CEI’s current commitment towards the migration crisis

The Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the CEI Member States, at their meeting in Ohrid on 15 June, expressed their strong concern regarding the threats affecting the area of Central Europe resulting from the radicalisation processes leading to acts of international terrorism. In this context, the Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to combating the causes that are at its root, and to strengthening cooperation towards global security. In particular, they agreed upon the urgent need to counter - with necessary measures - the escalation of illegal migration and human trafficking.

Based on this indication and on those weeks of emergency - resulting from the massive arrival of refugees and asylum seekers from war zones in the Middle East – during the second half of August the CEI Secretariat in Trieste launched an Extraordinary Call for co-financing Cooperation Activities related to migration and security issues, through the CEI Cooperation Fund, financed by all CEI MS. The idea was to co-finance, three / four small projects covering the management of migratory crisis and to be implemented during the first months of next year. The overall financial support amounted to € 50,000, based on a maximum contribution of € 15,000 per project and up to 50% of total eligible costs for each activity.

Already during the promotion of the call (the deadline was 30 October), CEI noticed a great interest, both institutional and "non-governmental", in this opportunity to share at transnational level experiences and methodologies with regard to the management of refugees, including measures for their registration and security, health care, and the subsequent local integration of asylum seekers and migrants in general. Eleven out of twenty proposals resulted as eligible for co-financing, with a total requested contribution amounting to almost 150,000 EUR!

The applicants were organisations and associations such as the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), the inter-ministerial Balkan Initiative for Migrants and Refugees (MARRI), the Foundation of the NATO Defense College and the Association for Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), seated in Strasbourg; and a number of other government agencies and non-governmental organisations such as the Ukrainian University of Ivano-Frankivsk, the Institut für den Donaurum und Mitteleuropa in Vienna, the European Movement in Macedonia, the Centre for Economic and Social
Studies in Albania, the International Solidarity Consortium (ICS), which manages much of the refugee reception programmes in Trieste and Friuli Venezia Giulia, and other organisations in Slovenia and Serbia.

Although not meeting the mandatory submission requirements, other very good projects reached the Secretariat, submitted by Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as by other organisations in Serbia and Slovenia. We have therefore elaborated a record of stakeholders and expertise in the area of migrant reception services, which could constitute a basis for the creation of an international network, to be used in the framework of other European programmes.

In order to be able to support - in the short run - as many proposals as possible, the Committee of the National Coordinators of the CEI approved on 17 December 2015 all the list of the projects eligible for co-financing upon the proposal of the CEI Secretariat to refinance the budget of the extraordinary call by committing remaining resources of the CEI Cooperation Fund: therefore an overall amount of 96,000 EUR has been allocated in order to support the eleven selected projects. Most of these will start their implementation phase during the first three months of 2016. The total value of these activities amounts to 450,000 EUR.

The Assembly of the CEI Parliamentary dimension rallying in Skopje on 10 December 2015 largely focused its proceedings on the issue of migrations and approved a Final Declaration where six out of the fifteen final statements state the common auspices of the CEI MPs for a shared responsibility of the Governments and civil society organizations in front of the crisis “through a coordinated cross-border approach in a European spirit of solidarity, as the only possible solution for a collective and permanent action; in this regard recalling the 17 Points Action Plan adopted on 25th October 2015 in Brussels”.

The PD Final Declaration with relevant highlights is attached.

The Macedonian CEI Presidency organised on 16 December in Skopje an international conference focused on the security issues entangled with the migration flows. The participation of the Ministries of Interior and of Foreign Affairs of most CEI Member States, international organisations such as the OSCE, IOM, MARRI, the UNHCR, and representatives of Greece, Kosovo*, Turkey and other countries demonstrates how the CEI is able to facilitate dialogue and consultations both at intergovernmental and civil society level. It also shows how the CEI can achieve, quickly, small/medium-scale results of great relevance for Europe.

A final press release and the shared Conclusions of the Conference are attached.
The urgency of issues related to the migration crisis as well as the importance of supporting a rapid adjustment of response capacity in all the CEI Member States, has also brought about other initiatives:

1. the Director of MARRI, Ambassador Tamara Mugosa, was invited to the meeting of the CEI Committee of National Coordinators in Trieste on 18 September to illustrate the activities of its Regional Centre in Skopje. A Memorandum of Understanding between CEI and MARRI was then finalized since beginning of October and was signed on 16 December 2015 in Skopje (MK);

2. the CEI has initiated talks with the Competence Centre for Macro-Regional Strategies of the Directorate General for Regional Policy of the European Commission, and with bodies of the EUSDR and EUSAIR on updating the macro-regional strategies and their transnational cooperation programmes in view of including additional capabilities for reception and integration of refugees and asylum seekers in regional development policies;

3. it is foreseen to strengthening the staff dedicated to the CEI Focal Point for Migration, created in September, in order to enhance the elaboration of European projects covering this issue.

Focal Point Migration
CEI Executive Secretariat

Trieste, 21 December 2015