

CEI-PRAISE: a Framework Programme to Promote Research and Innovation through Centres of Scientific Excellence and Advanced Research Groups in Member Countries

Science and Technology are called to play a crucial role in order to support growth and overall economic development in 18 Member Countries of the Central European Initiative. Accordingly, Science and Technology are stated among the priorities of the CEI Plan of Action 2014-2016 adopted by the Heads of Government in December 2013. In this perspective, **CEI-PRAISE** is a **Framework Programme** for the promotion of research, technology transfer and innovation through centres and other advanced groups of scientific excellence, expressing the best potential of the communities in these countries. This Programme is based on the **strengths of the institutions belonging to the CEI Science and Technology Network** which are either international by statute, or Italian by statute and international by vocation. More specifically, they have several decades of experience in international cooperation in the fields of physics, geophysics, biology, biotechnology, chemistry, mathematics and other related fields, representing a unique **interdisciplinary hub** where advanced **research infrastructures are traditionally open** for collaboration from outside.

This Network has an impressive **record of results in participation in the EU Framework Programme FP7**: 127 projects approved and implemented or under implementation, out of total number of 534 proposals collectively submitted, with a rate of success of 24%. Regional cooperation between CEI S&T Network and the scientific communities of Countries in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, which is already established, since decades, may therefore facilitate the participation of the latter to **Horizon 2020**.

Taking into consideration all the above mentioned aspects, the CEI-PRAISE Programme is meant to provide a comprehensive and unique framework for a wide and interdisciplinary spectrum of scientific activities which include for each specific project: fellowships in the Trieste hub, scholarships to young scientists and grants to group leaders at home laboratories, financial support to partners (centers and advanced research groups) for collaborative scientific activities, travel and major events at regional level, e-learning and web-based training, etc. The overall cost has been estimated at Euro 45 million coming from different sources, over a period of **seven years**, coinciding with the EU financial programming period 2014-2020. This estimate only represents an order of magnitude referred to the full potential of the Programme. In fact, it has been drafted considering a **modular flexibility**, as in any case it will be implemented according to the resources actually available during the period. While promoting a **unity of objectives** and a **single management approach** in its implementation, the CEI-PRAISE Programme will be funded from different financial sources and specifically, but not only, from **various funding instruments** of the European Commission through a **variable geometry** according to the respective eligibility of CEI Member Countries. The eligibility depends on their status vis-à-vis the European Union: i.e. Horizon 2020, EU Structural Funds, IPA II - Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, ENI (European Neighbourhood Instrument), others. The CEI Secretariat is already engaged in a fundraising campaign to finance appropriate **pilot activities**, which will aim at the establishment of a **regional cluster** of laboratories for each CEI-PRAISE project.

The **Central European Initiative** has a consolidated experience and expertise in promoting, designing and managing EU co-funded projects in different fields: this experience qualifies it for the role of **implementing agency for CEI-PRAISE** Programme with the essential support of institutions belonging to the CEI Science and Technology Network acting as a **hub**. There will be therefore **no need for a new management structure for this programme**. The **fundraising** will be the prime responsibility of the CEI Secretariat and the project leaders from the institutions participating to the CEI S&T Network will be responsible for the scientific implementation of each envisaged project, in cooperation with a respective **Project Committee** including representatives of the concerned centers of excellence and research groups in CEI Member Countries. An **Advisory Committee** will support the overall implementation of the Programme: an estimated number **up to 5000 scientists** with different levels of experience and involvement might be **directly or indirectly associated** to the implementation of this Programme over the years.

The CEI Secretariat, in coordination with the institutions belonging to the CEI Science and Technology Network, has identified over 200 **potential partners** (centres of excellence or other groups of advanced research in CEI Member Countries) which are candidates to be proactively associated to the implementation of the CEI-PRAISE Programme. This does not mean that the participation to CEI-PRAISE will be limited to the above partners: on the contrary, it may be extended to other highly qualified partners.