



**CEI
BELARUSIAN
PRESIDENCY
2017**

*Promoting Connectivity
in a Wider Europe*

PRESIDENCY AGENDA

In 2017 Belarus holds its first Presidency in the Central European Initiative – one of the oldest regional integration platforms, which brings together 18 countries to work for cohesion of a united Europe, without dividing lines, with shared values, embracing all countries, regions, peoples and citizens of the continent.

During the 25 years of its existence the CEI proved to play a meaningful role as an instrumental forum for dialogue and cooperation among its Member States. It has accumulated broad experience in fostering economic and social development, including in such fundamental areas as transport, energy efficiency, environment, culture, education, scientific research and promotion of people-to-people contacts. The Organisation has also been an active contributor to European integration processes at large, including by facilitating the implementation of relevant European Union programmes and strengthening the links between distinctive European sub-regions.

This experience is especially valuable at present, when Europe is facing a set of unprecedented challenges, such as the ongoing migration crisis, emerging security threats, social tension and economic difficulties. These phenomena defy borders and pose a serious threat to stability, highlighting the striking level of our interdependence. Overcoming them urgently requires concerted actions, genuine dialogue and engagement of all European countries.

In the current demanding regional setting, ***Belarus places promotion of connectivity in a Wider Europe at the very core of its CEI Presidency priorities.*** This cross-cutting topic encompasses all various aspects of connectivity, which are equally important and complementary for closer economic cohesion among the CEI Member States, *inter alia*:

- ***Development of transport infrastructure*** as a key prerequisite for trade and mobility through support and alignment of core interconnections within major policy frameworks of particular relevance for the CEI constituency, such as the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) and China's Belt and Road Initiative. In turn, this requires ***reinforced cooperation with European and international financial institutions*** to secure joint medium- and long-term planning of related investment efforts;

- **Approximation of norms and standards** related to trade operations and customs formalities in order to eliminate procedural bottlenecks and optimize the use of existing infrastructural connections. As an Organisation with diverse membership, the CEI could also **contribute to developing effective cooperation on these topics among different integration platforms in Europe;**
- **Stimulating entrepreneurship, grassroot economic initiative and sustainable economic development at municipal and regional level** along the main international transport arteries passing through the CEI constituency with particular focus on transit, multimodal logistics, hospitality and tourism services;
- Promoting broader introduction of **modern digital solutions** in trade and logistics to pave the way for a genuinely Pan-European digital market, including through development of interoperable paperless trade systems, cross-border e-services, e-commerce platforms, relevant legal framework for mutual recognition of data processing standards and cooperation of national digital regulators.

In pursuing these objectives, Belarus aims to **ensure consistency in the work of the Central European Initiative** in continuation of undertakings of the past Presidencies and with due account of interests of all the CEI Member States.

As an indispensable part of broader European integration, our Organisation should **reinforce cooperation with the European Union** on mutually relevant policy issues. In particular, the Belarusian Presidency as part of the CEI Enlarged Troika seeks to elaborate together with the European Commission the possibilities of **broader CEI's involvement in supporting the implementation of EU policies and programmes** in relevant areas, such as European Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policies, EU macroregional strategies, TEN-T, Digital Single Market, rural and local development, energy efficiency and climate change, research and innovation and many others. The diverse character of the CEI constituency could also be a tangible asset in fostering cooperation in such regional initiatives as **the Berlin Process and the Eastern Partnership**. In particular, our Organisation has unique potential to transpond vital transition experiences and know-how on to the Balkan States and the Eastern Neighbours of the EU, further assisting their approximation with European standards and practices.

Likewise, the Belarusian Presidency will uphold the efforts in **expanding the CEI's outreach to other international and regional organisations**, thus helping to jointly address emerging and existing challenges. This includes:

- Continued cooperation with **the United Nations** on such crucial topics as Sustainable Development Goals and Millenium Development Goals, migration, countering terrorism and radicalization, while upholding the regular practice of interaction within the UN General Assembly;

- Reinforcing CEI's engagement with **the OSCE** on common elements of both Organisations' mandates in the social and economic field, especially in light of the 2017 Austrian Presidency in the OSCE to be followed by the Italian Presidency in the OSCE in 2018;
- Enhancing practical interaction of the CEI with specialized agencies such as **the IOM and the ICMPD** to jointly address various aspects of migration management, including ways of overcoming its negative consequences;
- Aligning efforts with other European subregional organisations, such as **the Visegrad Group, the CBSS and the BSEC**, in promoting sustainable economic and social development within our region;
- Further building ties with **the Council of Europe, the UNESCO, the Energy Community Secretariat, the International Anti-Corruption Academy** and other international and European organisations in various fields of mutual interest.

Within its CEI Presidency, Belarus also invites the CEI Member States to examine the possibilities of establishing closer cooperation with evolving integration formats in the East, such as **the Eurasian Economic Union and the Commonwealth of Independent States**. This appears logical and justified in terms of our common economic interests, as well as in the context of ensuring cohesion and complementarity between different integration processes in Europe.

In the course of 2017 Belarus will uphold and further promote the initiative put forward by the Bosnian Presidency in 2016 **on reforming the Central European Initiative** with account of new challenges and developments in our region during the past decade. Based on the conceptual input of the Expert Working Group on CEI Governance, we intend to elaborate together with the CEI Member States and the CEI Secretariat concrete proposals on how to tailor the CEI Guidelines and Rules of Procedure to our common needs. In particular, this concerns **updating the core areas of CEI's activities, regular cooperation formats and mechanisms, as well as strengthening the CEI's project dimension and toolbox**. The mentioned proposals could also serve as a basis for elaboration of the new **CEI Plan of Action for 2018-2020**. We hope that, with active involvement of all the CEI constituency, this process may give rise to concrete decisions for adoption by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Heads of Governments of the CEI Member States in 2017.

Part and parcel of increasing the visibility and relevance of the CEI in the present regional setting, the Belarusian Presidency also plans to **reinforce sectoral interaction** within the Organisation. Namely, the Presidency Programme envisages a **dedicated ministerial meeting on connectivity** issues, intending to bring together the ministers of transport, heads of customs services and chambers of commerce of the CEI Member States.

At the same time, in 2017 Belarus will renew the practice of organising an **annual ministerial meeting on science and technology**, which for the first time is proposed to be held outside Trieste.

These formats need to be backed by **vibrant interaction within the CEI Parliamentary and Business Dimensions**, which will largely depend on the pro-active approach and engagement of relevant structures in our countries. Regular events to be held during the year, including the session of the CEI Parliamentary Assembly and the annual CEI Business Forum, should be fully used to build new partnerships among the CEI Member States in various thematic areas.

On top of that, in 2017 Belarus plans to organise a series of targeted CEI events on **education, fostering cultural dialogue, preserving historical heritage and promoting people-to-people contacts** in our region.

The Belarusian Presidency counts on the CEI Member State's active support and participation in key CEI high-level meetings and various other activities planned throughout this year. It also remains open to any forward-looking proposals for additional events that may be deemed necessary.
