



**Final Meeting of the Round Table of the Stability Pact and Inaugural Meeting
of the Regional Co-operation Council**
Sofia (Bulgaria), 27 February 2008

Dear Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first to express my gratitude to our hosting country for its hospitality and excellent organization of this very important event. It is a pleasure for me to come back to Bulgaria after its successful Presidency of the CEI last year. I would like to thank you Mr. Chairman (Mr. Erhard Busek) for inviting the CEI to be part of this historical moment for the region.

The CEI always attached great importance to the mission of the Stability Pact in bringing peace and stability to the countries of South Eastern Europe and to the whole region by fostering democracy, economic development and security, and getting them closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures. In this context, I would like to congratulate you Mr. Chairman for the mission successfully accomplished. The significant work done in all of the areas of the Stability Pact's activities, such as parliamentary co-operation, trade liberalization and promotion of investments, fight against organized crime and corruption, migration, disaster preventions, etc. deserve to be applauded.

Nevertheless, many changes happened and they are still going on in the region. The changing political and economic contexts provide new challenges and opportunities for the region. This process put more emphasis on the need for an extended regional and sub-regional cooperation in which the CEI, as the oldest and the largest regional organization, is indispensable.

The CEI was not immune to the changes in the past few years. A process of self-critical analysis and re-launching was undertaken last year with the aim to respond better to the changing conditions in the region. In any case, a dynamic adjustment was a feature of the CEI during all of the years since its inception. In this process, it has developed an identity consisting of a specific mix of institutional structures and instruments for cooperation.

Now the CEI will face new challenges. While in the past years priority was given to institutional areas of cooperation, now the economic growth and the human development are high on the list of priorities. Concrete actions and activities are envisaged to achieve these objectives under the Moldovan CEI Presidency, possibly in close collaboration with other regional bodies, such as the SEECP/RCC, the BSEC, the CEFTA, and others. The CEI expects a pragmatic dialogue and result-oriented discussions in a "give-and-take" open format.

In conclusion, the CEI is willing not only to maintain the exchange of information on all levels, but also to look for concrete practical co-operation where mutual interest exists and where tangible results are to be achieved. There certainly is a great deal to learn from one another, especially at this crucial juncture in history, on the role of regional co-operation in furthering regional integration and cohesion.

To this end, I would like to wish every success to the Secretary General of the Regional Co-operation Council, Mr. Hido Bišćević, and to express to him our readiness for an open and fruitful cooperation in a complementary and constructive manner. The CEI is convinced that there is enough room for everybody in the future regional architecture of Central and South Eastern Europe, provided that they will respond dynamically and effectively to the needs of the countries and come to a meaningful division of labour.

Amb. Pietro Ercole Ago
General Secretary of CEI-ES