



CONVENTION FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN INITIATIVE

Recommendations for the Strengthening of the Central European Initiative

1. Enhancing the CEI political role

More than three decades of intense regional cooperation in the CEI framework have created an excellent foundation on which to build on. The CEI's composition of encompassing EU and non-EU CEI Member States - all EU candidates, is an added value that should be further promoted. Moreover, in light of the increasing and complex challenges, affecting international peace and security, there is still a greater demand for multilateral approach. In this regard, a stronger promotion of regional cooperation is needed, as the right model to effectively address the vulnerabilities of our times, and to better deliver on the demands and expectations of the Member States especially to support European integration and sustainable development.

To cope with this scenario, a common endeavour should be undertaken to strengthen the role of the CEI as a valuable political platform contributing to the stabilisation of the region, its economic development and social progress. Therefore, at the top of this process, the strengthening of the outcome and outreach of the CEI political meetings should be envisaged in view of providing the Organisation with a new political impetus. On one side, the revival of the CEI Summit within the Presidency Programme should be considered and should take place more regularly in order to facilitate a broad discussion on pressing issues for the region (*e.g. as it was the case with Covid-19, the Prime Ministers could discuss topical issues such as Ukraine, the multifaceted aspects of the security, etc.*). On the other, the consistency and continuity of the political dialogue should continue to be ensured through the MFA Meeting (*according to the already established practice of two meetings: a formal one in the country of the Presidency, and an informal one in New York*). The CEI Summit could also be convened informally, and if needed, at the margins of other international high-level gatherings envisaging the participation of the Prime Ministers. In this common endeavour, the role of the Political Directors and the CEI Troika could be instrumental. Moreover, in the spirit of the work of the Convention, more frequent interactions and possibilities for synergies between the CEI Governmental and Parliamentary Dimensions should be promoted with the aim the enhance the CEI political role.

In addition, holding sectorial ministerial meetings in the framework of the CEI Presidency could be strengthened with focused discussions on topical issues for the region (*e.g. on issues such as regional connectivity, the triple planetary crisis, etc.*). This could be done also in cooperation with other international and regional partners.

In this context, the rotating Presidencies and the CEI-Executive Secretariat (CEI-ES), should seek to develop a more regular and structured dialogue with other relevant international and regional organisations active in the region and prioritise strategic partnerships on topical issues (*e.g. one of the meetings of the Committee of National Coordinators – CNC per year could be dedicated to this matter*). Such sectoral cooperation and dialogue with other international and regional actors should be carried out in a more result-driven manner aimed to produce concrete outputs for the Member States (*e.g. with WHO/Europe on health issues, with CoE on youth, etc.*) and a “niche” for the CEI in order to avoid duplication and overlapping with areas of cooperation addressed by other fora. Moreover, cooperation with third countries both from the region and beyond, sharing the same goals and objectives of the CEI Member States, could be considered.

Strategic partnerships could also raise the CEI's visibility and presence at European and international level. To this end, the practice of presenting Joint Statements on the occasion of the UN high-level events should continue,

and be further intensified. Moreover, this practice could also be explored in connection with EU meetings, while accounting for the decision-making autonomy of the EU, as well as at other relevant international events.

Last but not least, further support to Ukraine should also be a top priority.

To sum up, the following steps are recommended:

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
<i>Revive the full spectrum of CEI structures and meetings within the Governmental Dimension</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reintegrate the CEI Summit in the Presidency Programme, providing an instrumental role to the Political Directors and the CEI Troika. ➤ Explore convening the CEI Summit, informally and if needed, at the margins of gatherings already envisaging the participation of Prime Ministers (e.g. in Brussels at the margins of appropriate EU meetings, taking into account the decision-making autonomy of the EU, and avoiding duplication with processes at the EU Council or with other international fora) which could increase the CEI's visibility at EU level and be cost-effective in terms of organisation. ➤ Envisage reintegrating in the Presidency Programme sectoral ministerial meetings on topical issues for the region.
<i>Revive the full spectrum of structures and meetings within the Parliamentary Dimension</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consider convening meetings of the Parliamentary Dimension with the European Parliament or its structures. ➤ Promote experience sharing (EU-non-EU CEI countries) in the framework of the General Committee on Political and Home Affairs of the Parliamentary Dimension, with the participation of the legal commissions of the Parliaments of the Member States in support of the implementation of reforms. ➤ Consider resuming the Standing Committee meeting. ➤ Promote the strengthening of the CEI's visibility by enhancing its presence on various parliamentary websites.
<i>Strengthen interactions between the Governmental and Parliamentary Dimensions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Promote interaction on issues of importance for the European integration process of the non-EU CEI countries, with the involvement of relevant Governmental and Parliamentary institutions in the CEI Member States.
<i>Enhance result-oriented strategic partnerships</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enhance a result-driven project-oriented cooperation with other international and regional organisations to the benefit of the Member States upon regular assessment of existing needs and in line with the challenges. ➤ Establish cooperation with countries from the geographical region that share the same goals and objectives as the CEI Member States. ➤ Establish cooperation with third countries which share the CEI mission and objectives.
<i>Increase the CEI presence at European and international events</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consider increasing the number and frequency of Joint Statements at UN meetings, provided these statements represent an added value with regard to the fulfilment of CEI's mission. ➤ Explore similar practices on the occasion of EU meetings, while accounting for the decision-making autonomy of the EU.
<i>Further support Ukraine</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Continue to further support Ukraine within the CEI format. ➤ Examine possibilities to join the reconstruction of Ukraine in coordination with other international actors.

