



Permanent Mission of Italy
UN - New York

UN High-Level Political Forum 2023

Panel discussion on “Regional cooperation and acceleration of the SDGs implementation: The Role of the Central European Initiative (CEI)”

18 July h. 6.30-8.00 pm, UN Headquarters - New York
Conference Room 5

Concept Note

Background

Last year’s High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development (July 2022) highlighted the importance to “mark the beginning of a new phase of accelerated progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals”, as called by the UN Secretary General. The 2023 SDG Summit to be convened in September, during the United Nations General Assembly high-level week, will thus mark the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This year’s HLPF (July 2023) will pave the way towards the key leaders’ discussions also supporting the mid-term review of the implementation of the SDGs.

This follows the previous calls (e.g. September 2019), when the UN Secretary-General addressed all sectors of society to mobilize for a decade of action on three levels: global action to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals; local action embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; and people action, including by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations.

In the meantime, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged the progress in the overall attainment of the SDGs and exacerbated the existing challenges and inequalities. The pandemic and its impact on all 17 SDGs have shown that what began as a health crisis has quickly become a human and socio-economic crisis, with unprecedented consequences for the societies. This makes the SDGs implementation all the more urgent and necessary, through relaunched efforts to deliver.

In this respect, the 2023 High Level Political Forum under the theme "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels" will offer a major opportunity to review advancements and identify gaps, with special regard to the implementation of SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals).

As established by the UN Charter, regional and sub-regional arrangements are called to complement and support UN efforts in the maintenance of international peace and security. Moreover, the UN Agenda 2030 recognizes the pivotal role of the regional cooperation in translating the global goals into sustainable development realities. In this regard, intergovernmental regional organisations are essential in complementing and supporting UN efforts to promote cooperation transcending national borders, thus substantially contributing to the achievement of the SDGs, through furthering transboundary actions and regional efforts.

Against this background, this side-event aims at highlighting the specific contribution of the Central European Initiative (CEI), offering an opportunity to share experiences and lessons learned in the implementation of the SDGs and to consider the possibility to adapt some of the tools and practices CEI has developed to other regional contexts, with a specific focus on initiatives related to the SDGs under review during the HLPF. Moreover, given its size and nature as a multilateral intergovernmental forum, the CEI has a great potential to assist in the global efforts, thus determining large regional cohesion and future progress, towards the acceleration of the implementation of the SDGs.

The Central European Initiative

The CEI, currently chaired by the Republic of Moldova, is one of the largest intergovernmental regional organization in Europe, bringing together at the same table 17 Countries (Republic of Albania, Republic of Belarus-suspended, 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) from Central, South East and East Europe area, encompassing the geographical region from the Baltic, to the Adriatic and the Black Seas. This unique cross-regional footprint of the CEI is also complemented by other significant feature bringing together both EU Member States and EU candidate countries.

Since 2011, CEI has an observer status at the United Nations' General Assembly. On this basis, the General Assembly adopts by consensus a biennial Resolution on the Cooperation between the United Nations and the CEI, the latter being adopted on 21 November 2022 (A/RES/77/19). This Resolution acknowledges the CEI's commitment in upholding the same values as the United Nations; the important role the CEI plays at intergovernmental, parliamentary, economic and local levels, in strengthening multilateralism; and as a promoter of political dialogue and flexible and pragmatic platform for regional cooperation and sustainable development of its member States also through implementing tangible projects and programmes and establishing partnerships. It also highlights the CEI's efforts in addressing the current challenges related to climate and the coronavirus disease (COVID -19) pandemic. With regard to the latter, it especially underlines the cooperation established between the Initiative and the World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe (WHO/EUROPE), through the establishment of the joint Task Force and in particular, the joint endorsement of the WHO road map for health and well-being in the Western Balkans (2021–2025) at the Summit of the Heads of Government of the CEI Member States under the Montenegrin CEI Presidency in 2021.

