7
Corridor Vc - Tunnel Prenj: Corporate Governan- ce Action Plan	150,000.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transport	committed	1.1	11
Market readiness for a low-carbon hydrogen economy in the Western Balkans	150,000.00	Regional	Energy/ Cli- mate	disbursing	1.3, 1.4	7
Green City Action Plan for Brcko District	275,000.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Municipal infrastructure	committed	1.6	8
Green Cities Framework 2 Window 2 (GrCFW2) Sarajevo Public Transport e-Mobility – Project Implementation Support	430,000.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transport	committed	1.1	11,13
Green Cities Framework 2 Window 2 (GrCFW2) Sarajevo Public Transport e-Mobility – Project	70,000.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transport	committed	1.1	11,13
Chisinau Solid Waste – Project Implementation Support Services	300,000.00	Moldova	Municipal infrastructure	committed	1.6	8
Port of Brcko – Corporate Development Plan	250,000.00	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Transport	committed	1.1	11
Market Assessment for the Uptake of Climate Technologies in the Western Balkans	55,575.00	Regional	Energy/ Cli- mate	implemen- ted and closed	1.3	7
Improving Corporate Governance in Family- Owned Enterprises	40,000.00	Serbia	SME support	disbursing	1.2	8
Preparation of a Corporate Plan for the organisational strengthening of Public Enterpri- se for State Roads	200,000.00	North Macedonia	Transport	approved	1.1	11

EXAMPLES OF RECENT TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROJECTS

Albanian Railways - Asset Management Plan and Track Access Charges Methodology & Albanian Railways - Development of Accounting and Reporting Systems for full International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) Compliance

The EBRD, with a sovereign loan of up to 36.87 million EUR to the Government of Albania to be on-lent to the Albanian Railways Company (HSH), financed the rehabilitation of the 34.17 km railway line between the Tirana Public Transport Terminal and the city of Durres and the construction of a new railway line approximately 5 km in length and its interchange connecting the Tirana-Durres line with the Tirana International Airport (the Project). The Project was part of Route 2 of the Western Balkans Core Network connecting the cities of Podgorica in Montenegro and Vlore in Albania. It was established as an indicative extension to the Trans-European Transport Networks to the Western Balkans core railway network. The project was also part of the Connectivity Agenda of the European Union, which promotes transport connectivity in the Western Balkans as an important factor for the economic development, regional cooperation and EU integration. The objective of the Assistance was to support the Company, flanking it with an experienced Consultant, who reviewed the IFRS reporting methods, the Company's accounting policies and procedures, and helped preparing compliant financial records and reports. Moreover, the Consultant advised on the Management Information System, which is needed to facilitate effective financial management. Finally, the Consultant trained the Chief Financial Officer and its team on the application of the new IFRS compliant policies and procedures.



Independent System Operator of Bosnia and Herzegovina - Consultant for the Project Implementation Unit

The EBRD provided financing to the Independent System Operator of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ISO) for the development and installation of a new state-of-the-art IT system including the Energy Management System and the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition system as well as the construction of the new premises of the company. ISO is a public company owned by the governments of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska, operating on the entire territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in accordance with the license which was issued by the State Electricity Regulatory Commission. ISO is responsible, inter alia, for managing the transmission system and assuring its stability; managing assets and equipment in the central control and dispatching centre; dispatching, balancing and allocating the cross-border interconnection capacities; developing and managing the rules which regulate the transmission system utilisation; and developing and managing of market rules which are based on the provisions related to system and ancillary services in the transmission system. The main objective of the PIU Consultant was to provide organisational and technical assistance to the Client to ensure the successful completion of the project in accordance with the Project Implementation Plan and with all the EBRD'S requirements stipulated in the Loan Agreement.



Know-how Exchange Programme (KEP)

Launched in 2004, the KEP is a development instrument aimed at supporting the transfer of expertise from institutions in the EU to peers in the non-EU countries within the CEI region. By co-financing capacity building and technical assistance projects, the KEP offers grants to institutions willing to share their experience with their partners in the non-EU CEI Member States, thus helping non-members to advance on their path towards EU standards and policies. The Programme operates through calls for proposals. Since its establishment, 137 projects have been financed through the KEP for a total CEI Fund contribution of over 4 million EUR with an overall project value amounting to over 16 million EUR. In 2022, the KEP co-financed 8 new projects with around 300,000 EUR and an overall total cost of projects of almost 650,000 EUR (the full list of the KEP projects approved in 2022 is attached as Annex 5). In addition, 9 KEP projects were implemented and 8 closed throughout the year, as outlined in the table below:

project name	country of know-how provider institution	country of know-how recipient institution	total project cost (€)	CEI co-financing (€)	implementation stage	PoA objectives	SDGs
MEAT BIOHAZ	Italy	Serbia	80,000.00	40,000.00	under implementation	2.6	4
Innovative Know-how Exchange Programme in Animal Nutrition and Feed Technology (INNOKEP-FEED)	Italy	Serbia	85,188.00	39,950.00	implemented and closed	2.6	4
Capacity Support of Regional Cooperation in Mine Action (SEEMACC)	Slovenia	Regional	35,000.00	17,500.00	under implementation	2.1	11
Non-invasive and multi-analytical approach to the discovering of "Old Believer Faith icons" of VETKA Museum (ICONS)	Italy	Belarus	33,427.00	9,855.00	implemented and closed	2.3	4
"Composites for All". Advanced Materials for a Modern, Improved, and Sustainable Society	Italy, Slovenia	Regional	84,020.00	39,775.00	implemented and closed	2.6	4
Practical Application of 3D Technology in Medicine and Health Care	Italy	Bosnia and Herzegovina	137,205.00	24,975.00	implemented and closed	2.2	4
Improving Occupational Health and Safety System in Republic of Moldova	Italy, Hungary	Moldova	80,000.00	39,933.00	under implementation	2.2	3
Sustainability of the Platforms for Monitoring Population Food Consumption Habits and Pilot Study on Web- and Computer-based 24-H dietary Recall Tools	Italy	Serbia	80,000.00	40,000.00	under implementation	2.2	3
Sustainable Management of Cultural Heritage in the Balkans in Response to Climate Change. Best practices for adaptation and intercultural	Italy	Regional	45,969.00	22,942.00	implemented and closed	2.3	13
An Evolution of the Automotive Training Centre Serbia toward the Concepts of Light and	Italy, Croatia, Slovenia	Serbia	85,954.00	39,960.00	under implementation	2.5	4
"Bridging the Culture Gap", Novi Sad 2022 - 95th International Session of the European Youth Parliament	Czech Republic, Slovenia, Italy	Regional	81,619.00	15,000.00	implemented and closed	2.5	4

project name	country of know-how provider institution	country of know-how recipient institution	total project cost (€)	CEI co- financing (€)	implemen- tation stage	PoA objec- tives	SDGs
To enhance the institutional and regulatory framework for organic food production in Albania	Italy	Albania	80,000.00	40,000.00	under implemen- tation	2.1	8
Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Constitution and EU Accession, An Academic Platform for Discussing the Options	Italy	Bosnia and Herzegovina	79,960.00	39,700.00	under implemen- tation	2.1	16
Exchange programme on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities between Albanian and Croatian Institutions of human rights and anti-	Croatia	Albania	18,310.00	9,130.00	implemen- ted and closed	2.1	10
FORKITS- FOod expeRtise and Know-how exchange on technology transfer between Italy and Serbia	Italy	Serbia	35,199.00	20,802.00	implemen- ted and closed	2.6	8
Italy-North Macedonia knowledge exchange in conservation and innovative management of cultural heritage	Italy	North Macedonia	50,470.00	25,020.00	under implemen- tation	2.3	11
MARteFund: developing cooperation in the creative sector in the Western Balkans through replication of an Italian expertise in project design and fundraising	Italy	Regional	79,920.00	39,960.00	under implemen- tation	2.5	8

EXAMPLES OF RECENT KEP PROJECTS

Sustainable Management of Cultural Heritage in the Balkans in Response to Climate Change. Best Practices for Adaptation and Intercultural Cooperation (SMACH)

The SMACH project was led by Venice International University in partnership with key institutions from Italy (City of Venice, CNR, ENEA, University of Tor Vergata), Slovenia (University of Ljubljana) and four Balkan countries (Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, University of Belgrade, University of Montenegro, University of Sarajevo School of Science and Technology). The 12-month project, concluded on 25 February 2023, was designed to respond and adapt to the pressures of climate change affecting both movable and immovable cultural heritage assets in the Balkan area. In this regard, the project aimed at promoting know-how exchange between Italy and Slovenia on one side and the four Balkan target countries on the other side by engaging cultural-heritage stakeholders working in the field of restoration, conservation, cultural management, strategic planning, climate change, sustainability and science communication according to the beneficiaries' needs. The project included the mapping of the state-of-the-art and needs concerning sustainable management of cultural heritage in relation to climate change in the target countries, the development of the project on the basis of identified gaps, the implementation of a programme over four months, with over 40 participants from the target countries, and the organisation of a high-level workshop.



FORKITS - FOod expeRtise and Know-how exchange on technology transfer between Italy and Serbia

The project FORKITS tackled the need to implement the guidelines defined within the local and European Strategies and initiatives related to the agri-food sector. The project scope was to foster collaboration among the local ecosystem of the Veneto Region (Italy) and Serbia. FORKITS involved UniSMART- the Foundation of the University of Padova and the Institute of Food Technology of Novi Sad, Vojvodina (Serbia). The project was in line with one of the priorities of the Smart Specialization Strategy of Veneto Region that focuses on providing healthy and safe food (agri-food) products. The scope of the priority was minimising environmental impacts and enhancing ecosystem services while reducing waste and ensuring adequate societal value. In this framework, the project focused on the food value chain which can be considered a strategic priority for both regions (Veneto and Vojvodina) involved. In this context, the project related to current EU policies and strategies such as the European Green Deal, the Circular Economy Action Plan, and other strategies including the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Blue Growth Strategy. The project was also designed to support the development of long-term cooperation through know-how exchange. This process was realised through the development of a common cooperation framework able to cope with local needs and priorities. It acted in a crosscutting perspective by involving enterprises, research groups, young researchers and talents.



