

A large, semi-transparent logo is centered in the background. It features a stylized, abstract shape that resembles a compass needle or a stylized letter 'W', with several curved lines radiating from it, suggesting movement or a globe. The logo is rendered in a light purple or blue color, matching the top portion of the background gradient.

REPORT
ON THE ACTIVITIES OF
THE WESTERN BALKANS 6
CHAMBER INVESTMENT FORUM
IN 2023

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In 2023 WB6 CIF conducted different activities in the following areas:

- ✓ Supporting implementation of the Common Regional Market (CRM) and CRM Action Plan
- ✓ Promotion of the benefits of regional cooperation to business community
- ✓ Organization of free trainings for companies in WB6 economies
- ✓ Advocating the interests of WB6 companies
- ✓ Tailor-made support for WB6 companies
- ✓ Organizational activities of the WB6 CIF

From working with companies to [internationalize](#) and get [access to financing](#), marking the successes of the [region's champions](#), continuing the policy [dialogue with the EU](#), jointly presenting the capacities of the region's automotive industry and the investment potentials at [Hanover Messe](#), guiding our companies on topics like [CBAM](#), [financing instruments](#) and [SEED+](#), from [Business Forum](#) and Ministerial under the [Albanian Chairmanship of the Berlin Process](#) to the [EU-WB Brussels declaration](#), consultations and presentation of the [New Growth Plan](#), the focus of WB6 CIF's activities in 2023 year has all been about supporting businesses from the Western Balkans and advocating for them in the regional economic agenda.

WB6 CIF has established cooperation with almost all relevant business supporting organizations and is recognized as the important partner in implementation of business-related activities with regional coverage. Regional Supplier Development Program is one of the few concrete deliverables achieved through the Implementation of the CRM AP.

I. Supporting the implementation of the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan and promoting the benefits of regional cooperation to the business community

1.1. Implementation of the Regional Supplier Development Programme

The Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF), with the support from the European Commission, has been developing the WB6 CIF Supplier Development Program to ensure participation of SMEs (Small and Medium companies) in the regional and multinational supply chains and establishing new regional partnerships between WB6 companies.

The activities include mapping of suppliers from the WB6 region in selected industries, development of databases aimed at providing the necessary information to SME easing their access to markets, providing technical assistance to SMEs easing their access to finance and integration in the global supply chains, organization of networking events for SMEs from the region (joint participation at fairs and business events, investment conferences) and events aimed at increasing the capacities of regional SMEs (info days and trainings), all aiming at supporting the integration of WB6 SMEs in the regional and global supply chains. In 2023, particular focus was on the activities to support companies easing their access to finance and integration in the global supply chains.

❖ Technical Assistance program for SMEs for entering the European and global markets

The WB6 CIF in January has launched the call for the Technical Assistance program for SMEs for entering the European and global markets, for companies from 3 sectors (production of machinery and machinery parts, production and processing of fruits and vegetables, production of alcoholic beverages). **60 companies from all 6 economies were selected from these sectors**, and the assistance included:

1. **Reports on selected markets have been prepared for all companies and delivered to them.**
The markets that are covered by this program are the following:

- Germany and Italy for production of machinery and machinery parts
 - Germany and France for production and processing of fruits and vegetables
 - Germany and Slovakia for production of alcoholic beverages
2. Tailor made workshops for all companies that included communication with companies, filling in questionnaires etc in order to adjust to the needs of companies. **A total of 12 workshops were held, 4 per each industry.** Every company had optional time in order to follow up their other obligations and ensure participation. In this phase, the companies got more detailed information on the following topics:
- What is the minimum order quantity required? What are additional production costs? Will filling export orders hurt domestic sales?
 - Creation of prices, rules of origin and cumulation of origin. What is the cost of placing the product on the market - transportation, customs, taxes and other costs?
 - Required certificates, importance of quality assurance, packaging, labelling, etc
 - What specific operational steps must be taken to export abroad and when?
 - Sales channels, negotiations, marketing.
 - What company personnel and resources should be best dedicated to the export side of business?
 - How to use online tools and available data in order to support your exporting activities?
3. **One-to-one meetings** were scheduled with all companies to better understand their needs and potentials.
4. Preparation of **tailor made export strategy for each company**. Additionally, a list of potential partners from the target EU markets will also be identified and prepared, i.e. contacts of 10 potential partners from EU market will be sent to each company.
5. **Digital tools** have been developed for each sector to enable users to get all relevant data.

- Production of machinery and machinery parts.

Metal:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaMmRmZDA5MmMtYzE3NC00ODEwLTk3NDktYzNmNWlwNmRIYTIkIiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

- Production and processing of fruits and vegetables.

Fruit and vegetables:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiaMzUyZGRkNGUtYWQ1MCO0YWI2LThjZDctNDMwMTc0OGZiZWNhIiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

Processed fruits and vegetables:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieMmRmZDA5MmMtYzE3NC00ODEwLTk3NDktYzNmNWlwNmRIYTIkIiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

- Production of alcoholic beverages.

Wine and alcoholic drinks market

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieM3OTg2YjAtODBIOS00ZGI0LTk2NjYtMzYwMTFiYzY3NjMwIiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

Since some companies were accepted for technical assistance but did not fully meet the call requirements, the experts prepared additional tools only for them:

Tea production :

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieZTMzNzIxZDgtYjU1ZS00NTk2LWFhNmQtYzYzYmQyZTg1MzBmIiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

Live plants:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieZDRkYjM1MTQtZWwMS00MjQ0LWl5ZWQtODAzMzAyYmE1ODc5IiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

Bakery products:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieOWYwZWQ1ODAtODQzZC00NjMyLTJlZTQtYzQ2YzA4YWU2OWY5IiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

Rubber:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieiA3ODczZjctN2JmIiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

Paper:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieZjcyOWMzN2QtMmUzZi00MzgxLWEzNGltMjFjZmRhYTgzMTE1IiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

Tarpaulin:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieNTU2OTBhNjUtOTkxMC00ZGI0LWl5MzEtODc4OTE1Mjg3OTI1IiwidCI6ImQyNjBIZGJhLWnkZDctNDM4My1iZWQ0LWJlInzM3NzZjNDIyNyIsImMiOjI9>

❖ **Technical Assistance program for SMEs for providing access to finance**

During 2023 work was continued with the selected companies, and under this activity, a total of **61 applications** have been submitted by the selected companies, to relevant calls offering funding opportunities in their national economies, and 12 projects, in total value of **762,291 EUR** have been granted financing based on the submitted application. The overview of submitted applications per national economy is as follows:

Number of applications completed	Number of applications approved	Number of applications still in evaluation process
Albania: 10	Albania: 2	Albania: 8
Bosnia and Herzegovina: 8	Bosnia and Herzegovina: 0	Bosnia and Herzegovina: 7
Kosovo: 9	Kosovo: 0	Kosovo: 9
Montenegro: 10	Montenegro: 3	Montenegro: 4
North Macedonia: 7	North Macedonia: 2	North Macedonia: 2
Serbia: 17	Serbia: 5	Serbia: 0

1.2. Participation in CRM Coordination Meetings



WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska presented the WB6 CIF inputs in the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan at the coordination meeting held in Brussels on 18 April 2023.

