Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI)

Bucharest, 6 November 2026

Joint Statement

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative (CEI) gathered in Bucharest on 6 November 2026 under the theme "Closer in the region, stronger in Europe",

Expressing our commitment to the strategic goals embedded in CEI's mission: fostering progress toward full European integration and supporting the sustainable development of the CEI region,

Confirming our commitment to regional cooperation, good neighbourly relations, mutual trust and reconciliation across the region, as an indispensable part of a free, democratic, peaceful, stable and united Europe based on common values and principles,

Recognising connectivity as a cornerstone of regional cooperation and European integration, encompassing physical, institutional and people-to-people links,

Reaffirming our joint commitment to address actively the threats and challenges arising from the current geopolitical environment while fully upholding the international law, UN Charter, human rights and fundamental freedoms, sovereignty and territorial integrity, democratic values, justice and the rule of law,

Reiterating our unwavering support to Ukraine as we approach five years of the Russian Federation's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine and thirteen years since the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine,

We state the following:

1. Closer in the region, stronger in Europe

We reaffirm that **Europe is stronger when its countries and regions are stronger, more connected and more closely cooperating**.

We emphasise that **closer cooperation in our region is not an end in itself, but a means to build a more resilient Europe,** especially in a period of profound geopolitical change, fragmentation and uncertainty that requires stronger regional links and a greater capacity to act together.

We commit to **making better use of the CEI** as a bridging platform for practical cooperation, bringing countries, institutions, businesses, local communities and people closer together, sharing experience and expertise, and turning common challenges into common solutions.

We emphasise the importance of bringing cooperation closer to citizens. We reaffirm that **the European project must be visible where people live and work**, including through stronger local and regional cooperation, mobility, culture, education and opportunities for young people.

2. Regional cooperation as a driver of European integration

We reaffirm that **regional cooperation and European integration shall advance hand in hand**. *We emphasise* that cooperation across borders can accelerate reforms, strengthen institutional capacity, foster convergence and prepare societies and economies for deeper integration with the European Union.

We reaffirm the overarching importance of the future **EU membership** of the Western Balkans, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. *We underline* that the merit-based EU enlargement, is a **geostrategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity** across the continent. *We recognize* the transformative impact of the accession process and stress the importance of sustained commitment by both EU candidates and the European Union.

We encourage our members, candidates for EU membership, to **maintain the pace of reforms** and to meet the established criteria and negotiation benchmarks. *We emphasise* that, **when the necessary criteria are met, the European Union and its Member States are expected to deliver on their commitments and move the accession process forward without delay**. *We underline* that the credibility of the enlargement policy depends on both sides delivering on their responsibilities.

We support a **merit-based, credible and predictable accession process**, in which progress is determined by the fulfilment of clear criteria and negotiation benchmarks. *We also welcome* further opportunities for **gradual integration**, allowing EU candidates to benefit from closer participation in the European project as they advance on their path towards membership, while underlining that gradual integration shall complement, and not substitute, the accession process and the objective of full EU membership.

We acknowledge, in this context, the recent publication by the European Commission of the **tailored roadmaps for the most advanced candidate countries in order to advance the process**.

We also acknowledge that the **alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)** remains a key aspect of the EU integration process and a strong expression of the clear strategic choice of its partners.

We recognise the CEI as particularly well placed to contribute to this process. *We emphasise* that its Member States bring together EU members and candidates, creating a unique space in which **European integration can be facilitated by the practical regional cooperation**.

We strive for **stronger synergies** between the CEI and relevant EU policies, programmes and instruments, while fostering closer dialogue with EU institutions.

3. Working together for a more developed, connected and resilient Europe

We commit to strengthening cooperation especially in areas where **regional action can directly contribute to European convergence, resilience and competitiveness**.

We seek to strengthen the **role of CEI in fostering economic cooperation**, by bringing together local and central authorities, business communities and organisations, academia and experts, to shape an agenda based on economic interconnectivity and security.

