

The Central European Initiative (CEI) was created in 1989 from „quadrilateral cooperation" (Italy, Austria, former SFRY and Hungary). Today it has 17 Member States: Albania, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Italy, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Serbia, Ukraine and Montenegro (Austria decided to leave the Initiative in 2018). Nine countries are members of the EU, while the other eight are the Western Balkan countries and countries of the so-called European Neighbourhood - Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova.

The CEI Headquarters (CEI Secretariat) is based in Trieste. The CEI Secretary General is Roberto Antonione (Italy), who took over the post in January 2019. CEI is operating under the system of the annual rotating Presidency (from 1st January to 31st December). Serbia was presiding over the Initiative in 2011, while Italy is the current presidency. During 2019 the 30th anniversary of CEI will be marked.

In addition to the Secretariat and Presidency, CEI Troika has an important role in the functioning of the Initiative. It operates as extended CEI Troika, with Italy as a permanent member, due to its special role in the Initiative.

CEI, unlike most other regional initiatives, has its own funds for financing or co-financing cooperation projects. In addition to the regular annual contributions of the Member States, CEI activities are financed from a special fund, the CEI Fund at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which is fully supported by Italy in the amount of approx. 2 million EUR per year, as well as from other donations of Italy and Austria, prior to its withdrawal from the organization. Likewise, there are occasional small donations of other CEI Member States (to support the Know-how Exchange Programme).

In the framework of CEI, the following meetings are regularly organised: annual high level summits, meetings of foreign ministers, meetings of experts, etc. Important role is also given to CEI National Coordinators Meetings, which are held several times a year.

Activities within the Parliamentary dimension of cooperation in the CEI is executed through the work of CEI Parliamentary Assembly, the parliamentary committee and general committees (on political and internal affairs, on economic affairs and cultural affairs).

During Serbia's presidency in 2011, CEI obtained the observer status in the United Nations General Assembly, which resulted in the significant improvement of its overall prestige and strengthened its role as an integration and stabilization factor in the region and beyond. UN GA resolutions dedicated to the cooperation between UN and CEI are adopted every two years, within the framework of regular biannual meetings between the UN and regional organisations that have an observer status in the UN GA.

The strategic goal and basis of all CEI activities is: "regional cooperation for European integration". The fact that CEI is composed of two groups of countries – countries which are members of the EU and non-EU CEI Member States – significantly contributes to the acceleration of the EU integration process of CEI Member States that are not within the EU. Development of quality and functional project-oriented cooperation encourages faster adoption

of EU standards, and creates preconditions for their full EU integration.

With a view to strengthening the process of European integration of the whole region, one of the main CEI priorities is cooperation with the European Union and creation of conditions for signing a special agreement between CEI and the European Commission. CEI activities are mainly focused on realization of concrete cooperation projects in the region. They are being carried out on the basis of CEI Plan of Action for the period of two years. CEI focal points (experts from CEI Member States) have crucial role in selecting high quality projects.

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For more details see <http://www.cei.int/> .