The continuation of the Regional Supplier Development program, following the very successful WB6-EU Business Platform meeting and the regional awards organized in March in Skopje, and the joint WB6

participation at Hannover Messe, the Investment conference focusing on automotive and metal industry potentials of the region, confirm the WB6 CIF dedication to building stronger regional economy. Technical assistance for companies in access to finance and in internationalization that is being implemented by WB6 CIF supports the region's businesses in reaping the benefits the Common Regional Market has to offer. Further integration with the EU Single Market remains a strong request for the WB6 businesses, stated Shterjova Dushkovska.

WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska participated in the meeting of the Common Regional Market (CRM) Coordinators, held online, on 21 July 2023, informed on the implementation of mobility agreements as well as elaborated on the way forward on the implementation of the Berlin Process Summit deliverables.

1.3. Final conference of the „EU Support to the WB6 CIF” project

On 6 June 2023 in Prishtina, the WB6 CIF organized the final conference of the project „EU Support to the WB6 CIF.” Valued at over EUR 2.8 million, the project commenced in December 2019 and ran until June 2023. Its primary objective was to aid small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Western Balkans region, and it has played a pivotal role in enhancing cross-border cooperation, access to finance, and the overall competitiveness of SMEs in the Western Balkans, while also fostering economic integration in the region.



The overarching goal of the project was to facilitate cross-border business cooperation within the Western Balkans and bolster private sector development by improving the regional legal and policy framework. It also aims to support access to finance for various types of businesses and market niches.

Over the past three years, the project has provided free services and activities, **benefiting more than 6,700 companies across all six economies of the Western Balkans.** These services encompass technical assistance for internationalization and access to finance, investment conferences, joint

participation at fairs, B2B events, training, education, and seminars, implemented within the Regional Supplier Development Program, in line with the Common regional Market Action Plan.



At the project's final conference in Prishtina, the **WB6 CIF Managing Board** members called upon the European Union to ensure the region enjoys the fundamental freedoms of free movement of people, goods, services, and capital, believing this could be achieved in less than two years.

The European Commission expressed gratitude for the project's cooperation and **highlighted the WB6 CIF's role in promoting regional economic integration and bringing the region closer to the EU Single Market.**

YouTube video about the final conference: [EU Support to the WB6 CIF Final Conference.](#)

YouTube video about the WB6 CIF Achievements in the Regional Supplier Development Program: [WB6 CIF- Achievements within the Regional Supplier Development Program 2023.](#)

1.4. WB6 CIF participation in the Leaders' Dialogue Event "Implementing the Green Agenda for Economic and Societal Prosperity in the Western Balkans"

Ms. Ines Muçostepa, President of Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania and member of WB6 CIF Managing Board participated in the Leaders' Dialogue Event "Implementing the Green Agenda for Economic and Societal Prosperity in the Western Balkans", which was held in preparation of the 2023 Berlin Process Summit in Tirana, Albania, co-hosted by the Albanian Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure and the Albanian Ministry of Tourism and Environment, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development in cooperation with the German Federal Foreign Office on 6-7 June 2023 in Tirana, Albania. Ms. Mucostepa delivered an address in the panel discussion



“The Green Agenda as a Joint Mission – Rethinking Government-Private Sector-Civil Society Relationships,” focusing on the private sector’s views on the establishment of the Regional Climate Partnership between the Western Balkan states and Germany, as one concrete deliverable of the Berlin Process, which will intensify the political dialogue between Germany and the countries of the Western Balkans as well as ensure regional cooperation among these countries on climate and energy.

WB6 CIF representatives also took part in the roundtable discussion titled “The Socio-Ecological Transformation as an Engine for Employment and Private Sector Innovation.” At the heart of the discussions was the question of how to bring the Western Balkans region into closer alignment with the EU Single Market while concurrently creating the essential conditions for a socially just and economically equitable transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources and decarbonization.



1.5. WB6 CIF participation in the Conference „Enhancing Berlin Process through Parliamentary Diplomacy“



WB6 CIF Chairman Lulzim Rafuna participated in the panel discussion „Lessons learnt from adoption of the mobility agreements,” held during the Conference “Enhancing Berlin Process through Parliamentary Diplomacy” on 12-13 September 2023. In the exchange with Manuel Sarrazin, Special Representative of the Government of the Federal

Republic of Germany for the Western Balkan, RCC and Berlin Process Sherpa representatives, Chairman Rafuna shared the main message from the businesses that is that regional issues should be overcome, in view of greater good - securing businesses and citizens from the region the possibility to prosper here within the region - for that, fast implementation is crucial for all decisions enlisted under the CRM Action Plan.

1.6. Presentation on the opportunities and benefits from a Common Regional Market for Western Balkan economies

On 15 September 2023, the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, in collaboration with the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) presented a remarkable opportunity to export-oriented companies. The focus was on leveraging the Common Regional Market (CRM) of Western Balkan countries to foster deeper regional business cooperation and alleviate trade barriers, ultimately internationalizing the Macedonian business sector.

Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of WB6 CIF, outlined the ongoing and future activities within the Common Regional Market (CRM), the new prospects for the region's economies in light of the announced new growth plan for the Western Balkans, but also the services and opportunities offered by the WB6 CIF to regional companies in using the benefits of the regional economic integration. Another key contributor to the event was Marko Mandić, a trade expert from the CEFTA Secretariat, who shed light on CEFTA's significant role in advancing the region toward the EU.



1.7. Business Forum in Tirana “Phasing-in into the Single Market as a Potential for Growth for the Western Balkans”

Under the Albanian presidency of the Berlin Process, the Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania, in collaboration with the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) and the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania, hosted a Business Forum in Tirana on 26 September 2023, gathering more than 150 participants. The forum discussed the region's progress and challenges toward the EU single market.



Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama, in his opening speech, emphasized the need to think creatively within the framework of the Berlin Process. He highlighted the importance of the new EU plan in supporting the Western Balkans and stressed that each country must fulfill its responsibilities for the integration process.

Rama acknowledged the significant contributions of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF), noting that over 6,000 companies have benefited from the removal of barriers, fostering closer cooperation among countries in the region.



Ines Mucostepa, President of the Union of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Albania, called for EU support for Western Balkans companies, suggesting a tailor-made regional development



program to facilitate access to new markets.

Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board, stressed the importance of free movement of goods and proposed negotiations for an agreement on conformity assessment and acceptance of industrial products between the region and the EU.

Wojciech Kowalski, a representative of the European Commission, expressed the EU's commitment to the region, particularly focusing

on micro, small, and medium-sized businesses, with a EUR 30 billion Economic and Investment Plan.

Marko Cadez, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, highlighted the business community's desire for a barrier-free region and a faster inclusion in the EU's economic structure.

The Business Forum also featured insights from Ricardo Giucci, Heinz Hetmeier, and Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen on trade patterns, potential, and barriers within the Western Balkans.