CEI COOPERATION FUND

The multilateral CEI Cooperation Fund is provided by all Member States on an annual basis, according to an agreed scale of contributions. It supports Cooperation Activities.

Cooperation Activities

The CEI Cooperation Activities are multilateral small-scale projects such as seminars, workshops, training courses or other kinds of meetings focusing on mobility and networking. In some cases they can be linked to larger projects. They are entirely financed out of the CEI Cooperation Fund to which all Member States contribute annually. The Fund operates through calls for proposals. Since the start of its operations in 2002, the CEI Cooperation Fund has co-financed - with an amount of more than 11 million EUR – more than 1,200 Cooperation Activities for a total value of the activities amounting to about 67.5 million EUR. It is estimated that the annual mobility generated by the Cooperation Fund throughout the years of its operation is of about 5,000 people. In 2022, 49 activities were implemented (of which 25 approved in May 2022—Annex 6), including 4 activities supported in the framework of the Presidency and 1 as extraordinary support to Ukraine. The total CEI contribution for these activities amounts to almost 0.5 million EUR or about 2% of the total cost of the projects representing a value of around 2.5 million EUR (the full list of activities implemented in 2022 are outlined in the table below:

activity name	country	applicant	total estimated cost	approved CEI contribution	PoA	SDG
Trieste Film Festival 33 / Feature Launch Workshop at Eastweek/ Mid-point Shorts / TSFF Academy and CEI Award in the framework of Trieste Film Festival	Italy	ALPE ADRIA CINEMA ASSOCIATION	482,000.00	11,000.00	2.3.	none
Ecosystems services, pressures, payments, and actions – motivation required in south-eastern CEI countries (ESS - MotSE)	Serbia	Faculty of Agriculture, University of Novi Sad, Serbia	29,970.00	10,000.00	1.3.	13
The Tenth International Conference on Radiation in Various Fields of Research (RAD 2022 Conference)	Serbia	RAD Centre	57,800.00	10,000.00	2.2.	3
12th CEI Regional Forum for Health, Wellness & Spa Industry	Serbia	Cluster Wellness Serbia	19,116.90	6,000.00	2.2.	3
Equal Pay Day conference going international!	Czech Republic	Business & Professional Women CR	117,390.00	10,000.00	2.5.	8
International Conference “Geo-Hazards and Climate Change in Geoparks”	North Macedonia	Civil Association Stenae - Stenae Demir Kapija	30,080.00	10,000.00	1.3.	13
Upcelerator fully remote idea stage accelerator for startups in Eastern Europe.	Moldova	'Dreamups' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Accelerator	81,659.00	8,000.00	1.2.	4 and 8
Prague Pre-Presidency Conference 2022	Czech Republic	Institute of International Relations	35,250.00	8,000.00	2.3.	none
WHEN EAST MEETS WEST Co-Production Forum	Italy	FVG Audiovisual Fund	185,670.00	8,000.00	2.3.	none

activity name	country	applicant	total estimated cost	approved CEI contribution	PoA	SDG
Transfer of knowledge between local public authorities and citizens on climate friendly best practices of solid waste management through the use of a mobile application technology	Moldova	Public association Women in Sustainable Development of Moldova (WISDOM asso-	28,000.00	7,000.00	1.6.	11 and 13
Theatre for social activation of vulnerable social groups (working title)	Slovenia	Slovene National Theatre Maribor	31,256.62	10,000.00	2.3.	none
European Youth Network on Intercultural Dialogue and Inclusion	Bulgaria	European Youth Network for Creativity and Innovation	31,200.00	8,000.00	2.3.	none
Tenth CEI Venice Forum for Contemporary Art Curators	Italy	Trieste Contemporanea. Dialogues with the Art of Central Eastern Europe.	34,455.00	10,000.00	2.3.	none
The Conference "Strengthening Women Entrepreneurs in Rural Tourism for post COVID-19 period"	Serbia	Center for Tourism Research and Studies	32,910.00	8,000.00	1.2.	8
Final Conference of V4+WB RMA Network project	Hungary	HETFA Research Institute Ltd.	43,808.00	10,000.00	1.2.	8
Building resilience of the Gen Z and Millennials	Serbia	NEW LEADERS FOR STABILITY AND TRUST	42,050.00	8,000.00	2.4.	n/a
Promotion & support EUSDR National & Priority Areas Coordinators meeting & discussion, answering CEI AP objectives (PANACEA)	Ukraine	State Scientific & Technical Centre for inter-sectorial & regional problems of the Environmental Safety and Resource Conservation	27,660.00	8,000.00	1.5.	12
DisCo 2022: Empowering Digital and Entrepreneurial Competences through E-learning	Czech Republic	Centre for Higher Education Studies	27,229.00	10,000.00	2.5.	8
EESTEC Spring Congress 2022	Serbia	Electrical engineering students' European association – Local committee Belgrade	35,718.45	10,000.00	2.5.	8
X Spring School on "IoT, economic and management challenges for e-health integration in the enlarged Europe"	Italy	SSIC-HECE (Higher Education in Clinical Engineering) of the University of Trieste	27,045.00	10,000.00	2.2.	3
XVIII Central European Forum of Aquileia Euroregion: "Mitteleuropa: many Capital Cities, one destiny - from the barbed wire to the thread of	Italy	Mitteleuropa Cultural Association	44,410.00	8,000.00	2.3.	none
OHRID Blue Economy Summit	North Macedonia	PrimePoint DOO Skopje	31,200.00	10,000.00	1.2.	8 and 14

