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Honorable Minister,
Distinguished Participants and Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since many years the Central European Initiative plays an active role in shaping and improving the territorial cooperation between its Member States. Therefore it is a great pleasure for us to take part in this important conference, which comes in a crucial moment and not only for the future of the European regional policy.

As you all know, the CEI is the oldest regional Forum for intergovernmental cooperation: established in November 1989 by Italy, Austria, Hungary and Yugoslavia, it has also become the largest regional initiative, which comprises today 18 Member States of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, with a population of 250 million.

Since 1989, the CEI has successfully adapted to major historical changes in Europe, and has become a champion of regional cooperation for European integration: the European perspective of its Member States is at the core of the CEI mission.

In this context, I would like to say how much we welcome the commitment of our Hungarian Presidency, which incidentally also will take over the responsibilities of the Visegrad Group, in organizing this second meeting of the Approval Authorities of the European Groups of Territorial Co-operation: an instrument which is not only a tool for regional policy but one of the main political and



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legal drivers allowing the implementation of the principle of economic, social and territorial cohesion laid down in the Treaty of the European Union.

EGTC is probably the best instrument to ensure a stable, long term co-operation between cross-border regions and local authorities, also in peripheral territories, allowing a common legal environment to invest in major facilities, to fully implement integrated policies and actions in almost all fields of activity: ultimately it is a most appropriate tool to contribute to the territorial development in a sustainable and cohesive way.

EGTC is at the European Union's frontline!

For this reason, the CEI welcomes the work of the European Commission and of the Committee of the Regions which, in strict co-ordination with the European Parliament, are committed to enhance the enormous potential of this instrument. As a contribution to the multi-level democratic governance, the European Commission has promoted a revision of EGTC regulation, addressing the concrete needs of cross-border regions.

The philosophy behind the changes proposed by the Commission can be summarized in three words: continuity, clarity and flexibility.

We fully share this view, but also, on the basis of our own direct experience, let me add a fourth word: urgency!



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We are aware that EGTCs encounter a number of major legal difficulties, which deal mainly with procedures. This regards the excessive round of draft conventions and statutes between the various national authorities and promoters: it also refers to the question of discretionality, the complicated provisions regarding the status of personnel, and tax arrangements.

The right of scrutiny of national governments should be fully ensured; but, as the Commission's proposal rightly pointed out, the approval procedure could be limited to the Convention, in a more realistic time framework. The tacit agreement principle should otherwise be used in some cases, for the implementation of instruments such as the statutes, maybe accompanied by specific national regulations as appropriate.

This calls for a joint effort to better clarify undefined legal aspects, to set a maximum period of time for the approval procedure, but also to establish a formal tri-lateral link between the three Parties involved: the European Commission with the Committee of the Regions; the national authorities and the EGTC participants. This joint effort would facilitate solutions on each phase of the procedure. This would also help all the parties involved in terms of legal certainty, capacity building measures, and respect of both EU and national provisions.

Another important issue relies on the financial sustainability of the EGTCs and their active involvement in the Cohesion Policy, where EGTCs can open up a new perspective in the domain of the territorial cooperation.



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Evidence has shown that existing EGTCs encountered significant difficulties in implementing EU programmes, for a number of reasons: unclear legal provisions; problems related to eligibility issues; little awareness by the EU programme structures themselves; uncertainty of first level controls or audit in general; lack of professional experience of the EGTCs management. All these elements deter national and regional authorities from fully relying on this instrument, missing the related concrete advantages.

Nevertheless, the participation of an EGTC, both in terms of a beneficiary, or possibly in terms of a real implementing body of the European Territorial Co-operation Policy, is the primary objective of the new EGTC formula.

EGTC as a legal body may operate on both sides of a border in various fields, by tendering international bids or managing cross-border structures: the resulting advantages can have a tremendous impact in sectors like infrastructures and local transport, public health also through sharing hospital facilities, energy and scientific research.

In this regard, we do hope that the Institutions will introduce a new legal provision aimed at regulating and clarifying the case in which an EGTC acts as a contracting agency for services and public works in a member state different from that where it is established.

Despite different situations in terms of national provisions and internal structure of each EGTC, we are also convinced that most of the cross-border actions could be transferred to an EGTC when it



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has proven to be completely responsible for assuming the role of a Managing Authority and/or that of a Joint Technical Secretariat.

Since the Central European Initiative that I have the honour to represent here today, has several non-EU States among its Members, I avail myself of this occasion to urge the adoption of a Regulation which may facilitate the participation of these countries.

The advantages which may derive from the opening to this category of our members are self explanatory. But it must be emphasized that they would correspond to a strategic vision of open integration, rather than simply respond to practical/operational reasons or requirements. In the peripheral territories of the EU it would make no sense to exclude local authorities, with a common language, a common historic and traditional background with their neighbors, from participating to a common body across the border: it would only seem unnecessarily discriminatory.

We all are conscious that the EGTC has come into being through an intense inter-institutional dialogue at different levels: for this reason we are convinced that only through this path the national authorities could acquire the right instruments that effectively contribute to its renewal and its full contribution to the regional policy of the European Union, taking into account the aspirations of the current non-EU countries.



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This implies to work harder towards a more inclusive policy of the national authorities in third countries, through rising awareness on the institutional opportunity which could be offered through a revisited EGTC, but also identifying the right legal instruments allowing their full participation.

The next EU programming cycle is going to start very soon, and the implementation of the European territorial cooperation programmes needs to understand if this instrument can be “safely” used. Furthermore, in a difficult period of economic and social downturn, the new legal framework should serve to the principle of a more efficient cross-border cooperation.

In this context, the EGTC should be empowered with all those instruments that meet the needs of the cross-border regions in bringing down political and market barriers, in a timely and effective manner, in order to realistically contribute to the EU Strategy 2020.

Indeed, it is time to shift from debating to delivering solutions: this is the right moment for the EU Parliament and Council to act. This conference will surely represent a common front to advocate a final effort for the adoption of a new legislation, showing that national authorities are ready for a more strict coordination.



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We therefore call for all the Parties to adopt a pragmatic approach; maybe not by reinventing the wheel, but making good use of the existing instruments like the EGTC platform with the support of Regional Organizations, such as CEI, which can provide expertise and inter-institutional co-ordination. At the CEI we are fully convinced that the ambition and the success of the EU strategy relies in its decentralized implementation.

At the same time we are also convinced that a new legal basis should be combined with a full involvement of the Ministries competent for the various sectors in a permanent basis, in order to forge a clear and homogenous acceptance and interpretation of the new provisions.

Dear Minister, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today the CEI is renewing its commitment, expressed years ago, not only to support the process of the revision of the EGTC instrument, or to support the public administration of our Member States to create a EGTC (like the one we did promote between Italy and Slovenia), but also to serve as a platform to promote legal and operative solutions for a simpler, effective and homogeneous implementation of the EGTC in all CEI Member States.

Thank you!