As part of the panel discussion on the challenges and potentials of the common regional market, ministries – Ervin Mete, Minister of Finance and Economy, Rozeta Hajdari, Minister of industry, entrepreneurship and trade, Goran Đurović, Minister of Economic Development and Tourism Kreshnik Bekteshi, Minister of Economy and Tomislav Momirović, Minister of Domestic and Foreign Trade and local companies represented by Mr Angel Angjusev (Green Machines), Nenad Ristic (Elixir Group), Sanja Prastalo (Mikroelektronika), Merve Ozer Yilmaz (Newko Balkan) and Antje Muller (German Eastern Business Association) discussed investments, free movement of people, goods, services and capital, green transition, human capital development etc.



Vjekoslav Vukovic, President of the Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina moderated the event and pointed out conclusions and initiatives from the business community, highlighting the requirements from local companies to have a good environment for growth, through:



- better access to EU and national financing instruments for investing in technologically advanced products;
- transparent and competitive national procurement procedures;
- support in aligning with EU values related to green emissions including cross-border, EU and national funding instruments for green investments;
- EU support in establishment of the regional certification body/laboratory that is one of the

main problems for companies due to the fact that none of the laboratories is available in the region;

- Necessity for joint regional training academies to have certified experts in different fields;
- Establishment of the sectorial associations within WB6 CIF to have more focused approach.

1.8 WB6 CIF Participation in the Berlin Process Forum of Economy Ministers “Common Regional Market – A Stepping Stone Toward the EU Single Market”

The Tirana meeting of the Berlin Process’ Ministries of Economy, organized under Albania’s presidency, focused on preparations for the 16 October 2023 Berlin Process Summit. Mr. Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) Managing Board, joined discussions on the Common Regional Market as a pathway to the EU’s Single Market. Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi announced a new plan for economic growth in the Western Balkans.

Speakers addressed achievements, priorities, and challenges in implementing the Common Regional Market Action Plan (CRM AP). Emphasis was on opportunities for economic growth, trade facilitation, transport infrastructure projects, integration of payment systems, and euro area readiness. The Berlin Process was highlighted as a crucial tool for the region's economic convergence with the EU.



In the Chair’s conclusions: Berlin process forum of Economy ministers “Common Regional Market - a stepping stone towards the EU single market”, finalizing the Western Balkans Common Regional Market was stressed for improving competitiveness, the business environment, and fostering regional economic integration. **Ministers noted the achievements of the Regional Suppliers Development program led by WB6 CIF and expressed strong support for its continuation.** They also welcomed ongoing cooperation through the Regional Challenge Fund for youth employability and economic growth, advocating for its continuation through vocational training and job creation.

1.9. WB6 CIF at the Berlin Process Summit 2023

On 16 October, the Berlin Process Summit 2023, a historic event held for the first time in the Western Balkans, brought together key leaders, including President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Charles Michel, and Heads of State or

Government from the Western Balkans. Among the distinguished participants were Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) Managing Board, and Ines Mucostepa, member of the WB6 CIF Managing Board.



The summit, hosted in Tirana, marked a significant milestone for regional cooperation. Western Balkans partners endorsed joint statements on climate, pollution, digital transition, trade, transport facilitation, and the ambition to join the Single Euro Payment Area. The leaders also discussed the upcoming Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, aiming to bring EU membership benefits to the region's people.

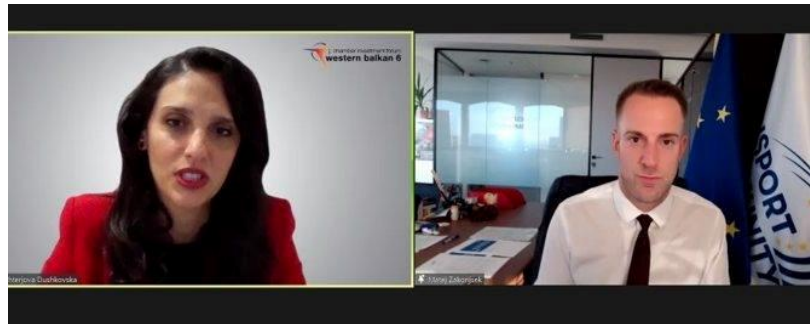
The WB6 CIF, represented by Rafuna and Mucostepa, played a crucial role in highlighting the potentials of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Western Balkans. The establishment of a common regional market was a focal point, promising increased trade, economic growth, job creation, enhanced mobility, and tighter regional cooperation.

Addressing the session on "Integrating the Region into the Single Market and Improving Convergence with the EU," leaders emphasized the societal implications of the Common Regional Market (CRM) in the Western Balkans. The WB6 CIF underscored the importance of synchronized efforts and a consistent approach from all stakeholders, aligning with EU strategies and standards.

The summit also touched on challenges, including the varied needs and priorities of each economy. Discussions emphasized the WB6 CIF's commitment to continuous development, tackling non-tariff barriers, promoting trade digitalization, and adhering to EU policies and standards. The forum's dedication was evident in its pivotal role at the summit, reinforcing the significance of regional collaboration for the advancement of the Western Balkans.

1.10 New Growth Plan – Opportunities for the Western Balkans business sector

The New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans marks a significant shift in the EU's approach, offering early access to the EU Single Market for regional companies. As part of CEFTA Week 2023, the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment



Forum (WB6 CIF), in collaboration with the European Commission and regional partners, **organized a roundtable on 5 December 2023 to familiarize the business community with the plan.**

The Growth Plan, built on four pillars, emphasizes alignment with the EU acquis, regional economic integration, accelerated reforms, and increased financial assistance through a proposed EUR 6 billion Reform and Growth Facility. This facility links payments to specific conditions, including democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

As stated by Mr David Hudson – DG NEAR, Senior Expert on EU enlargement „With the Growth



Plan we want to double the size of the Western Balkan economies within the next decade (7% per year), incentivise countries to accelerate the adoption and implementation of the EU acquis and accelerate the accession process. There is now a big momentum and the Western Balkans need to

take the advantages of it, specially taking into consideration the possibility to have new EU Member States by 2030 or soon after it”. Enrica Chiozza of DG NEAR highlighted the allocation of funds, emphasizing support for national budgets and investments in infrastructure, transport, energy, green and digital transition, and human capital development through the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF).

The meeting, attended by over 160 participants, underscored the plan's ambition, calling for coordinated efforts between governments, institutions, and businesses. President Branko Azeski emphasized the need to address corruption and the grey economy, urging commitment to the rule of law and market economy principles. Mr. Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board, stressed the ongoing commitment required for the plan's implementation to deliver tangible benefits to regional companies promptly.

1.11. WB6 CIF at the CEFTA Week 2023 Conference eCEFTA: Click, Connect and Tr@de



The Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) played a prominent role at the "CEFTA WEEK 2023 CONFERENCE eCEFTA: Click, Connect and Tr@de," held on 7 December 2023.

"The full implementation of the Common Regional Market remains an issue of utmost priority for the region's business community. It is of utmost priority to the processes of ratification and implementation of the adopted agreements and decisions relating to trade in goods and services, which have already been finalized on technical level. The EU and CEFTA are the most important

markets for Western Balkans producers and providers of services. In 2022, total trade, both in products and services, amounted to over 12 billion euros. Therefore, economic integration of Western Balkan economies and their access to the EU single market is a crucial objective for promoting economic growth, trade expansion, and regional stability.", stated Lulzim Rafuna, WB6 CIF Chairman during the opening address at the CEFTA WEEK 2023 CONFERENCE eCEFTA: Click, Connect and Tr@de.

Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, WB6 CIF Secretary General, contributed to the panel "SEEDing the Future: Paperless and Effortless Tr@de." She highlighted the success of the SEED+ sensitization campaign and trainings for veterinary certificates SEED+/CEFTA TRACES NT. Organized jointly by WB6 CIF and the CEFTA Secretariat, these events drew 770 attendees, comprising economic operators and veterinary inspectors, and emphasized the regional challenges hindering the pace of trade facilitation. Shterjova Dushkovska expressed regional businesses' full support for advancing digitalization in trade activities, envisioning a transition to completely paperless trade.

While acknowledging SEED+'s contribution, she stressed the need for a comprehensive approach, including harmonizing veterinary certificates and enhancing regional recognition of electronic documents and signatures.



Additionally, Balsa Culafic, WB6 CIF National coordinator from the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro showcased the WB6 Market Access Database and Market Intelligence Database,

utilized by over 2400 users, offering valuable tools for companies seeking partnerships in the EU and the WB6 region.

1.12. EU-Western Balkans Summit Brussels Declaration



The Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) received a significant recognition as the EU leaders entrusted our organization with a critical task—to spearhead the preparation of the new Common Regional Market Action Plan, CRM 2.0. This significant responsibility

outlined in the [EU-Western Balkans Summit Declaration](#) underscores the pivotal role WB6 CIF plays in ensuring that the needs and challenges faced by the Western Balkans business community are thoroughly addressed in the forthcoming Action Plan, which states:

“The EU invites the region, with the help of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), CEFTA and the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum (CIF), to prepare an ambitious successor to the current CRM action plan before the current one expires in 2024”.

II. Trainings for companies in WB6 economies



8 February 2023, Skopje - The Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, with the support from the WB6 CIF, organized one-day free seminar on Confidence and Security, that took place on 8 February 2023, according to the requirements of the business community. The training aimed at familiarizing the participants with current security threats and frauds taking place as of late, both in the region and globally, providing them with basic and advanced knowledge of managing

information security and data protection, as well as helping the participants understand the IT control employed to detect and prevent in case of security threats. The training provided basic and advanced knowledge and skills in managing information security and data protection, as well as managing current IT threats that may emerge in virtually every company.

16-17 March 2023, Belgrade – The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, with the support from the WB6 CIF, organized a two-day training in the field of digital marketing, which was held on 16 and 17 March 2023 and attended by more than 170 participants.



As part of the "How to understand digital marketing" training, participants had the opportunity to learn about the detailed process of business or brand promotion and also with tools and services which improve and control the effectiveness of online business, with detailed information on the methods how digital marketing can help the businesses in their daily operations, what is needed to better understand the areas of digital marketing and how to understand the results of marketing activities on the Internet, and guidance how to present products and services through social networks, in order to get as much visibility as possible.

The topics that were included in the training included main channels of communication (content marketing, social media, SEO and other channels), difference between retail and wholesale on the Internet, and how to systemically increase profits and stand out in the market.

6-7 June 2023, Skopje- In collaboration with the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) played a key role in advancing digital transformation within Macedonian companies. A two-day training program titled Digital Transformation for Macedonian Companies: Road to Regional Integration was organized on 6-7 June 2023, targeting the business community.

Aleksandar Vratonjić Gligorijević, an expert holding a BSc in IT Management from the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, Scotland, served as the program trainer. He not only addressed the challenges



of digital transformation but also introduced participants to the transformative potential of modern technologies such as cloud accounting, business analytics, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things (IoT), cybersecurity, and blockchain.

III. Advocating the interests of WB6 companies

3.1. Meeting of the WB6-EU Business Platform in Skopje – The progress toward the EU Single Market for the Western Balkan businesses



On 30 March 2023 in Skopje, the WB6-EU Business Platform brought together the members of the WB6 CIF Business Council, as representatives of the region’s private sector, the European Commission, and the regional stakeholders for the Meeting of the WB6-EU Business Platform, under the topic “One Region- One Economy – the progress toward the EU Single Market for the

Western Balkan businesses.”

Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board and Thomas Hagleitner, Head of Unit at European Commission DG NEAR in the opening remarks, stated that 2023 marks the 30th anniversary of the creation of the EU single market, and the 3rd year of the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan, aimed at paving the way to a deeper economic integration of the Western Balkans with the EU market, and WB businesses should make the most of the lessons learnt from the creation of the EU single market, which in the last decades has helped to make everyday life easier for people and businesses, fueling jobs and growth across the EU, and being one of the EU’s greatest achievements, and the creation of the Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans is the path for WB companies in easing their daily operations in the region, and greater economic integration.

The annual reports on the business insights into the progress of the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan, prepared by the WB6 CIF, showed that although some modest progress regarding the regional economic integration process has been made, most of the

work lies ahead. The full implementation of the Common Regional Market remains an issue of utmost priority for the region's business community, and despite the laggings in its implementation, the results of the conducted surveys in the past three years confirm that the issues stated as action points in this document still remain valid requests of the regional business community and businesses across the region expect to see visible shifts related to the issues selected as Key Priority Areas. **In general, the WB6 business community is very supporting to any viable option that makes regional business cooperation more efficient and helps every market within the WB6 be stronger and more sustainable.**

In the **panel discussion**, the members of the WB6 CIF Business Council focused on several topics, including the Quality Infrastructure in the WB6 and the need to continue the work on the harmonization of WB6 Laboratories accreditation with European rules and mutual recognition throughout the WB economies; the challenge of shortening waiting times at border crossing points, where infrastructure and staff, along with the border procedures, still remain the key obstacle in providing smooth movement of goods between the region and the EU, and intra the WB6 region; the further elimination of non-tariff barriers that still impede regional trade; the challenges, but also the perspectives for WB6 companies in incorporating ESG standards in their operations, and complying with the EU Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

The objective of WB6–EU Business Platform is to ensure a continued and structured dialogue between EU decision makers, the WB6 business community represented by the WB6 CIF Business Council and the regional stakeholders, and forum for exchange on the obstacles and opportunities for businesses with EU decision makers and regional stakeholders. Such a dialogue serves to search for



administrative, regulatory and policy solutions, and support the business communities in the Western Balkans to understand better the European Union, its acquis, and help them to be prepared for the integration into the Single Market.

3.2. WB6 CIF Managing Board meeting with the President of North Macedonia, H.E. Stevo Pendarovski

The members of the WB6 CIF Managing Board held a working meeting with the President of North Macedonia, H.E. Stevo Pendarovski. During the meeting, the parties discussed the open issues and main points related to the regional cooperation and perspectives for the further implementation of the WB6 Common Regional Market (CRM).



3.3. Contribution of the Western Balkans 6 Chambers Investment Forum to the European Commission's Consultation on the Draft Implementing Regulation on Foreign Subsidies

On 3 March 2023, the WB6 CIF prepared a submission, to the European Commission's Consultation on the Draft Implementing Regulation on Foreign Subsidies, which sets out the rules and procedures for merger and public procurement notifications under the EU Foreign Subsidies Regulation. The Submission points out that the regulatory gap that the Commission is concerned about does not exist as regards to the WB6 Countries since the EU and the WB6 Countries are well positioned to address any concerns regarding subsidies granted by the WB6 Countries under the existing framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement that the WB6 Countries have with the EU.