We emphasise that **connectivity** - including transport, energy, digital transformation institutional and people-to-people links - is a **strategic asset**, considering the CEI region's strategic position **at the intersection of the Adriatic, Baltic and Black Seas and the major European connectivity corridors**.

We commit to supporting efforts to connect the region more effectively with European networks and the EU Single Market, including through **cross-border infrastructure and projects of regional significance**, such as exploiting indigenous resources, LNG infrastructure and North–South gas and electricity interconnections. In this context, we underline the importance of diversifying energy sources, suppliers and routes, and strengthening the security of energy supply throughout the region. *We also emphasize* the potential of **connectivity projects** such as the Vertical Corridor, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor) and India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), Trieste-Ljubljana-Zagreb-Belgrade railway and timely completion of Corridor 8, as well as all other complementary European and global connectivity initiatives that impact the region.

We value the **synergies with the EU connectivity programmes and instruments**, notably the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), TEN-T and TEN-E, as well as Western Balkans Investment Framework and EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes and welcome the contribution of the EU's Global Gateway strategy to diversifying routes, increasing trade flows and reducing freight transit times.

We commit to strengthening **democratic and information resilience**, in full respect of freedom of expression and fundamental rights, including through closer regional cooperation to address foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) and disinformation, (which pose significant threats to our shared information space. In this context, we welcome the recent decision to extend cooperation under the **European Centre for Democratic Resilience, as part of the European Democracy Shield,** to EU candidate countries and potential candidates, with a view to enhancing democratic resilience and fighting FIMI, through enhanced information-sharing, mutual learning and coordinated responses.

We underline the importance of regional cooperation in upholding the **rule of law and public trust**, strengthening **resilient institutions**, and **combating organised crime and corruption**. *We encourage* cooperation among relevant institutions and stakeholders, including through the Falcone–Borsellino Programme.

We reaffirm the importance of the **CEI's role as an observer at the United Nations General Assembly** and its longstanding contribution to the promotion of peace, security, respect for international law and of the principles of the UN Charter and we look forward the adoption of the Resolution on the cooperation between the United Nations and the CEI during the 81st session of the UN General Assembly.

We reaffirm our commitment to the full implementation of the **United Nations 2030 Agenda** and the achievement of its **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),** and *we commit* to strengthening cooperation to foster inclusive and **sustainable economic growth,** promote **innovation** and advance the **clean, energy and digital transitions** to strengthen competitiveness and enhance energy security. In this context*, we underline* the importance of accelerating implementation through an **integrated approach** addressing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, by strengthening cooperation among governments, international organisations, academia, research institutions and the private sector, including through the exchange of experience and the sharing of good practices, while strengthening policy coherence.

We *recognise* **water resilience** as an important cross-border issue, especially after this summer dramatically low water levels in the Danube River Basin and their implications for the region, requiring strengthened

regional cooperation, including in addressing water scarcity, droughts, floods and other water-related challenges, and promoting the sustainable management of water resources.

4. Ukraine: solidarity, recovery and European integration

We reaffirm our **unwavering support for Ukraine**'s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, extending to its territorial sea, and *we call* for an immediate end of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which continues to cause immense suffering and casualties among the civilian population, as well as harmful impact on global commons like food security and the freedom of navigation.

We stress **Ukraine's inherent right for self-defence** according to the Article 51 of UN Charter, in response to Russia's ongoing war of aggression. *We support* a **comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine** based on the principles of UN Charter and international law, and underpinned by robust and credible security guarantees for Ukraine. Such a peace must ensure accountability and provide for swift and comprehensive solutions to all outstanding humanitarian issues, including the return of Ukrainian children from Russia.

We continue to condemn **Russia's continued missile and drone attacks** on Ukraine, affecting the civilian population, energy facilities and critical civilian infrastructure and the resulting humanitarian consequences to people deprived of the essential services, including electricity, heating, water and medical care. Repeated violations of the national airspace, territorial waters and exclusive economic zones of several CEI Member States, including in the Black Sea, are unacceptable. In this context, *we remain seriously concerned* for the consequences of the escalatory behaviour and the continued military actions.

