



CEI PD Parliamentary Committee Meeting, Zagreb, 13-14 May 2018

Minutes of the meeting

Since the Republic of Croatia is currently presiding over the Central European Initiative (CEI), the Croatian Parliament holds the chairmanship of the Initiative's Parliamentary Dimension (CEI PD). In that capacity, the Croatian Parliament hosted the meeting of the CEI PD Parliamentary Committee. The meeting was chaired by the CEI PD President and Head of the Croatian Delegation to the CEI PD **Mr Peđa Grbin** and attended by the parliamentary delegations from **Austria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Ukraine** and **Croatia**. The parliamentary delegations from Albania, Moldova and Slovenia were not able to attend due to parliamentary elections taking place in those countries.

The Parliamentary Committee Agenda included two items:

1. Election of the countries to hold the chairmanships of the Parliamentary Dimension's general committees
2. Adoption of the Parliamentary Committee's Joint Statement on sustainable tourism and the role of parliaments

Introductory part of the meeting

The Deputy Speaker of the Croatian Parliament **Mr Željko Reiner** welcomed the participants and pointed out that the Republic of Croatia had already presided over the Central European Initiative in 1998. To re-chair the Initiative twenty years later is of great significance, he said, as this time Croatia is a member of the European union and the priorities of the Croatian Presidency are directed precisely at the enlargement of the EU and at the transfer of knowledge and experiences from the pre-accession process, which Croatia itself had to undergo. There are eleven EU member states among the CEI countries, and the other seven work towards the same goal of joining the European family. The other priorities of the Presidency – economic cooperation, cultural cooperation and cooperation in addressing

migration challenges – make the Central European Initiative a constructive and fruitful platform not only for achieving but also for raising the standards and criteria shared by the EU member states and the countries en route to the EU.

In his introductory speech, the CEI PD President Mr **Peda Grbin** particularly accentuated the importance of the Parliamentary Dimension as a platform for the exchange of experiences and good practices among all member countries which share the same challenges and problems. The topic of sustainable tourism and the role of parliaments is aimed at raising awareness and topicalizing the potential and possibilities of sustainable tourism as a major leverage for achieving economic growth of national economies but also of the EU economy to which we belong or are about to belong. Mr Grbin also emphasized the dimension of environmental protection, the protection of cultural wealth, and the responsible policies and strategies mindful of local communities.

The CEI Deputy Secretary General Mr **Antal Nikoletti** addressed the Parliamentary Committee on behalf of the CEI and thanked Croatia for its Presidency in 2018. He recalled the history of the Central European Initiative which was founded in Budapest in 1989. Mr Nikoletti expressed his satisfaction at the very rich programme of the Presidency including more than 17 meetings at the parliamentary, governmental and business level and noted that the topic of sustainable tourism was highly important to all CEI members, as evident from the large number of parliamentary delegations present at the Parliamentary Committee meeting. Mr Nikoletti referred to the meeting as a kick-off event for further discussion of the topic at the CEI PD Plenary Assembly in autumn.

In her welcome address, Member of the Croatian Parliament's Tourism Committee Ms **Sabina Glasovac** highlighted Croatia's long-standing reputation as a well-recognized and attractive tourist destination on the world map. This statement is corroborated by the ever increasing number of overnight stays and arrivals of guests from both Europe and distant markets who come to Croatia because of its geographical position, well preserved nature, pleasant climate and extremely rich cultural heritage. And cultural, natural and historical heritage are the foundations of tourism. If we build on these foundations by designing appropriate tourism activities conducive to social and economic development, then we can be talking about sustainable tourism and the concept of sustainable development which is based on meeting the needs of the present, and particularly of the future generations, so as to preserve all the resources.

The State Secretary at the Ministry of Tourism Mr **Franjo Matušić** emphasized that the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Croatia had always been supportive of international and regional initiatives and activities dealing with sustainable and responsible tourism. Consequently, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Tourism Development Strategy until 2020 where sustainability is accentuated as a key element. Based on the Strategy, a number of action plans have been developed, such as the *Green Tourism* Action Plan which emphasizes environment protection. Mr Matušić highlighted the importance of utilizing the EU funds. Croatia uses them for the establishment of visitors' centres, hiking and biking trails and animal observation shelters. Within the framework of Croatia's CEI Presidency as well as its

Council of Europe Presidency that starts by the end of May, in November this year the Ministry of Tourism will host the *Olive Tree Route Workshop*.