3.4. Position Paper with Conclusions from the WB6-EU Business Platform meeting held in Skopje on 30 March 2023

Following the panel discussions at the roundtable "Untapped opportunities for WB6 businesses and problems detected by the business community" during the **WB6-EU Business Platform**

meeting, on 4 May 2023, the WB6 CIF has prepared a **Position Paper**, summarizing the most pressing issues tackling the region’s accelerated economic integration and “phasing-in” to EU’s Single Market, but also issues relating to reducing and removing administrative barriers within the WB6 region and building upon the Common Regional Market as a stepping stone to the EU single market raised by the participants representing the WB6 business sector.

The Position Paper has been sent to the European Commission, the regional institutions and the regional governments.



3.5. Joint WB6 CIF Initiative - eliminating restrictions on the stay of WB6 professional drivers in the territory of the European Union

Following the Conclusions by the WB6 CIF Managing Board, the WB6 CIF has addressed the European Commission with a **proposal for eliminating restrictions on the stay of professional drivers in the territory of the European Union (90 days in any period of 180 days in the territory of the European Union)**, which at the moment is effectively incapacitating them to perform transport operations for almost 6 months within a calendar year. These persons, unlike common travelers, are entering and exiting the EU area in the performance of professional activities, and this limitation poses serious constraint to this WB6 sector, but also to the connectivity of the region with the EU single market, and for these reasons, the WB6 CIF proposed granting this category a special preferential treatment when entering the European Union.



3.6. Meeting with Commissioner Varhelyi and DG NEAR Head of Unit

On 30 May 2023, the WB6 CIF Managing Board Chairman Lulzim Rafuna and the former WB6 CIF Managing Board Chairman Marko Cadez had a **working meeting with the European Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi**.

During the meeting, Mr. Rafuna and Mr. Cadez discussed with Commissioner Várhelyi about the prospects for regional economic integration of the Western Balkans and the role of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) in that process, as well as the achievements in the implementation of the EU funded project in supporting the region's private sector in actively participating in the processes.



The meeting also tackled possibilities for setting up a more structured framework for cooperation between the EC and the WB6 in order to achieve the closest possible association with the EU Single Market (WB6 access to EU Single Market prior to full membership i.e. “inclusive enlargement”), and a follow up on the Conclusions from the WB6-EU Business Platform meeting in March 2023, and the initiative for eliminating restrictions on the stay of professional drivers from the WB6 in the territory of the European Union, which have been raised by the WB6 CIF in the past months.



The Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board Lulzim Rafuna had a **working meeting with Thomas Hagleitner, Head of Unit for Western Balkans Policy and Regional Strategy, European Commission DG NEAR**, and exchanged views and issues regarding the regional economic integration of the Western Balkans and the role of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF).

3.7. Study on the obstacles and opportunities for doing business in the region – Niche markets

The study [„Niche market possibilities in the WB6 region“](#) was prepared under the EU funded project. The study states that a complementary approach specific to the regional sector of Western Balkans is needed to develop its full economic potential by attracting more investment and increasing trade. Such an approach will deal with sector-specific investor requirements and political barriers but must also take into account the possibilities of narrower market specialization, or in other words, the creation of industrial niches, which will surely make a direct contribution to realizing the full economic potential of this region.

In the recommendations for the niche markets in the region, the authors singled out a significant number of opportunities for industry niche markets in the WB6 region. The largest number of opportunities for creating market niches in the WB region are found within the primary sector –in all areas of agriculture, and also in plenty of areas from secondary sector of the economy, especially light industry, while also significant opportunities can be found in heavy industry (another part of the secondary sector), then in the tertiary sector (tourism, trade, transport, craftsmanship, ICT sector, hospitality and others), and in the part of education, culture, information and healthcare (quaternary sector). Special attention must be paid to agriculture when defining market niches in the WB region, for a simple reason – more and more consumers are searching for authenticity and are willing to pay higher prices for typical food products that are deeply rooted in their territories of origin. For small and medium producers from the WB region, this new trend signifies a major opportunity. Also, the authors also drew attention to the importance of establishment adequate cooperation between Art Faculties with the offered tourist products in the country, and to the importance of increased degree of processing of raw materials into the final product at existing factories, in order to significantly accelerate the industry of niche markets. To single out the key to defining a niche – differentiation of products or services, the product review matrix was presented. Moreover, an overview of several examples of good practices (impact stories) was given, which to a greater or lesser extent justifies all the previously defined recommendations and isolated opportunities.

3.8. Study on the obstacles and opportunities for doing business in the region – Automotive Industry

The Study [“Automotive Industry in the Western Balkans: State of Play, Competitiveness and Challenges on Europe's Doorstep”](#) was prepared under the EU funded project. The study focuses

on the automotive industry in the region, noting that the FDIs has played a pivotal role in the economic development of the WB6. With its strategic location, growing market potential and ongoing efforts towards EU integration, the region offers promising investment opportunities across various sectors with the automotive industry being one of the most promising and successful for several countries in the region so far. The study included recommendations to improve the wb6's attractiveness for (automotive) FDIs, including the following: reducing red tape and bureaucracy, new or upgraded infrastructure, increase the effectiveness of legal systems, increase the timely fulfilment of contractual obligations, reduce emigration and brain drain, : enlarge offer of vocational training and dual education programs, pre-university and university level, with a cross-border offer and increased share of in-company training (50:50 %), establish education and research focus on industrial electronics, industry 4.0/5.0 and other production-related subjects, establish cross-technology (excellence) clusters, e.g. battery technologies, AI, embedded software, digital manufacturing etc., enable industrial clusters and proximity, integrate key topics and requirements of the automotive industry into the industrial policies of wb6 countries, increase awareness and fast-track implementation of sustainability and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) management and green technologies along all supply chain elements, : professionalize and depoliticize investment promotion agencies (IPAs), establish a heat map of needed suppliers / processes in the region, establishing FDI screening mechanics (per EU/US requirements), : enhance supplier networking, via fairs or similar events to improve integration of local suppliers. improve and connect existing databases, enhance investment promotion to similar products like commercial vehicles and machines to reduce cluster risk from passenger cars.

3.9. Participation in a panel discussion on “Regional Initiatives and European Integration”



On 27 April 2023 in Skopje, WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska participated in a panel discussion on the topic "Regional Initiatives and European Integration" organized on the occasion of the Macedonian Diplomacy Day, 29 April, by the Diplomatic Club and the American College University in Skopje. The fulfillment of the goals of regional integration should be a further incentive for successful European integration – agreed the EU Ambassador in North Macedonia David Geer and the

representatives from EU institutions, Economic Chamber of North Macedonia and state institutions that took part in the discussion.

3.10. Exports and regional cooperation as driving forces for growth in the WB – event at the ECNM



During the event organized by the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia (ECNM) on 8 June 2023, Branko Azeski, Deputy Chairman of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) and President of ECNM, underscored the vital role of exports in driving business progress. Azeski emphasized that, instead of relying solely on political diplomacy, a greater emphasis should be placed on export as the

cornerstone of economic advancement.

