Distinguished Ministers,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank the State Committee on Science & Technology and the Institute of System Analysis for the organisation of this Conference. Moreover, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the CEI Presidency, successfully held by Belarus in 2017.

I am very pleased to open this Ministerial Conference on Science & Technology: indeed, the CEI has been historically active in this field, based on the assumption that scientific collaborations among nations are fundamental to tackle global challenges with a strong societal impact.

I would like to stress this point: global challenges do not involve only scientists but societies as a whole. They stand at the interface between science and policy and call for solid transnational and inter-disciplinary partnerships. This is the reason why “Science Diplomacy” is emerging as a relevant element of foreign policy, or better as “the torch that can light the way, where other kinds of politics and diplomacy have failed”, in Commissioner Moedas’ words.

As a tool to reinforce bilateral and multilateral relations - which are essential to implement effective international cooperation – Science Diplomacy shall be supported by an organisation like ours. Thus, I would like to encourage our Member States to make use of the CEI as a multilateral forum for thought, analysis and exchange of information between scientific communities and policy-makers, as well as an incubator of project ideas.

This perfectly suits both the CEI’s political mandate and its working methodology, which can be defined as a combination of multilateral diplomacy and fund, programme and project management.
The Secretariat is ready and willing to support this process in multiple ways.

First, through its **long-standing cooperation with the institutions of the “Trieste Science System”**. At the beginning of 2017, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding with **AREA Science Park** – the leading multi-sector Science and Technology Park in Italy. The ultimate goal of this collaboration is to design joint activities contributing to unlock the innovation potential in the CEI area, through technology transfer, valorisation of research results and start-up generation.

Other important collaborations in place are with

- **the National Institute of Oceanography and Experimental Geophysics (OGS)**, focusing on blue economy;
- **the Central European Research Infrastructure Consortium (CERIC)**, focusing on materials, biomaterials and nanotechnology;
- **the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB)**.

As to the latter, I would like to mention a recent event co-financed through the CEI Cooperation Fund, entitled “Smart Specialization Strategy in the field of Biotechnologies in Europe: a challenge for Central and Eastern Europe Region”. This international workshop was organized by the University of Trnava in cooperation with the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the ICGEB and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission.

I mention this event to remark that - in addition to well-established relations with renowned scientific centres - the CEI can rely on useful financial tools. In particular, I refer to the **Cooperation Fund** and the **Know-how Exchange Programme**: both can provide public and private applicants from our Member States with the necessary seed money to generate larger projects focused on regional needs and challenges.
Such larger projects can be co-developed with the CEI Secretariat, which has acquired specific expertise in the field of EU project design and implementation over the last years. Our involvement in EU projects represents a particular feature of the CEI, if compared to other regional organizations. The Secretariat will elaborate further on this topic during thematic session II, focused on the creation of “effective partnerships towards better use of existing instruments”.

In addition to cooperation with scientific institutions, own financial resources and expertise in designing EU projects, the CEI Secretariat can be useful to represent shared interests’ of CEI Member States in multilateral for a or within international initiatives.

As a matter of example, we participate as observers in the Steering Platform on Research & Innovation for the Western Balkan Countries and in the Steering Group on Knowledge Society of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region. Even more important - considering the topic of today’s Conference - is our involvement in the European Innovation Partnership in Active and Healthy Ageing, particularly in the Action Group D4 on “Age friendly environments”.

Another important initiative, to which the CEI Secretariat directly contributed, is the successful candidature of Trieste for hosting the Euro Science Open Forum (ESOF) in 2020.

ESOF is the largest interdisciplinary science meeting in Europe, created in 2004 and organized every two years. It is dedicated to scientific research and innovation and offers a unique opportunity for interaction and debate among scientists, innovators, policy makers, business people and citizens. It brings together over 4,000 stakeholders (researchers, educators, business actors, policy makers and journalists) from all over the world to discuss breakthroughs in science.

ESOF 2020 will ensure a projection towards Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, thus the CEI’s involvement in the application process. By hosting ESOF 2020
in Trieste, ground could be set for a future application from a city in one of CEI Member States, since previous hosts were all located in Western Europe.

The Secretariat intends to support preparatory activities to raise awareness among CEI scientific and business communities on this event. Indeed, during 2018 and 2019, scientists from CEI Member States will be encouraged to submit project ideas through an open competition, including on topics such as active ageing and smart health that will be high on the agenda. Selected ideas will be included in the scientific programme of ESOF 2020. In this process, cooperation between the Secretariat and CEI ministries responsible for science and research will be essential, thus I would kindly ask for your future support in this context.

I think that these platforms and initiatives, which I have briefly outlined, can represent appropriate frameworks where project ideas generated in this Conference can be further developed and effectively promoted.

Distinguished Ministers,

In brief, these are the main tools at disposal of the Secretariat to implement the strategic goals identified by the CEI Member States, which will represent the backbone of the forthcoming Plan of Action 2018-2020. In the area of science, research and innovation, we will strongly support activities able to bridge countries in and out the European Research Area. Accordingly, we will promote the definition of a comprehensive CEI approach towards Science Diplomacy in order to facilitate interactions between scientific communities and decision-makers: in this sense, I am confident that this ministerial Conference will offer interesting inputs to elaborate on under the forthcoming CEI Plan of Action 2018-2020.