The Head of the European Parliament's Information Office in the Republic of Croatia Ms **Violeta Simeonova Staničić** reminded that tourism was the third most significant branch of the EU economy, accounting for 10% of the European GDP. Fully aware of that fact, the President of the European Parliament Mr Antonio Tajani personally organized a high level conference in the European Parliament on the topic of sustainable tourism. If developed in the direction of sustainability, tourism is well placed to solve the unemployment issue as well, said Ms Simeonova Staničić, since according to the last projections of tourism development trends, tourism will create over five million jobs in the next ten years.

Election of the countries to hold the chairmanships of the Parliamentary Dimension's general committees

At the initiative of the CEI Deputy Secretary General Mr Nikoletti, **President Grbin** put forward the proposal for the mandate of the general committees whose chairpersons were to be elected to last until the end of 2019 since the chairpersons were not elected in November 2017 in Minsk when the election was supposed to take place in line with the CEI PD Rules of Procedure. The proposition was unanimously accepted.

The CEI PD President then invited the candidates for the general committees to present their candidacies.

The Bulgarian representative Mr **Nikolay Aleksandrov** presented **Bulgaria's** candidacy for the General Committee on Political and Home Affairs, announcing that the first meeting would be held in October.

The representative from Bosnia and Herzegovina Mr **Fehim Škaljić** presented the candidacy of **Bosnia and Herzegovina** for the General Committee on Economic Affairs.

Poland also submitted its candidacy for the General Committee on Economic Affairs. Its candidacy was presented by the Polish representative Mr **Bogdan Rzonca**.

After a secret ballot, President Grbin announced that the following countries had been elected to chair the three general committees until the end of 2019:

General Committee on Political and Home Affairs – **Bulgaria** (15 votes)

General Committee on Economic Affairs – **Poland** (9 votes)
(**Bosnia and Herzegovina** won 6 votes)

General Committee on Cultural Affairs – **Hungary** (15 votes)

Mr **Grbin** congratulated the new chairpersons and invited them to convene committee meetings before the CEI PD Plenary Assembly scheduled to take place by the end of November, so that the committees' representatives could present their reports from the meetings at the plenary session.

Adoption of the Parliamentary Committee's Joint Statement on sustainable tourism and the role of parliaments

President Grbin opened the floor for the discussion on the Draft Joint Statement.

Mr **Fehim Škaljić** from **Bosnia and Herzegovina** considers that, due to the absence of direct influence of politics, tourism may be an acceptable platform for the whole region, and therefore for national economies as well. Welcoming the strengthening of the Parliamentary Dimension through CEI activities, Mr Škaljić supported the Draft Joint Statement of the Parliamentary Committee of the CEI PD on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina, proposing that this statement be further promoted in the national parliaments of the member states to ensure parliamentarians' follow-up activities in the field of sustainable tourism.

After having thanked the hosts for organizing the meeting and selecting the topic of sustainable tourism, Mr **Fadil Zendeli** from **Macedonia** presented the key points of the Strategy for Tourism Development in Macedonia from 2016 to 2021. The vision of sustainable tourism development in Macedonia rests on the development of cities and the promotion of culture and tradition as tourist attractions. Macedonia invested in projects to this effect, which very quickly prompted an increase in the number of tourists.

Mr **Miodrag Vuković** from **Montenegro** informed the CEI parliamentarians that Montenegro had adopted the Declaration of Ecological State Montenegro as far back as 1991. Moreover, the definition of Montenegro as an ecological state is also enshrined in the country's constitution. Mr Vuković believes that the responsibility towards future generations obliges us to adopt an approach which puts man in the centre of development allowing for a sustainable and intertwined valorisation of four groups of national resources: human, social, natural and economic. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the core of sustainability consists of consistent political actions aimed at developing our descendants' resources and at preventing any decision that would lead to the depletion of national resources.