activity name	country	applicant	total estimated cost	approved CEI contribution	PoA	SDG
CREATE - Climate Refugees Exist: let's start to Talk about it SciEnce Diplomacy as an innovative tool to unlock the potential of dialogue with citizens and society	Italy	National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics - OGS	25,040.00	10,000.00	2.6.	horiz - 17
FESTIVAL IDENTITY 2022 – workshops for film professionals from across Europe	Czech Republic	DOC.DREAM Services / Ji.hlava IDFF	36,379.00	10,000.00	2.3.	none
Workshop on transposition and implementation of regulation 1315/13 in Montenegro	Montenegro	Ministry of Capital Investments	29,914.03	8,000.00	1.1.	11
CEI Round-Table Discussions at Vilenica and CEI Award for Young Writers	Slovenia	SLOVENE WRITERS' ASSOCIATION	70,425.00	8,000.00	2.3.	none
Breaking circular economy barriers	North Macedonia	Youth Entrepreneurial Service Foundation	18,355.00	7,510.00	1.5.	12
Boosting Social Inclusion in SEE: Policy Hackathon for Municipalities	Hungary	Union of the Robert Schuman Institute for Developing Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe	30,910.00	10,000.00	2.1.	16
Building health resilience in SEE Region through bridging science, policy and diplomacy to advance the SDG Agenda	other	South-eastern Europe Health Network Secretariat (SEEHN Secretariat)	39,470.00	10,000.00	2.2.	3
Is pandemic over? How to better address lessons learned and good practices from the Covid-19 pandemia	Italy	ITALIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH	25,605.00	10,000.00	2.2.	3
9th Central European Symposium on Plasma Chemistry (9th CESPC)	Slovakia	Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics, Comenius University in Bratislava	56,932.00	8,000.00	1.3.	13
XXII Summer Seminar for Young Public Policy Professionals "Exploring Post-COVID Recovery Scenarios for Central and Eastern Europe"	Bulgaria	Economic Policy Institute	59,615.00	10,000.00	2.1.	16
International conference on Circular Economy	Albania	Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana	36,835.00	8,000.00	1.5.	12
TRANSNATIONAL MULTILEVEL COOPERATION BETWEEN CEI MEMBERS	Slovenia	UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, FACULTY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	30,000.00	8,000.00	1.2.	8
Playing seriously: games as space of interaction, testing and intervention	Italy	SAE Institute	30,000.00	8,000.00	2.5.	4

activity name	country	applicant	total estimated cost	approved CEI contribution	PoA	SDG
Building resilient information spaces in the CEI countries	Poland	The Kosciuszko Institute Association	30,000.00	8,000.00	2.4.	
17th International Summer School "Clean energy – solution for climate changes"	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Regional Education and Information Centre for Sustainable Development in South East Europe – REIC	29,900.00	10,000.00	1.4.	7
XVI South East Europe Media Forum (SEEMF)	Serbia	South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)	113,497.52	10,000.00	2.4.	?
Contact #3 (CERIC-CEI Open Access Training, third edition) - Workshop on enhancing fuel cells research in Central Europe	other	CERIC (Central European Research Infrastructure Consortium)	37,086.50	10,000.00	1.4.	7
The 4th International symposium «Combating of illegal migration and illicit human trafficking»	Ukraine	King Danylo University	24,372.00	8,000.00	2.6.	horiz - 17
17th Summer School for Junior Anti-Corruption Practitioners from South East Europe – Bulgaria, 2022	other	Regional Anti-corruption Initiative Secretariat	32,442.16	10,000.00	2.1.	16
Two Open Weeks of Plavo Theatre 2022	Serbia	Plavo Theatre - theatre laboratory	17,275.00	6,259.00	2.3.	none
BPU11 CONGRESS International Conference of the Balkan Physical	Serbia	SEENET-MTP Centre	79,650.00	8,000.00	2.6.	horiz - 17
Young Bled Strategic Forum 2022	Slovenia	Centre for European Perspective	60,085.00	10,000.00	2.5.	horizontal
Educational Hub Ukraine in Poland	Poland/ Ukraine	Pro Futuro	15,000.00	15,000.00	extraordinary support for Ukraine	10
CEI Local and Regional Authorities in the post crisis Europe – prospects for sustainable and resilient future	Bulgaria (Presidency)	National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria	n/a	10,167.00	Presidency programme activities	horizontal
High-level expert discussion on 'Strengthening health systems to improve preparedness and quality of care	Bulgaria (Presidency)	Bulgarian Ministry of Health, CEI-ES, WHO/Europe	n/a	10,000.00	Presidency programme activities	3
Youth as a pillar for building resilient and peaceful societies	Bulgaria (Presidency)	Bulgarian Ministry of Youth and Sports	n/a	15,000.00	Presidency programme activities	16
An Integrated Concept of Connectivity for the CEI Region	Bulgaria (Presidency)		n/a	15,000.00	Presidency programme activities	11

