



The statement by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the Annual Meeting of CEI Foreign Ministers, held in Ohrid, reads as follows:

Mr. Chairman,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to thank Minister Poposki and CEI Secretary General Ambassador di Vietri for their exquisite hospitality and excellent organization of the Annual Meeting of the CEI Foreign Ministers.

It is my pleasure to have this opportunity here today to take part in views exchange on the perspective and infrastructural development of the CEI region, the current political situation and on the CEI's role of a bridge between European macro-regions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The CEI top strategic goal of "Regional cooperation for European integration" is fully consistent with Serbia's foreign policy priorities, its strategic goal of integration into the EU but also of deepening regional cooperation both through the development of good-neighbourly relations and through an active participation at regional fora and initiatives.

The proactive approach of Serbia to the development of goodneighbourly relations and regional cooperation resulting from the dialogue with Pristina representatives and important political decisions made by the Government of Serbia have been recognized by the EU as well. This recognition is being particularly reflected in the European Council decision to open EU accession talks with Serbia.

Serbia's strategic goal is the fastest possible membership of the European Union. In this context, we are aware of the complex and demanding period of reforms that is ahead of us but, at the same time, I am pleased to note that Serbia has made huge progress in many areas such as justice, business and economy, combating corruption and organized crime as well as promotion of human and minority rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is in the common interest of all of us in the region of the Western Balkans to implement successful reforms aimed at establishing efficient economic systems, thus improving the standard of living and the overall quality of life of our populations. This, of course, will not be possible without infrastructural connectivity on the regional level.

I would like to underscore, in particular, the significance of one of the Macedonian CEI Presidency's priorities concerning the continued development of energy and transport infrastructure linking all CEI member States. In this regard, I wish to underline as specially important the meetings held in the previous period in Belgrade, Pristina and Brussels respectively, in the "Western Balkan Six" format that contributed to the identification of shared interests, further strengthening of the stability of the region and reaffirming regional cooperation and economic stability as their common tool in achieving European standards and meeting EU membership criteria. The top level meeting held in Brussels on 21 April was of huge significance as well. With the aim of fully contributing to the process, Serbia was the first in the region to prepare and present the Single Pipeline Project and to set up the National Investment Committee. We stand ready to share the experience of establishing such structures with other WB6 stakeholders at any time.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am at liberty to say that CEI is a bridge between the EU Member States, on the one hand, and those candidate countries and countries still aspiring to attain EU membership, on the other hand. Affiliation with this regional initiative, which provides a framework for the enhancement of regional cooperation and an accelerated European integration, is very important for Serbia, particularly in the context of EU accession negotiations.

CEI is also one of the oldest regional initiatives on the European continent, now bringing together 18 countries, a regional initiative that can, by way of its experience and reputation it enjoys, bringing a significant added value to the process of networking European macroregions. In this regard, I can note with pleasure the importance of the efforts being invested in this area.

I would also like to underscore with satisfaction that four years after the Serbian CEI Presidency, numerous proposals vigorously upheld by Serbia have largely been introduced into practice. Allow me to mention a few of them: completion of the procedure concerning CEI attaining the observer status in the UNGA, creation of CEI NGO networks, strengthening of CEI's business dimension, etc. Moreover, I take pleasure in noting that the beneficiaries from Serbia have been among the most successful when it comes to record and the number of projects co-funded from the CEI Fund. Allow me to recall that the Government of the Republic of Serbia has as of 2015 voluntarily doubled the amount of its annual contribution, as a reflection of its commitment to the values the Initiative stands for.

I believe that in the coming period we should invest additional efforts into reviving this regional initiative as a forum for discussions concerning political and economic issues at a high level. In

this regard, in my capacity as the incumbent OSCE Chairman-in-Office I may gladly note the fact that cooperation between CEI and this international organization has been intensified.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To conclude, I would like to commend the results achieved by Macedonia as the country currently holding the CEI Presidency, wishing it every success in chairing this regional initiative in the coming period. The Republic of Serbia, as your immediate neighbour and the country currently holding the OSCE Chairmanship, stands at your disposal for any assistance in sharing experiences.

Thank you.