Ms **Rozalia-Ibolya Biro** from **Romania** expressed her support for all the activities of the Central European Initiative, particularly those in the field of sustainable tourism accentuating their positive effect for regional cooperation among the CEI member states. The Romanian tourism development strategy relies on innovation, green tourism and environmental protection. Romania therefore, concluded Ms Biro, supports the Draft Joint Statement as a step forward in the right direction of sustainable tourism development in all CEI member states and beyond. Romania proposed an amendment to the Draft Joint Statement which additionally stresses that the countries on the path to the EU membership should timely prepare for the use of EU funds through an active participation in the existing macro-regional strategies of the EU.

Mr **Bogdan Rzonca** from **Poland** believes that sustainable tourism development is closely linked to the local community, which should therefore be additionally enforced in terms of infrastructure so as to achieve the huge potential of sustainable tourism as an economy sector

influencing entrepreneurship development, environment protection, waste management, water management, development of new service industries and so on.

After thanking the hosts, Mr **Lodovico Sonego** from **Italy** presented the Italian Delegation's amendment aimed at additionally accentuating the importance of cooperation with the institutions of the European Union and of their stronger engagement concerning the reforms being implemented in the Western Balkan countries.

Ms **Irina Starovoytova** from **Belarus** greeted the parliamentarians and presented the activities of Belarus in the field of sustainable tourism and particularly in the field of transport infrastructure. Also, in Belarus emphasize is put on creating the legislative framework for implementing the concept of green tourism, i.e. tourism that is closely related to environment protection.

Mr **Nikolay Aleksandrov** from **Bulgaria** expressed his Delegation's support for Romania and Italy's proposed amendments, considering that they would additionally accentuate the European context of both the issue of sustainable development and the Central European Initiative. Mr Aleksandrov welcomed the choice of topic believing that tourism is one of the most important economic sector with the biggest potential for economic growth and job creation. It is therefore very important to introduce a methodology for measuring the levels of tourism sustainability, i.e. to define performance indicators, so as to steer the real sector activities and the national strategy implementation accordingly.

Ms **Iren Sarkozy** from **Slovakia** believes that the topic of tourism is equally important to all CEI member states, in both their national economies and in the European context. Economic development and the creation of jobs and new accompanying activities in national economies are further reinforced through regional and European cooperation, through competition, trade and mobility of people. **Slovakia** therefore supports the Draft Joint Statement.

Mr **Attila Tilki** from **Hungary** presented the potential of Hungarian tourism and of regional cooperation among the countries of the Central European Initiative. He thanked the participants for having elected Hungary as the new chair of the General Committee on Cultural Affairs.

Mr **Valeriy Babenko** from Ukraine talked about the difficulties facing tourism development in his country. The negative public perception is due to the political situation, recent war events and the nuclear power plant incident that happened long ago but still raises questions about the purity of the environment. The Ukrainian government and parliament mobilize considerable efforts to change that perception and to ensure investments in roads and other infrastructure needed for the development of tourism.

Mr **Maximillian Unterrainer** from **Austria** is of the opinion that sustainable tourism must be economically efficient and create opportunities for all stakeholders, but at the same time must take into account important determinants such as protection of the environment, culture and historical heritage. It must also have a strong social component, respecting local communities and their traditions as well as their social and economic welfare. Sustainable tourism,

Unterrainer believes, has great potential in the fight against poverty and social inequalities, and it is therefore essential for the political community to closely monitor the development indicators so that incentive or corrective measures can be implemented if necessary. Long-term planning of sustainable tourism development in line with the development of tourist needs and interests inevitably implies investing in human potential of both service providers and tourists themselves.

After closing the debate, President Grbin put to the vote the Draft Joint Statement along with the amendments proposed by Romania and Italy. All the 15 parliamentary delegations present unanimously adopted the Joint Statement of the Parliamentary Committee of the Central European Initiative's Parliamentary Dimension on sustainable tourism and the role of parliaments, and the meeting in Zagreb was thereby declared closed.