EXAMPLES OF RECENT COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

Equal Pay Day conference

The 13th Equal Pay Day (EPD) conference, organised by the non-profit organisation Business and Professional Women CR (BPWCR), was held in Prague on 8-10 April. It offered a valuable opportunity to gain information on new trends in women's entrepreneurship and equal opportunities in order to strengthen their entrepreneurial and managerial skills as well as their empowerment. 14 women professionals from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Hungary, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia and Slovakia, who attended the conference, had the chance to get acquainted with the latest trends in promoting women's economic participation in society. They received information about good practices in sustainability, gained more insight into the investing field, and got inspiration for organising similar events in their countries. They also joined speed mentoring activities both on the side of mentors and mentees. The President and Founder of BPWCR, stated that it was a great honour for her organisation to be able to transfer its experience to other countries thanks to the CEI grant. Moreover, she informed that over the past 12 years, the EPD conference has earned the respect of experts on equal pay, diversity and inclusion, popularity for its unique atmosphere among participants and the support of partners.



X CEI-HECE Spring School on "IoT, economic and management challenges for e-health integration in the enlarged Europe"

The X edition of international the Spring School was convened from 26 August to 29 September 2022. The workshop was held at the University of Trieste, with 33 participants and 16 professors and experts attending, from a total of 9 European countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia and Ukraine). The school was organized by Bioengineering Group and Higher Education in Clinical Engineering (HECE), and received the endorsement of the International Federation of Medical and Biomedical Engineering (IFMBE), the Italian Association of Clinical Engineers (AIIC), the Italian Health Technology Assessment Society (SIHTA) and the Trieste Municipality. The programme of the X School encompassed seminars on the various aspects of Clinical Engineering: European Medical Device Regulation, Medical Software Certification, Hospital Information Systems, Innovative Biomedical Devices as well as touching most of the organizational and managerial aspects, thus providing a 360-degree view of the reality of Advances in Biomedical and Clinical Engineering in Central Europe. The gathering was also a great opportunity for participating experts to exchange views and experience on the related topics, as well as for networking among all participants.



EXAMPLES OF RECENT COOPERATION ACTIVITIES

Ohrid Blue Economy Summit

Given the important role of the Blue Economy sector, the inaugural “Ohrid Blue Economy Summit” that took place on 2 and 3 November was among the first activities of this kind to tackle the importance of the fresh-water basins, addressing the specific sustainability challenges in tourism, agriculture, manufacturing and municipal sectors. The Blue Economy is a significant part of the European Green Deal. It represents a sustainable use of water and coastal resources for economic growth and job creation, encompassing renewable energy, maritime transport, waste management, sustainable tourism and agriculture, aquaculture, bio-economy, desalination, blue-tech innovation, and robotics. The Summit, organised by PrimePoint Partners, gathered more than 120 attendees from 10 different countries. It aimed to raise awareness about economic growth and development possibilities of the Blue Economy and to address the importance and specific sustainability challenges of fresh water with a special focus on Lake Ohrid and the broader area of the Drim River basin. Throughout the 6 Summit sessions, sectoral experts speakers and moderators had the opportunity to engage and share their professional experiences, highlighting the importance of the Blue Economy in the region and use it as common ground for collaboration between sectors.



International Conference “Circular Economy: Opportunities and Challenges”

The International Conference held in Tirana on 17-18 November, served as a multiplatform where interdisciplinary sessions, panels, and working groups regarding the circular economy were presented. New solutions for green economy were also discussed. The fundamental target was to rethink manufacturing systems and citizens’ consumption habits through technological, social and organisational innovation. The conference, led by the University of Tirana and attended by the Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra (Slovakia), the Danubius University from Galati (Romania), the University of Tetovo (Republic of North Macedonia) as well as online by 16 CEI partner universities, was followed by a broader range of stakeholders, policy makers and experts. They discussed policy frameworks at the national and regional levels on pro-poor development strategies, supported accelerated investments and refined the policy-relevant messages in order to obtain sustainable development leading to reduced amounts of natural resources used, wastes disposed of in landfills, and greenhouse gas emitted to the atmosphere. The conference was concluded with a Roadmap promoting sustainable practices and mechanisms, in accordance with national policies and priorities among the CEI members based on sharing, circularity, collaboration, solidarity, resilience, opportunity and interdependence.