We emphasise that support for Ukraine must extend beyond the immediate, most urgent needs. *We reaffirm* that **Ukraine's successful reforms, its recovery, reconstruction and European integration** are inseparable from the future of the wider region and the security and stability of Europe. *We commit* to contributing to this process by strengthening regional cooperation in connectivity, energy, infrastructure, local development, institutional capacity, economic cooperation and resilience. *We also recall* the importance of measures aimed at further consolidating the EU-Ukraine Solidarity Lanes, which are vital for sustainable grain exports towards global markets.

We underline the importance of freedom and safety of navigation, *call for* **ensuring safe and unimpeded maritime trade** in the Black Sea and *encourage* **continued efforts to facilitate Ukraine's exports**, including through enhanced transit and transshipment capacity.

We encourage relevant regional and international stakeholders to **join efforts and coordinate their contributions to Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction**, in order to maximise impact, avoid duplication and advance shared European objectives.

5. A CEI ready for the next decade

We positively acknowledge that since its inception, the CEI has been driving economic and social development as well as building trust, cooperation and bridges across a changing Europe and *we highlight*, in this context, the **celebration of 30th anniversary since the establishment of the Executive Secretariat at the Trieste Conference in March**, the Chairs' Statement adopted on that occasion, as well as the policy paper of the *Istituto Affari Internazionali*, containing valuable reflections on the CEI's future. *We emphasise* the need to translate this accumulated experience into a **renewed commitment to our shared priorities.**

We commit to **further strengthening the CEI,** making it more strategic, more visible, more connected to the European agenda and more focused on results. Thus, we have agreed to revitalize the CEI Summit as a high-

level political meeting composed of Heads of Government of the Member States or, in case of specific national arrangements, of Heads of State.

We welcome the adoption of the **CEI Plan of Action 2027–2030** as an important step towards advancing this objective. *We commit* to using the Plan of Action to sharpen the Initiative's priorities, strengthen its project-driven dimension and ensure that its instruments respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities of the coming decade.

We emphasise that the CEI should focus its political and operational resources where it can make the greatest difference: **European integration, connectivity, resilience, sustainable development, rule of law competitiveness, energy security and people-to-people cooperation**. In this context*, we welcome* the significant results achieved through the **CEI Cooperation Fund**, which translate shared priorities into concrete regional cooperation projects and we *adopt* the **new scale of contributions to the CEI Cooperation Fund**, aimed at strengthening its capacity to support cooperation activities in line with the priorities of the Organisation. Equally, *we commend* the **CEI Fund at the EBRD** financed by Italy, which supports investment, technical cooperation, know-how exchange and sustainable economic development across the region.

We commit to strengthening **synergies with the European Union and with other regional and international partners,** while making better use of the CEI's networks, expertise and instruments. In this context, *we commend* the efforts of the Executive Secretariat to enable the CEI to play a stronger operational role in implementing EU-supported actions and projects in areas of shared priority, building on its regional presence, established networks and capacity to connect political objectives with local needs. *We support* the objective of the CEI-Executive Secretariat's accreditation as an implementing body for European delegated cooperation by EU funds.

We encourage **increased exchanges and synergies** between the CEI and other **regional cooperation platforms**, such as South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and its operational arm, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), and the EU **macroregional strategies** for Adriatic-Ionian (EUSAIR) and Danube (EUSDR) regions, focusing cooperation where working together creates added value. Such cooperation should promote resource pooling, complementarity and joint initiatives in areas of common interest, delivering more coherent and effective support for the region's resilience, connectivity and sustainable economic growth, while reinforcing contributions to shared European objectives.

We envisage a CEI that brings the region **closer together**, **strengthens its voice in Europe** and **turns cooperation into action.**

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We express our high appreciation to the **Romanian CEI Presidency** for the wide range of activities undertaken throughout its mandate – the list of all activities is annexed – and for the excellent organisation of today's meeting in Bucharest.

We thank Secretary General of the **CEI-Executive Secretariat** Franco dal Mas and his excellent team for their dedicated work.

We express our best wishes and full support to **Ukraine as CEI Presidency for 2027**.