



First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, Ivica Dačić, participated today at the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Central European Initiative (CEI), held in Trieste. The meeting was a great opportunity to exchange views on current issues, challenges and perspectives of regional cooperation, especially in light of the thirty years of CEI's existence.

Statement of the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dacic at the CEI Central and Eastern European Foreign Ministers' Meeting:

Distinguished Minister Milanese,
Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, first of all, to thank our host for warm hospitality and congratulate him for the outstanding organization of this meeting. The efforts of the Italian Republic and its commitment to promoting further the activities of the Central European Initiative are evident. I trust that the Italian Presidency will be equally successful. I would also like to greet distinguished colleagues from other CEI Member States and thank them for their continued activities and cooperation within this initiative. Let me also express gratitude to Secretary General Roberto Antonione and the entire CEI Executive Secretariat who within a short period of time invigorated the activities and functioning of CEI.

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It has to be noted that in thirty years since its inception CEI remained consistent in its strategic goal of creating a close-knit Europe, without artificial divisions and based on common values. It should also be recalled that CEI was founded on the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and OSCE documents, including the Charter of Paris for New Europe – documents of crucial importance for the maintenance of peace and security not only in Europe but in the world at large. It should further be noted that these principles primarily concern the respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity of states and resolution of disputes by peaceful means, by fostering friendly relations among states. That is why stepping up political dialogue

among Member States must continue to top the list of priorities.

In addition to political dimension of CEI activities, the Republic of Serbia also recognizes the importance of other two dimensions – parliamentary and business one. I take pleasure in pointing out that the representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia regularly and actively participate in meetings of the Parliamentary Assembly and in the meetings of specific parliamentary committees. On the other hand, allow me to recall that the revival of CEI business dimension started during Serbia's Presidency in 2011. In that context, I would like to inform you that the Republic of Serbia fully supports the introduction of the local dimension of CEI which will, no doubt, contribute to the promotion of CEI activities and communication with Member States.

Moreover, I would like to commend Italy's efforts in placing scientific cooperation among CEI Member States in focus which is in accordance with priorities contained in CEI Plan of Action 2018-2020. I would like to reiterate the readiness of the Republic of Serbia to engage in promoting cooperation in this field. In that context, I am pleased to remind you that early this year Serbia became a member of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN).

Excellences,

It is also evident that CEI proved successful in facilitating European integration processes of those Member States that decided to join EU. Unlike in 1989, when Italy was the only member of European Community, today 9 CEI states are also members of EU, while two more states – Serbia and Montenegro – are undergoing accession negotiations. In this context, the support of those partner states which are at the same time members of CEI and EU is of outstanding importance along the path to the EU accession. In that regard, I feel the need to emphasize the role of CEI as a bridge between EU Member States and candidate countries. Taking into account diverse CEI membership, this initiative is an excellent forum for experience-sharing in the process of European integration. Notwithstanding other formats and organizations, CEI managed to remain relevant even despite being labelled as "the oldest regional initiative in these territories".

In view of the above, allow me to remind you that joining the European Union is the main foreign policy priority of the Republic of Serbia. Allow me to underline that for the Republic of Serbia the EU membership is not a goal in itself, but rather the prevalent moving force for the reformation of our society through implementation of comprehensive reforms. Notwithstanding the obvious challenges facing the EU today, both those internal and international ones, we are still confident that the clear perspective of EU membership is the best and optimal mechanism of transformation and progress of societies. It is encouraging, therefore, that during the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU the issue of European integration of the Western Balkans has been placed high on the agenda. We welcome the intention of the Republic of Croatia, which will take over the Presidency of the Council in January 2020, to organize the EU and WB leaders' summit. We deem it necessary to keep the momentum which commenced when EU-WB Summit was held at the time of Bulgarian Presidency in 2018, in order for the question of the accession of the Western Balkans to the EU to be brought back to the focus of Brussels. We believe that the enlargement policy is one of the most important EU policies and an

instrument for stabilization and prosperity. I take this opportunity to reiterate what is sometimes forgotten, that the EU enlargement to the Western Balkans is not only in the interest of the Western Balkans, but also of the EU itself and its Member States.

The Republic of Serbia offers its strong support to the activities conducted under the Eastern Partnership. It is also worth stressing that we highly appreciate the mutual support shared among the Republic of Serbia and six partner countries in the Eastern Partnership, hoping that these relations will be even better promoted in the period to come.

Dear colleagues,

I would like to recall that the Republic of Serbia is lastingly dedicated to regional cooperation which is at the same time one of the pillars of our foreign policy. We underline, in particular, the strengthening of good neighbourly relations and partaking in various regional initiatives, and being committed to the promotion of cooperation between various regional initiatives in this part of Europe. Bearing this in mind, we highly welcome the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Executive Secretariat of CEI and Permanent Secretariat of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative (All) which, without any doubt, will contribute to the further promotion of cooperation between the two organizations in the areas of mutual interests.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind my distinguished colleagues that as of 1 June, the Republic of Serbia took over the Presidency of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative and of the European Union Strategy for Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR). Allow me to inform you that the Republic of Serbia, in the framework of its Presidency, will put emphasis on the functional connectivity between the Adriatic and Ionian continental hinterland and its coastal area, but also that it will continue the work started by previous Presidencies on the achievement of other priority goals. We are particularly looking forward to the upcoming cooperation with Montenegro and the Republic of Slovenia in the framework of the mechanism of "Troika Presidency".

In spite of the major importance of all forms of regional cooperation, it is indispensable to underline that not a single one of these processes should be seen as a replacement for the European integration process, and to always bear in mind that their sole purpose is to help the region progress on its path towards the EU. I would also like to stress the importance of the respect of all agreements reached in regional fora, without exception. In this context, we underline that the current non-compliance with the obligations undertaken under the CEFTA is unacceptable and it flies in the face of the very idea of regional cooperation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for your attention and to once again express my gratitude to the Italian Republic for excellent organization of this meeting, as well as to the CEI Executive Secretariat for their readiness to work, together with Member States, on fulfilling full potential of this initiative of ours.

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