ANNEXES

ANNEX 1

Calendar of Events of the Montenegrin CEI Presidency 2021

Date	Place	Event
23 February	Trieste and online	1 st CNC Meeting
11 May	Trieste	2 nd CNC Meeting
16-17 May	Sofia	Parliamentary Committee Meeting
8 June	Sofia	Congress Meeting of the CEI Local Dimension
22 September	New York	Informal MFA Meeting
28 September	Trieste	CEI-WHO/Europe Joint Meeting “Strengthening Health Systems to Improve Preparedness and Quality of Care”
11 October	Sofia	High-Level Expert Meeting “Youth as a Pillar for Building Resilient and Peaceful Societies”
26 October	Strasbourg	CEI Local Dimension Informal meeting at the Council of Europe
7 November	Sofia	3 rd CNC Meeting
7 November	Sofia	Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the CEI Member States (MFA Meeting)
7 November	Sofia	CEI Economic Forum
8 December	Brussels	Expert Panel “An Integrated Concept of Connectivity for the CEI Region”
14 December	Trieste	4 th CNC Meeting

ANNEX 2

Staff of the CEI-ES

CEI-Executive Secretariat

Executive Level

Roberto Antonione <i>Secretary General</i>	Overall management of the CEI activities.
Nina Kodelja <i>Deputy Secretary General</i>	Overall management of the CEI activities; Institutional affairs; Relations with international/regional organisations.
Ivana Holoubková <i>Deputy Secretary General</i>	Overall management of the CEI activities; Parliamentary Dimension; Science Diplomacy
Zsuzsanna Király <i>Deputy Secretary General</i>	Overall management of the CEI activities; Economic Dimension; Youth Affairs.
Zoran Jovanović <i>Special Advisor to the SG (until 30 June 2023)</i>	Local Dimension.

Executive staff

Lidija Arsova <i>Senior Executive Officer</i>	Liaison with Member States (CNC and CEI Presidency); External relations; Preparation of CNC meetings, MFA Meetings and CEI Summit; Coordination of Annual Report and Plan of Action.
Barbara Fabro <i>Senior Executive Officer</i>	Coordination of CEI activities in the areas of intercultural cooperation and media, including Cooperation Activities and Feature Events in these areas; CEI Parliamentary Dimension; CEI SEEMO Award for Outstanding Merits in Journalism and other CEI Prizes/Awards.
Alessandro Lombardo <i>Senior Executive Officer</i>	Head of Office - Project Management Office: programming and coordination of CEI projects and initiatives funded by the EU and the Region FVG; Coordination of CEI activities in the areas of scientific cooperation, science diplomacy and innovation, including Cooperation Activities in these areas; CEI Executive Secretariat's financial management.
Tania Pibernik <i>Senior Executive Officer</i>	Communication and media relations including CEI website's news, social media and CEI newsletter; English reviser/copy-editor of CEI website, publications and official documents; corporate image.
Paola Plancher <i>Senior Executive Officer</i>	Supervision of procedural requirements and administrative evaluation of CEI Cooperation Activities.
Slavena Radovanovic <i>Senior Executive Officer</i>	Administrative and financial support within the cooperation with ARFVG; Cooperation Activities in the areas of Climate and People Empowerment; activities related to the CEI Youth Agenda; coordination of Young Officials from CEI Member States and of intern recruitment.
Ugo Poli <i>Consultant</i>	Focal Point for migrations and anti-corruption.

Office of the CEI Fund at the EBRD

Elisabetta Dovier <i>Programme Manager</i>	Management of the CEI Fund at the EBRD: Technical Cooperation Programme and the Know-how Exchange Programme.
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ANNEX 2

Staff of the CEI-ES

Programme/EU-funded projects support staff

Anna Marconato <i>Head of Finance and Operations</i>	Responsible for planning and monitoring overall financial and administrative management, including procurement and supervision of staff, of projects funded by external sources; Project Manager of ICARUS, SUSTOURISMO.
Gian Matteo Apuzzo <i>Senior Programme Manager</i>	Project Manager of ACSELL, Digital Health Europe, TAAFE, IDEAHL; Focal Point for health strategies and emergencies response.
Paolo Dileo <i>Project Manager</i>	Project Manager of MIMOSA, ADRIPASS PLUS.
Peter Canciani <i>Project Manager</i>	Project Manager of FORTIS, INTERCONNECT PLUS, BIOLOC, GREENME UP.
Ana Sinkovic <i>Project Officer</i>	Day-to-day support to project management and reporting.
Alice Pappas <i>Project Officer</i>	Day-to-day support to project management and reporting.
Ana Aligrudić <i>Project Officer</i>	Day-to-day support to project management and reporting.
Stefania Silvestri <i>Project Officer</i>	Day-to-day support to project management and reporting.
Gabriele Mingolla <i>Project Assistant</i>	Assistance to project implementation.