Azeski's remarks at this event echoed the sentiment within the WB6 CIF that smart and strategic steps are essential to eliminate barriers hindering regional integration in the Western Balkans. The overarching goal is to foster a more connected Balkan region, close historical divisions, and unite businesses for mutual prosperity. Business leaders, exemplified by the WB6 CIF, are actively engaged in constructing economic bridges that transcend political boundaries.

3.11. Meeting in Podgorica and Joint Statement by presidents Rafuna and Cadez

On 16 June 2023 in Podgorica, Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of WB6 CIF Managing Board and President of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and Marko Cadez, WB6 CIF Managing Board member and President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, **held a joint meeting with Goran Djurovic, Minister of Economic Development and Tourism in the Government of Montenegro**, and issued a Joint Statement following the meeting, considering the latest developments in the economic relations in the region.



The Joint Statement underlines that WB6 CIF believes that economic cooperation of the business communities of the region substantially contributes to the overall development of our societies at all levels by creating preconditions for greater economic growth and employment and, ultimately, to strengthening cooperation and peace in the Western Balkans, and calls on all the responsible actors to immediately take steps to calm the situation and ensure that political developments do not hinder ever improving business environment and the progress that the economies have made.

3.12. Preparation of inputs of the Western Balkans Business Community for the development of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans



In the consultations process during the preparations of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkan, the WB6 CIF had a working meeting with Directorate-General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR), and prepared a **position paper summarizing the inputs of the regional businesses related to the access to EU Single Market**, on several key topics: infrastructure, free movement of goods, free movement of services and free movement of capital. The [New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans](#) notes WB6 CIF's active involvement in defining the Priority Actions for Integration into the EU's single market.

3.13. Award to WB6 CIF from the ECNM

In celebration of the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia's 101st anniversary, the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) received a prestigious award for its notable contributions to Macedonian businesses. Specifically, WB6 CIF was recognized for its role



in promoting export growth and fostering a skilled workforce aligned with the region's business needs.

During the event held in Skopje, President Azeski emphasized the significance of exports and workforce development as top economic priorities. He commended WB6 CIF for its pivotal role in advancing these priorities and for the substantial progress made over the past year in fulfilling the chamber's strategic objectives. These objectives revolve around enhancing the interests of regional businesses and augmenting their overall value.

Chairman Rafuna, upon receiving the award, expressed his hope that this recognition would serve as an impetus for WB6 CIF to intensify its efforts in supporting regional economies. He underlined the vital importance of strengthening ties between Western Balkans economies and the EU market. Moreover, he encouraged businesses across the region to actively seek collaboration with their respective chambers of commerce and, critically, with the Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum.

The award conferred upon WB6 CIF acknowledges its outstanding achievements, particularly in the successful implementation of key initiatives, including the Regional Supplier Development Program and the Regional Challenge Fund.

3.14. WB6 CIF participation in the Regional Business Forum „The Western Balkans in 2030 and Beyond“

The Regional Business Forum, held on 13 and 14 September 2023 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, provided a platform for insightful discussions about the future of the Western Balkans. WB6 CIF Chairman Rafuna delivered a compelling speech during the event, highlighting key aspirations and prospects for the region.



In his address, Mr. Rafuna applauded the concept of the TIME-CAPSULE, a thought-provoking exercise that invites contemplation of various scenarios and desires for the future. If he were to distill these ideas into a few words, Chairman Rafuna emphasized a vision of the Western Balkans firmly integrated into the European Union by 2030. Such a transformation would herald profound changes in the economic, political, security, and cultural landscape of the region.

In summary, Chairman's speech at the Regional Business Forum, on behalf of WB6 CIF, centered on a vision of the Western Balkans integrated into the EU by 2030. It underscored the region's resilience, commitment to economic reform, and determination to combat corruption, all while striving for enhanced political stability and democratic governance.

3.13 WB6 CIF participated in the Western Balkans Digital Summit 2023

Sarajevo hosted the 6th Western Balkans Digital Summit from 4 to 5 October, organized by the Ministry of Communications and Transport of Bosnia and Herzegovina with support from the Regional Cooperation Council. The largest regional digital event gathered 500 participants, 150 companies, and 100 speakers.

The Summit emphasized the need for a Digital Community in the Balkans, similar to the Energy Community and the Transport Community. A panel featuring the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) discussed interoperability and showcased achievements in digitalization, including Market Access and Market Intelligence Databases.



The discussion highlighted that interoperability is crucial for a unified digital market, emphasizing the importance of mutual cooperation in digital transformation. Challenges were identified, including the underutilization of existing digital solutions due to legal, regulatory, and human mindset issues. Additionally, the retention of quality IT staff in governmental institutions was recognized as a hurdle to digitalization and public sector improvement.

3.15. WB6 CIF MB Chairman Rafuna participates in the 20th Vienna Economic Forum

Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) Managing Board and President of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, actively participated in the 20th Vienna Economic Forum's session on "Acting Together with Responsibility for the European Future – Infrastructure, Energy, Digital Technology, Innovation." The 20th Vienna Economic Forum



took place on 13 November. There, Rafuna affirmed WB6 CIF's commitment to regional economic cooperation, serving as a catalyst for partnerships, economic growth, and bridging ties between the Western Balkans and Western Europe.

He highlighted the organization's role in infrastructure development, particularly in highways and railways, with Kosovo serving as a notable example. Emphasizing the Green Transition Agenda, Rafuna underscored the region's focus on green energy sources. In the realm of digital technology and innovation, WB6 CIF established a Regional Training Center dedicated to equipping the region's youth with qualifications for the modern labor market, contributing to a competitive workforce and fostering innovation.

Rafuna reiterated the commitment of WB6 CIF, governments, and the private sector to responsible and united action with European partners, shaping the European future through infrastructure, sustainable energy, digital technology, and innovation for mutual economic growth and a sustainable future.

3.16. WB6 CIF MB member Ines Mucostepa keynote speaker at a high-level conference on regional trade facilitation

Ines Mucostepa, member of the Managing Board of WB6 CIF, served as a keynote speaker at the High-Level Conference on Regional Trade Facilitation “Unleashing Collaborative Partnerships in the Digital Era,” held on 8-9 November 2023 in Tirana, Albania. Mucostepa emphasized the crucial



need for Western Balkan companies to overcome barriers in their interactions with the European Union, ensuring full access to the EU Single Market and equitable treatment alongside EU counterparts adhering to European standards. She stressed the importance of intensifying efforts in digitalization, green transition, and

dismantling barriers within the Western Balkans to enhance regional competitiveness. Mucostepa presented key proposals from the WB6 business sector to both EU and Western Balkans economic policymakers, including the development of transnational networks, financing for cross-border and digital infrastructure, increased investment in physical infrastructure at border crossing points for faster controls, establishment of green lanes, and mutual recognition of certificates for Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) with designated special lanes at major border crossings with the EU. The proposals also highlighted the need for additional border inspection points, harmonization of administrative procedures, utilization of unique digital systems, and expansion of green lanes to neighboring EU member states.