2. Strengthening the CEI relations with EU institutions

Establishing structured cooperation links with the EU and its institutions has always been one of the main priorities of the CEI in support of the European integration process, especially the EU enlargement.

However, the path to the EU is merit-based and requires a long series of applications of standards, and compliance with accession criteria by the EU candidates. In this regard, the CEI should further step up its role as a platform of dialogue and cooperation as well as facilitator of know-how transfer between the CEI EU and non-EU countries on EU enlargement related reforms (*e.g. the CNC could discuss the modalities*).

To this end, it should be carefully investigated whether an increased and more constant liaison (*e.g. through a CEI office in Brussels, involvement of the Permanent Representations or Missions, etc.*) with the EU institutions in Brussels would provide added value. A desired outcome of such a link could be that the European Commission (EC) establishes delegated cooperation with the CEI-ES for the implementation of projects as a partner organisation (so called “indirect management”).

To sum up, the following steps are recommended:

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
<i>Strengthen cooperation on EU enlargement related reforms within the CEI framework</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Uphold the political dialogue and cooperation supporting European integration related reforms, without prejudice to further EU enlargement, through appropriate CEI instruments (e.g. statements, awareness raising campaigns, etc.). ➤ Entrust the CNC to further promote know-how transfer between the CEI EU and non-EU countries, through capacity building projects and programmes.
<i>Establish liaison with EU institutions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Consider exploring the added value of the possible establishment of a dedicated CEI office in Brussels, after clarifications on financial and operational modalities within the related CEI structures. ➤ Investigate the possible involvement of the Permanent Representatives and Missions in Brussels with a view of regular flow of information on CEI activities.
<i>Obtain a delegated cooperation from the EC</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish a plan of possible actions/projects that could be in line with the EC requirements for “indirect management” mode.

3. Reinforcing the role of the CEI-Executive Secretariat

The CEI-ES assists in implementing decisions taken at political level, and promotes programmes and initiatives to foster cooperation in the region. It also puts forward proactive initiatives for the benefit of enhanced regional cooperation, and offers solutions in addressing challenges within the instruments provided by the CEI Member States.

In order to better deliver on the ambitious political agenda, increase the number of projects and develop efficient synergies with other potential partners and stakeholders in areas of joint interest, while at the same time enhancing visibility through an effective communication strategy, first of all the operational level of the CEI as Organisation in general should be increased.

In this regard, the multistakeholder approach could play an important role. Over time, the CEI has established a wide outreach and a valuable network of stakeholders and non-government actors (local authorities, private sector, academia, media, youth, etc.). Bringing together such stakeholders from across the region to discuss issues of particular relevance for the region, is a role which the CEI is well positioned to undertake, and contributes to raising the operability of the Organisation. This kind of vertically integrated practical cooperation could be the model for the activities undertaken by the CEI, in particular in view of strengthening the “CEI Local Dimension”, “CEI Youth Agenda” or in further developing the cultural dimension.

In addition, the good practices and success stories achieved in the framework of the CEI funds, programmes and instruments should be regularly assessed (*e.g. on the occasion of a dedicated CNC meeting*) so that their added value could serve as a reference for streamlining CEI actions and for promoting synergies between the political component and project-oriented activities.

The enhancement of the overall operational aspect of the CEI is closely linked to the administration role of the Secretariat. To this end, in order to better serve the needs, strengthening the CEI-ES would be necessary (*e.g. through secondments of officials from institutions to the CEI-ES in order to follow focused agendas*). Attention could also be paid to securing outside funding from potential donors.

To sum up, the following steps are recommended:

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
<i>Reinforce multistakeholder approach</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strengthen activities designed to spur vertically integrated practical cooperation, bringing a variety of stakeholders. ➤ Further promote synergies between the multilateral component and project-oriented activities
<i>Ensure the right composition of competencies in the CEI-ES</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Encourage secondments of officials to the CEI-ES to follow focused agendas.
<i>Step-up fundraising efforts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish contacts with potential donors such as third countries, international financial institutions and others, upon the presentation of a detailed plan regarding the envisaged activities.

The Recommendations are intended to be presented to the structures of the CEI Governmental and Parliamentary Dimensions. It will then be up to these structures, and to their decision-making processes (in line with their Rules) to decide what, how and if to incorporate into their work and/or statutes.