Cooperation with ARFVG

Carlo Fortuna <i>Programme Manager</i>	Implementation of Joint Work Programmes.
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Administrative staff

Roberta Milano <i>Senior Administrative Officer /Accountant</i>	Head of Human Resources; responsible for Personnel Administration and General Services; Accounting; Cooperation on budgetary issues: overall financial planning, monitoring and reporting of Italian Contribution (L. 286/1997 and 142/2003) and overall financial planning, monitoring and reporting of contributions provided by the Region FVG (LR 11/1996, 18/2011 and 19/2000).
Loretta Brcic <i>Senior Administrative Officer</i>	Assistance to SG; assistance to accounting; assistance to administration of personnel issues; supervision on relations with suppliers; supervision on conference services.
Antonio Monteduro <i>Senior Administrative Officer</i>	Archives and Protocol; switchboard; management of the official CEI e-mail address; any other office management tasks delegated by the administrative office.
Frida Cottic <i>Administrative Officer</i>	Assistance to SG; travel desk for SG, ASG and DSG; relations with suppliers and MFA with regards to ID cards, passports and plates; administrative support to CEI-ES; overall office maintenance; hospitality and conference services, including internal meetings; errands.

ANNEX 3*Contributions to the Budget 2022 of the CEI-ES*

<i>Type of contribution</i>	€
Contribution from Italian MFA (including contribution to Cooperation Fund)	1,250,053.00
Contribution from Autonomous Region Friuli Venezia Giulia (ARFVG), including for the implementation of CEI-ARFVG Joint Work Programmes and Projects	330,931.15
Contribution from Member States to CEI Cooperation Fund (excluding Italy)	256,310.00
EU Grants and Refunds, in the framework of EU-funded projects	1,173,661.66

ANNEX 4

TC Projects Approved in 2022

n.	earmark document number	project name	country of operation	sector of operation	committed €	expected related investment (€ million)
1	to be assigned	North Macedonia: Rail Corridor VIII, Phase 3 - Economic, E&S and GET assessment	North Macedonia	Sustainable Transport	250,000.00	94
2	50008879	OSHEE COVID-19 Response - Smart Grid Development Road-	Albania	Sustainable Energy	220,000.00	70
3	50008812	Support for the Implementation of Renewable Energy Auctions in Montenegro	Montenegro	Sustainable Energy	250,000.00	not applicable
4	to be assigned	Feasibility study for Albania-Montenegro 110 kV overhead transmission line connection Dajc (Kosmac) - Briska Gora (Ulcinj)	Regional (Albania and Montenegro)	Sustainable Energy	250,000.00	to be determined
5	50009263	Brcko District: Electrical Grid Expansion - Due Diligence & Advance Procurement	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Sustainable Energy	150,000.00	10,2
6	50009267	Youth in Business Programme in the Western Balkans	Regional (Western Balkans)	Enterprise Development	1,500,000.00	100
7	50009034	Serbia: High Speed Rail Belgrade to Nis - Serbian Railways Infrastructure: Corporate Governance Action Plan	Serbia	Sustainable Transport	150,000.00	500
8	50009035	Serbian Rail Sector Reform and Regulatory Capacity Building	Serbia	Sustainable Transport	400,000.00	

ANNEX 5

KEP Projects Approved in 2022

n.	reference number	project name	country of know-how provider	country of know-how recipient	total project cost (€)	CEI co-financing (€)
1	304.4.001-22	North Macedonia: Advisory Support for Strengthening the Capacities for Diaspora Engagement and Evidence-based Migration Policy	IOM	North Macedonia	80,000.00	40,000.00
2	304.4.015-22	Programming the EU Cohesion Policy: Exchange Programme on Chapter 22 in Serbia and Monte-	Italy	Serbia, Montenegro	79,718.00	39,808.00
3	304.4.022-22	Assessing the effectiveness and affordability of tariff-setting methodologies in covering drinking water and wastewater services	Italy	Regional	121,800.00	39,400.00
4	304.4.029-22	Reducing the impact of earthquakes in Albania through collaboration: Computing seismic hazard to support the update of Albania's	Italy	Albania	66,698.00	26,698.00
5	304.4.055-22	Executive Program "Countering Corruption within Public Admini-	Italy	North Macedonia	82,820.00	39,820.00
6	304.4.065-22	Harmonising the Regulatory FRAMEwork for the ORGanic food production in Montenegro with the Regulation (EU) 2018/848 -	Italy	Montenegro	74,700.00	37,350.00
7	304.4.068-22	Strengthening ties and learning between the twinned municipalities of Centar Sarajevo and Reggio Emilia	Italy	Bosnia and Herzegovina	80,000.00	40,000.00
8	304.4.070-22	"HABI.tat, LAND.scape, forest and WATER managemet: experiences in the mirror between from Italy to Moldova	Italy	Moldova	78,350.00	39,175.00