3.17. WB6 CIF Managing Board Chairman Rafuna in working meetings in Berlin

Chairman Rafuna and the WB6 CIF delegation had highly productive meetings in Berlin on 23 November 2023, engaging with the **Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Unit for the Western Balkans and Berlin Process**, as well as with the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK).

The discussions focused on the active participation of the private sector in the Berlin Process, emphasizing the crucial role of the business community in fostering regional cooperation and integration into the EU framework. Chairman Rafuna exchanged insights and perspectives with the ministry, aligning priorities for the upcoming steps within the Berlin Process.





During his stay in Berlin, Chairman Rafuna also participated in a roundtable discussion with the German Eastern Business Association (Ost-Ausschuss der Deutschen Wirtschaft), delving into the current challenges of regional economic cooperation. The WB6 CIF and the German Eastern Business Association explored possibilities of establishing a

strategic partnership between the two organizations. The potential partnership aims to concentrate efforts on critical areas such as education, the Green Deal, and digitalization. This collaborative initiative underscores the commitment to addressing shared challenges and leveraging joint expertise for the advancement of economic cooperation and sustainable development in the region. Notably, these discussions set the stage for closer collaboration and increased involvement of WB6 CIF in the Berlin Process framework, aligning with the ongoing commitment to regional cooperation and progress towards EU integration.

3.18. WB6 CIF at Transport Community’s “Where are the future jobs and professions in the transport sector?” regional dialogue

At the regional dialogue on "Where are the future jobs and professions in the transport sector," organized by the Transport Community in cooperation with ReSPA on 27 November 2023, the WB6 CIF played a pivotal role, with insights shared by Marija Askovic Matic, WB6 CIF project coordinator. She highlighted the significant challenges faced by Western Balkans transport companies in sourcing skilled workers, including issues related to migrations and the absence of flexible formal education aligned with evolving technologies and policy demands.



The dialogue drew attention to the growing disparity between retiring and new drivers, projecting a threefold increase in unfilled truck driver positions to over 60% by 2026 in Europe. Additionally, it addressed the potential impact of automation on jobs, especially within sectors like transport, emphasizing the pressing

need for strategic workforce planning. A key concern brought to light was the restriction on the stay of Western Balkans professional drivers in the EU, limiting them to 90 days within any 180-day period. This restriction, initiated by WB6 CIF, has been submitted for review to the European Commission, given its adverse effects on the economic viability and attractiveness of the occupation for both drivers and employers. The dialogue underscores the proactive role of WB6 CIF in advocating for policy changes to address these challenges and enhance the prospects of the transport sector in the Western Balkans.

IV. Tailor-made support for WB6 companies

4.1. Technical Advisory Committee workshop of the Regional Challenge Fund

The second Technical Advisory Committee workshop of the Regional Challenge Fund in Western Balkans 6 took place on 25-26 January 2023 in Skopje, North Macedonia. The two-day workshop gathered VET experts from Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF), RCF's partners from KfW German Development Bank and the Swiss Embassy in North Macedonia, VET specialists from WB6, and the RCF Fund Management Unit.



The Second TAC was chaired by Mr. Balsa Culafic, Project Coordinator on behalf of the WB6 CIF, and opened with welcoming addresses by Ms. Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, WB6 CIF Secretary General, Ms. Viktoria Veidt, Senior Portfolio Manager, KfW German Development Bank, and Mr. Lucien Aegerter, Deputy Head of Mission, Swiss Embassy/Swiss Cooperation in North Macedonia.

The meeting started with updates on the RCF's ongoing activities, the status of the projects awarded in the First Call and the Second Call selection process status, expected results, and key lessons learned about the cooperative training arrangements in the WB6 region from two open calls. Presentations were delivered by Mr. Frieder Woehrmann, Team Leader, and Ms. Jelena Manic Radoicic, Deputy Team Leader, of RCF's Fund Management Unit. In a similar manner, VET experts and managers of VET projects from the region shared their success stories in the field of green VET, VET digitalization, and the regional dimension of cooperative and labor market relevant VET. The presentations were followed by several workshops where the participants discussed the faced challenges, initiatives, good practices, and the importance of RCF's role in the VET field.

4.2. Meeting of representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and Kosovo Chamber of Commerce with the aim of improving business cooperation

The delegations of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia held a successful bilateral meeting within the EU project „EU support to the WB6 CIF,” in Podgorica on 2 February as a part of the 24th session of the WB6 CIF Managing Board. The meeting was held in order to monitor future joint activities within the EU project. The inter-chamber dialogue is a process launched in 2013 between the two chambers in order to support the efforts of promoting further business cooperation.

The inter-chamber dialogue covers issues related to the movement of goods and services, promotion of cooperation between the two business communities and cooperation between the two chambers. Both chambers agreed to cooperate in the upcoming period in order to successfully fulfil the activities within the project that covers 2 meetings on topics that are important for the business community and one business forum. The idea of a business forum is to gather companies from business communities that are strongly interested in having more incentives and a predictable business environment. The importance of business cooperation and inter-chamber dialogue was pointed out at the meeting, as well as the need for chambers to cooperate more closely in order to fully use the potential of business cooperation.

4.3. Participation in TAIEX Workshop in Brussels on designing apprenticeship and traineeship schemes for the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee

Mr. Balsa Culafic, Project Coordinator of the Regional Challenge Fund participated in the TAIEX Workshop on “Designing apprenticeship schemes for the implementation of the EU Youth Guarantee – Approaches, methodologies and practices in the EU and in the Western Balkans,” organized in cooperation with DG NEAR, taking place in Brussels on 13-14 March 2023.



Mr. Culafic shared insights about apprenticeship arrangements across the WB6 region and cooperation between vocational training providers and enterprises, and presented the experiences of the Regional Challenge Fund, contributing to the debates about implementing Youth Guarantee as one of the most important measures for fighting youth unemployment.

4.4. WB6 CIF awarded the most successful companies from the region

On 29 March 2023, the WB6 CIF organized an Awards ceremony for the regional competition, which recognized the contribution of companies that are leaders in regional economic integration and cooperation, across the various pillars of the Common Regional Market, the Green and Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans and the integration of the economies of the Western Balkans toward the EU single market.



A total of **16 awards** in six different categories were granted - highest export growth, digital champion, environmental protection champion, successful supplier in the regional chain, most innovative company, and champion investor.

- Alumnij, Bosnia and Herzegovina – company with highest export growth in the region for 2022.
- Marbo Product, Serbia – company with highest export growth in the region for 2022.
- Mega –International, Montenegro –company with highest export growth in the region for 2022.
- Tikveš Winery, North Macedonia - company with highest export growth in the region for 2022.
- Cactuss, Kosovo – digital champion in WB6.



- Logate, Montenegro - digital champion in WB6.
- Makprogres, North Macedonia - digital champion in WB6.
- Salveo, Serbia - digital champion in WB6.
- SIK Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina - digital champion in WB6.
- AZ Group - environmental protection champion in the Western Balkans 6.
- NEST Coworking, Montenegro - environmental protection champion in the Western Balkans 6.



