



Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Central European Initiative

7 November 2022, Sofia

"A united CEI region in support of Ukraine and addressing the wider ramifications of the war"

- Honourable Chair, Minister Milkov, CEI Secretary General Antonione, Ministers, Excellencies...
- I would like to thank you for the invitation and for the organization of this high-level event.
- This meeting takes place in a crucial historical moment, with the war in Ukraine running for more than 8 months.
- The **TRIO-Presidency** of the Adriatic and Ionian Initiative issued a **Joint Statement**, just a few days after the beginning of the conflict, on February 28, condemning in the strongest terms the military invasion of Ukraine from the Russian Federation.
- The All foundations are rooted on the values and standards of European Union and the All stands with Ukraine against this illegal act of war against a sovereign and independent state. This grave violation of the international law threatens the regional, European and global security.
- But despite the tragedy of the war, the thousands of deaths, millions of displaced people, and a country severely damaged, we can draw at least one positive conclusions from this situation.
- The Ukraine tragedy has made it possible to speed up the process for giving the candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. But this has also made it clear that the "European project" is not complete without Western Balkans and other European countries. These countries, which belong to Europe for their history, culture, political aspirations and geography, must join the European Union as soon as possible and without hesitation, finally obtaining the membership. This would greatly contribute to strengthening the stability of the entire region.

- From June 1st 2022, **Bosnia and Herzegovina** took over the **Chairmanship** of the Adriatic Ionian Initiative, with the main priority for its presidency on Enlargement and European Integration process.
- We need a change of pace and an acceleration of the integration process of the Western Balkans. For this reason the AI sincerely appreciated the proposal put forward by the EU Commissioner Borrell to the European Council to grant as soon as possible the candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- As Adriatic and Ionian Initiative, we will continue to support the European integration aspirations of the Western Balkans and supporting candidate and potential candidate countries in their bid for accession in the European Union.

- Let me also sincerely thank the CEI Executive Secretariat for the results of the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the CEI Executive Secretariat and the Adriatic Ionian Initiative Permanent Secretariat signed in 2019. Within this overall framework, we developed together two initiatives named “**Active Young Citizens for Sustainable Development in CEI and AI areas**”, to raise awareness in high school students on the UN Agenda 2030 and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- In this respect, let me also thank the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for the valuable support throughout the whole process.

- The importance of this joint programme has also been recognized by the ten AI / EUSAIR Participating countries, reflected in the Tirana Declaration adopted last May by the ten Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

- I really hope we will have the chance to develop further initiatives with the CEI and other regional organizations in the future.

- I wish every success to the **Republic of Moldova** for the taking over the CEI Presidency.

- Thank you.