The document also recognizes the commitment of the Initiative to contribute to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and acknowledges, in this context, that the CEI Plan of Action (PoA) 2021–2023 was elaborated in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as the efforts made so far in support of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and the continuous commitment of the Initiative in keeping up with the pace towards achieving the 2030 Agenda (OP 1 and OPs 6 to 8);

The goals embedded in the PoA of the CEI stem from the challenges faced by its member States as well as the geographical region. Most of CEI activities in implementing the CEI PoA at the same time contribute to the implementation of the SDGs.

The CEI promotes cooperation in all topics tackled by the 2023 HLPF. It places a significant focus on the acceleration of the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). It has also been focusing on carrying out concrete actions aimed at implementing the SDGs under review, in particular, SDG 6 - promoting the access to suitable infrastructure and services, including the provision of high-quality and availability of drinking water, and the development of adequate waste and wastewater treatment facilities (CEI PoA 1.6.), SDG 7 - promoting clean energy, in particular clean energy research and technology, including renewable energy, energy efficiency, low carbon energy sources and advanced and cleaner fossil-fuel technology, as well as smart energy systems, and the putting into place of regulatory mechanisms for renewable energy (PoA 1.4.), SDG 9 - strengthening transport networks (PoA 1.1.) and boosting innovation and entrepreneurship (PoA 1.2.), SDG 11 - encouraging smart communities (PoA 1.6.). SDG 17 is a cross-cutting issue in almost all CEI activities. Moreover, the CEI experience is focused on fostering synergies among various SDGs.

Under the Moldovan Presidency 2023, the CEI program puts emphasis - with targeted initiatives and high-level events during this year – on innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17).

Aim of the event

The main objective of the panel discussion is to share and exchange knowledge and experiences regarding good practices of regional partnership, such as is the case of the CEI in the delivery of SDGs. The added value of the CEI experience can be seen through its large membership, the focus on sharing of knowledge and capacity building, as well as CEI's multi-stakeholder dimension, regional and transnational activities and instruments, including strategic partnerships with other important actors. On one hand, the intergovernmental pillar is the backbone of its political dialogue, on the other, the parliamentary, economic and local dimensions allow for enhanced multilateral dialogue also through these constituencies. The instruments at CEI, as well as its projects and activities, foster the participation of civil society, as well as cooperation of local and regional actors.

The event is also inspired by the Study published in 2020 “Contribution of CEI to UN Agenda 2030 and its implementation in CEI Member States”, with inputs by all CEI member States on how UN Agenda 2030 and its SDGs have been integrated into country strategies and institutional arrangement, as well as by the conference organized by the CEI-Executive Secretariat in 2021 on “Sustainable Development Goals decade of action – exchange of experiences, best practices and current challenges in Sustainable Development Goal implementation, role of regional cooperation and partnerships”. Both activities were a follow-up of the side-event under the Italian CEI Presidency on the occasion of the HLPF 2019.

The panel discussion will therefore showcase the overall CEI approach, especially its experiences and practices in:

- engaging a wide variety of stakeholders (Governments, Parliaments, local institutions, private sector, civil society, universities and academia, media, young people) in policies and activities related to the SDGs;
- supporting activities also through flexible and innovative financial instruments aimed at the implementation of the SDGs, and through establishing partnerships with other international and regional (intergovernmental) organizations (special attention would be given to the partnership with the WHO/Europe);
- presenting selected CEI flagship initiatives, relevant for the purpose of the HLPF 2023.

The event will also provide an opportunity to further the discussion on how to improve synergies and cooperation between regional organizations and the United Nations as well as among regional and sub-regional organizations, in the framework of the common effort to advance the SDGs and promote regional integration.

Leading questions

- Considering the mid-point of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which complementary actions in addition to the UN and governments' led process could be considered useful?
- Can regional and sub-regional organizations and partnerships, also bringing together different stakeholders such as local communities, youth, civil society, increase their contribution to UN efforts aimed at accelerating the implementation of the SDGs?
- What are the lessons learned stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences for the acceleration of the SDGs implementation to foster more resilient societies?
- Which best practices can be drawn from CEI's experience?