

Title Global Forum – Driving the Digital Future

Venue Trieste

Date

**28 October – WELCOME ADDRESS by Amb. Margit Waestfelt,
CEI Alternate Secretary General**

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first on behalf of the Central European Initiative to thank the Global Forum/ Shaping the Future and its organisers, in particular Items International, for gathering in Trieste top-rank participants from all over the world and from a wide array of institutions.

Furthermore, I am glad to share this table with high-level representatives of the local authorities, including the Regional government: this shows that a common understanding exists on the necessity to encourage innovation through an open debate involving various stakeholders from both the public and the private sectors.

The Central European Initiative, whose Headquarters are based in Trieste since 1996, is the oldest regional forum for intergovernmental cooperation in Europe. Its membership comprises 18 participating countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, out of which eight are not, or not yet, members of the European Union. Therefore, our institutional mandate is to bridge between EU and non-EU countries, thus promoting Regional Cooperation for European Integration to fight geographical disparities and enhance territorial cohesion. We try to reach this ambitious goal through our specific working methodology, a combination of multilateral diplomacy and project management.

The main theme of this Global Forum, “Driving the Digital Future – Strategies to grow Stronger Communities and Business” is particularly appealing for our Member States. Indeed, any risk of digital divide shall be duly counteracted in order to avoid the emergence of two groups of countries, one innovative-oriented and one lagging-behind. This is a challenge not only for the CEI, which already promotes specific actions for knowledge transfer and capacity building, but also for policy makers and entrepreneurs, as well as for the academic world.

Effective cooperation within the “knowledge triangle” business-government-academia is the key to innovation. This is widely highlighted in the forthcoming CEI Plan of Action, which will cover the next tri-annual period 2014 – 2016 and align with the scope and objectives of the EU2020 Strategy. The CEI Plan of Action will pay particular attention to innovation-related issues and will support activities in line with the EU Digital Agenda, by favouring the accessibility to ICT solutions and e-applications in different sectors. To reach this goal, the CEI will mobilise its networks in order to multiply opportunities and facilitate synergies in its targeted region.

In this regard, I am most grateful to the organizers that agreed to host, in the context of the Global Forum, the annual CEI Ministerial Meeting on Science & Technology: this meeting will be held tomorrow morning, thus allowing ministers, deputy ministers and high officials to take part in the afternoon sessions of the Global Forum.