

**Statement by Prime-Minister of the
Republic of Belarus A.Kobyakov at the
Summit of the Heads of Governments
of the Central European Initiative
(December 13, 2016, Sarajevo)**

Dear Chairman,

Dear colleagues,

From the very outset, I would like to sincerely thank the Bosnian Presidency and the CEI Secretariat for the excellent preparation of the Summit and for the warm hospitality that we all enjoy in Sarajevo.

The place of our today's meeting itself is of special importance. It strongly reminds us of the **true value of peace** through

immense suffering and grief that it has witnessed. It underscores the **indispensable need to work together, despite all our differences**, on the basis of mutual respect. It starkly recalls of **our joint responsibility for a better future** of Europe and our Region, for ensuring social stability and sustainable development in all our countries through genuine cooperation.

These messages are of particular relevance now, when Europe is facing a set of dire challenges, such as the ongoing migration crisis, radicalisation, and new security threats.

Sided by the complex economic difficulties, **these developments defy borders and pose an unprecedented challenge** to European integration at large.

Over the last 25 years Europe has made **a quantum leap from a divided, post-Cold-War setting towards a progressive political and economic integration.** It brought irrefutable benefits to all of us in terms of fostering trade and mobility, promoting cross-border cooperation and good-neighbourly relations.

Yet, **these achievements should not be taken for granted and remain strikingly fragile.** They come under ever increasing pressures.

The only way to effectively respond to these challenges and prevent new dividing lines in Europe is through **concerted actions, dialogue and engagement of all European countries.**

In this context, the **Central European Initiative is becoming increasingly relevant** as an important platform for such a dialogue and interaction.

The Organisation has accumulated a vast experience in promoting pragmatic cooperation in a number of areas, including transport, energy efficiency, agriculture, scientific research. It has also significantly contributed to cross-cultural dialogue and people-to-people contacts. We need to build further on this.

In the present challenging setting, **the CEI should largely focus on supporting sustainable economic development and fostering interconnections** among our countries as key prerequisites for regional security, stability and cohesion.

The CEI should also continue to serve as a **bridge between various integration platforms and a “meeting point” of distinctive sub-regions across Europe**. It unites today the countries of the European Union, Western Balkans and Eastern Europe around the idea of united, peaceful and strong Europe.

Organisation should remain a key partner of the European Union in implementation of **macro-regional strategies** and in promoting wider European integration. The CEI has all necessary potential and experience to assist in achieving the primary objectives of the revised **European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership**. Above all, this regards stabilization through economic development, creation of partnerships for growth, ensuring wider connectivity and mobility. This may also play a significant role in **reinforcing the Eastern dimension** of our Organisation.

At the same time, we strongly support the process of further developing synergies between the CEI and other key stakeholders in our region. Belarus fully upholds continued efforts in **expanding the CEI's international outreach through closer cooperation with other international, regional and sub-regional organizations.** We welcome new cooperation arrangements established in the recent years with the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Energy Community, the International Centre for Migration Policy Development, and the International Anti-Corruption Academy and others.

Belarus also favours and fully backs the practice of organising **joint high-level events with major economic players**, such as the CEI-EBRD International Conference on Supporting Local Enterprises and SMEs (*Small and Medium Enterprises*) along the China's Belt and Road Initiative in South Eastern Europe held in April 2016 in Trieste. Such endeavours are of crucial importance for promoting trade, attracting investments and reviving economic growth in the countries across the CEI's constituency.

Likewise, Belarus suggests **engaging more with evolving stakeholders in the Eastern Europe, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Eurasian Economic Union.**

We are convinced that it meets not only our common economic interests, but also it would allow the CEI to contribute to the facilitation of dialogue and interaction between different integration platforms across the continent.

We should **continuously improve our Organisation by adjusting to new developments in our Region.** In this context we welcome and fully support the timely initiative of the Bosnian Presidency to establish the **Group of Experts on the CEI Governance**, tasked to deliver concrete proposals on further improving the Organisation's effectiveness and updating its areas of activity.

Mr. Chairman,

Belarus does strongly believe in the **continued value and relevance of the Central European Initiative** for our countries and our citizens.

Therefore, we are ready and eager to provide our contribution to the common efforts by taking over in 2017 – for the first time – **the CEI Presidency**. This creates additional opportunities for involvement of Belarus in European integration processes and will also foster a more geographically balanced approach in the activities of the Organisation.

In exercising this function, Belarus will ensure **proper continuity and consistency** in the work of the Organization with due attention to the interests of all Member States. We intend to make a **special emphasis on fostering connectivity in the region, supporting sustainable economic development, further promoting the CEI's outreach**. In particular, we would like to work more on the infrastructural interconnections as a key factor for trade, growth and stability.

We should try together to tackle effectively existing transport bottlenecks, to improve transit capabilities and logistics chains, to introduce wider modern information technologies and solutions.

Belarus will also apply all efforts to **reinforce the role of the CEI as a connecting point for synergies and cooperation between different integration platforms and processes in Europe.**

We intend to continue the work started by the Bosnian Presidency in order **to support the process of reforming the CEI**, which is of utmost importance to adjust its areas of activity and toolbox to our common needs in a new regional setting. Belarus will provide its contribution to this process, including within the **drafting of a new CEI Plan of Action for the period until 2020.**

In the course of its Presidency in the CEI, Belarus is open to full-fledged and constructive interaction with all the CEI Member States.

We would like to make full use of the additional opportunities also in terms of intensifying our bilateral cooperation within the region, including with use of high-level CEI events to be held in Belarus in 2017.

We count on your support and active cooperation during the next year.

I thank you.