ANNEX 6

Cooperation Activities Approved in 2022

no.	reference No.	title	country	institution	total cost (€)	CEI grant (€)
1	302.5.2022.029	X Spring School on "IoT, economic and management challenges for e-health integration in the enlarged Europe"	Italy	SSIC-HECE (Higher Education in Clinical Engineering) of the University of Trieste	27,045.00	10,000.00
2	302.5.2022.033	XVIII Central European Forum of Aquileia Euroregion: "Mitteleurope: many Capital Cities, one destiny - from the barbed wire to the thread of history"	Italy	Mitteleuropa Cultural Association	44,410.00	8,000.00
3	302.5.2022.035	OHRID Blue Economy Summit	North Macedonia	PrimePoint DOO Skopje	31,200.00	10,000.00
4	302.5.2022.037	CREATE - Climate Refugees Exist: let's stArt to Talk about it SciEnce Diplomacy as an innovative tool to unlock the potential of dialogue with citizens and society	Italy	National Institute of Oceanography and Applied Geophysics - OGS	25,040.00	10,000.00
5	302.5.2022.039	FESTIVAL IDENTITY 2022 – workshops for film professionals from across Europe	Czech Republic	DOC.DREAM Services / Ji.hlava IDFF	36,379.00	10,000.00
6	302.5.2022.042	Workshop on transposition and implementation of regulation 1315/13 in Montenegro	Montenegro	Ministry of Capital Investments	29,914.03	8,000.00
7	302.5.2022.044	CEI Round-Table Discussions at Vilenica and CEI Award for Young Writers	Slovenia	SLOVENE WRITERS' ASSOCIATION	70,425.00	8,000.00
8	302.5.2022.046	Breaking circular economy barriers	North Macedonia	Youth Entrepreneurial Service Foundation	18,355.00	7,510.00
9	302.5.2022.049	Boosting Social Inclusion in SEE: Policy Hackathon for Municipalities	Hungary	Union of the Robert Schuman Institute for Developing Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe	30,910.00	10,000.00

ANNEX 6

Cooperation Activities Approved in 2022

no.	reference No.	title	country	institution	total cost (€)	CEI grant (€)
10	302.5.2022.053	Building health resilience in SEE Region through bridging science, policy and diplomacy to advance the SDG Agenda	other	South-eastern Europe Health Network Secretariat (SEEHN Secretariat)	39,470.00	10,000.00
11	302.5.2022.054	Is pandemic over? How to better address lessons learned and good practices from the Covid-19 pandemic	Italy	ITALIAN NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH	25,605.00	10,000.00
12	302.5.2022.055	9th Central European Symposium on Plasma Chemistry (9th CESPC)	Slovakia	Faculty of Mathematics, Physics and Informatics, Comenius University in Bratislava	56,932.00	8,000.00
13	302.5.2022.056	XXII Summer Seminar for Young Public Policy Professionals "Exploring Post-COVID Recovery Scenarios for Central and Eastern Europe"	Bulgaria	Economic Policy Institute	59,615.00	10,000.00
14	302.5.2022.057	International conference on Circular Economy	Albania	Faculty of Economics, University of Tirana	36,835.00	8,000.00
15	302.5.2022.062	TRANSNATIONAL MULTILEVEL COOPERATION BETWEEN CEI MEMBERS	Slovenia	UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA, FACULTY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION	30,000.00	8,000.00
16	302.5.2022.064	Playing seriously: games as space of interaction, testing and intervention	Italy	SAE Institute	30,000.00	8,000.00
17	302.5.2022.065	Building resilient information spaces in the CEI countries	Poland	The Kosciuszko Institute Association	30,000.00	8,000.00
18	302.5.2022.069	17th International Summer School "Clean energy – solution for climate changes"	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Regional Education and Information Centre for Sustainable Development in South East Europe – REIC	29,900.00	10,000.00

ANNEX 6

Cooperation Activities Approved in 2022

no.	reference No.	title	country	institution	total cost (€)	CEI grant (€)
19	302.5.2022.071	XVI South East Europe Media Forum (SEEMF)	Serbia	South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)	113,497.52	10,000.00
20	302.5.2022.072	Contact #3 (CERIC-CEI Open Access Training, third edition) - Workshop on enhancing fuel cells research in Central Europe	other	CERIC (Central European Research Infrastructure Consortium)	37,086.50	10,000.00
21	302.5.2022.074	The 4th International symposium «Combating of illegal migration and illicit human trafficking»	Ukraine	King Danylo University	24,372.00	8,000.00
22	302.5.2022.075	17th Summer School for Junior Anti-Corruption Practitioners from South East Europe – Bulgaria, 2022	other	Regional Anti-corruption Initiative Secretariat	32,442.16	10,000.00
23	302.5.2022.079	Two Open Weeks of Plavo Theatre 2022	Serbia	Plavo Theatre - theatre laboratory	17,275.00	6,259.00
24	302.5.2022.088	BPU11 CONGRESS International Conference of the Balkan Physical Union	Serbia	SEENET-MTP Centre	79,650.00	8,000.00
25	302.5.2022.090	Young Bled Strategic Forum 2022	Slovenia	Centre for European Perspective	60,085.00	10,000.00