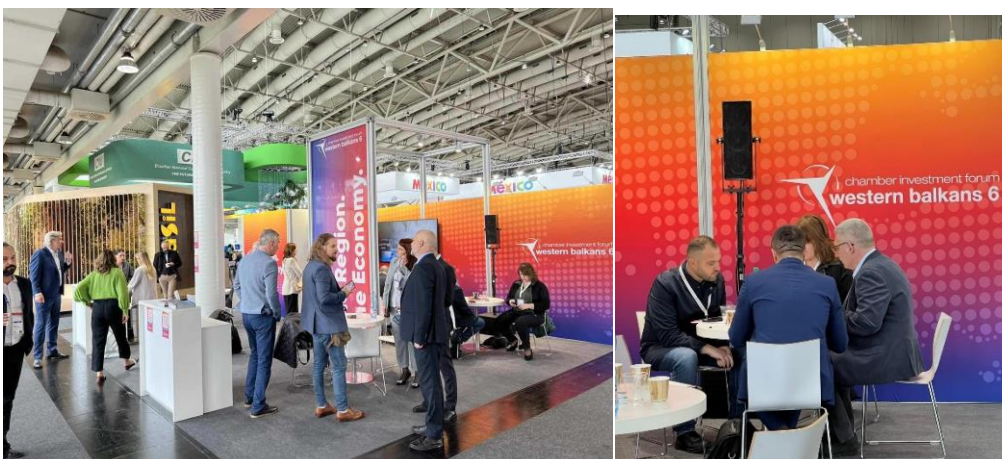
- Civil Engineering Institute Macedonia - environmental protection champion in the Western Balkans 6.
- Elixir Zorka, Serbia - environmental protection champion in the Western Balkans 6.
- Alkaloid, North Macedonia – lead investor in Western Balkans 6.
- NELT, Serbia - successful supplier in the regional chain.
- Farmavit, Bosnia and Herzegovina - most

innovative company in the Western Balkans.

A [Brochure](#) has been prepared with brief information on the awarded companies and [promotional videos](#) for the achievements in the field the company has received award.

You Tube link to the Awards Ceremony: [WB6 Awards Ceremony Video- YouTube.](#)

4.5. WB6 CIF delegation at Hannover Fair 2023



Companies from the Western Balkans 6 region presented themselves at the Hannover Fair as joint delegation of Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF).

Supported by the European Commission within the project “EU support to WB6 CIF,” companies from the automotive and metal industry had the opportunity both to present their potential and had B2B meetings with other companies presented at the fair. At the world’s leading trade fair for industry, around 4,000 companies from the mechanical and electrical engineering and digital industries presented technologies and solutions for a networked and climate-neutral industry.

From the digitalization and automation of complex production processes to the use of hydrogen to supply factories with energy and the use of software to record and reduce the carbon footprint. Top topics at Hannover Fair 2023 were CO₂-neutral production, energy management, industry 4.0, artificial intelligence and machine learning, as well as hydrogen and fuel cells.

The main goal of the WB6 CIF joint delegation participation in the Fair was to connect manufacturers, TIER1&2 companies with potential investors and business partners from EU and with relevant public institutions to support the development of



the automotive industry in the Western Balkans and create new supply chains that include companies from the WB6 region.

Companies presented at the WB6 CIF stand were: Activa Ltd., Brako, Daido, Emsol, Gomma Line, Industry Association, Kaz Group Ltd, Medena Commerce, Metal Kosova, Metal Processing Association, Metalac Fad, Remid Vis, Serbian Automotive Cluster, Tikt Manufactura Ltd.

The participating companies had the opportunity to promote their companies and products in person on the WB6 CIF stand and in the **WB6 catalogue- [Automotive and metal producers- WB6 CIF](#).**

Companies took part in **B2B meetings within the Technology & Business Cooperation Days 2023 [Technology & Business Cooperation Days 2023- Home \(b2match.io\)](#)**, where WB6 CIF was event partner.

4.6. WB6 Investment Conference 2023



During the Hannover Fair, on 19 April 2023, the WB6 CIF organized an Investment Conference 2023. The event gathered European investors, with an eye to presenting opportunities and benefits from investing in the region. The conference disseminated the information on the investment

framework, including benefits and opportunities of doing business in the Western Balkans region, but also showcased examples of successful investments to the region for the benefit of companies considering investments to the region. Additionally, it provided information on the Common Regional Market and the benefits and opportunities it offers to foreign investors in the short and medium term. The audience were companies from the automotive and metal industry from Germany and other leading European markets.

The conference was opened by Mr. Lulzim Rafuna, WB6 CIF Chairman who sent a message that joint cooperation is the key to success and that only together we can move forward. During the panel discussion dedicated to investors insights, Mr. Viktor Mizo, Vice President of Kostal Group presented the **regional potentials and an**



overview of the current situation. Things are moving forward, the region is improving in many fields and despite challenges that we are all faced with, positive impacts are visible. As it was recommended during the panel, creation of different joint WB6 CIF sectorial clusters could be more interesting to foreign investors and that should be the path to go on in future WB6 CIF activities.

The second panel gathered **representatives of the agencies dealing with foreign investments and promotion in the region** who presented all countries' potentials individually. They spoke about the current state of play of the FDI in the WB6 region – the main advantages, challenges and risks.

4.7. Workshop for WB6 companies – ICS2

On 25 April 2023, the WB6 CIF in cooperation with the CEFTA Secretariat and Directorate-General Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD) organized a **workshop to discuss the details of the ICS2 system and the obligations for the economic operators from the WB region.**

The European Union is implementing a new customs pre-arrival security and safety program, underpinned by a large-scale advance cargo information system – Import Control System 2 (ICS2). The program is one of the main contributors toward establishing an integrated EU approach to reinforce customs risk management under the common risk management framework (CRMF).

During the workshop, DG TAXUD experts elaborated on the general description and purpose of ICS2, timeline for its implementation, data requirements, filing requirements, the link with NCTS and other customs IT systems and the legal framework.

4.8. Meeting of representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and Kosovo Chamber of Commerce with the aim of improving business cooperation

The delegations of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia held two meetings within the EU project „EU support to the WB6 CIF” in Skopje, **on 30 March 2023 and online on 10 May 2023.** The inter-chamber dialogue is a process launched in 2013 between the two chambers in order to support the efforts of promoting further business cooperation.

The inter-chamber dialogue covers issues related to the movement of goods and services, promotion of cooperation between the two business communities and cooperation between the two chambers. At the meetings, the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia have exchanged opinions on the main administrative barriers and main administrative issues that affect their companies in conducting everyday business procedures in the bilateral economic relations and discussed and defined Recommendations for solving the main administrative barriers between the two chambers and two economies. which affects the daily activities of companies. During the discussion, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce both suggested recommendations, but the two chambers also stated that most of the barriers need to be solved on institutional level or that some have political segments that are out of the reach of the chambers.

4.9. Working meeting with the ETF - the role of chambers of commerce in upskilling and reskilling in the agri-food sector



On 12 May 2023, representatives from the Agri-food and Skills/Education sectors from the WB6 CIF chambers held a consultative meeting with the ETF - European Training Foundation. The main objective of the meeting was to explore the current role and future needs of chambers of commerce in supporting small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in upskilling and reskilling in the agri-food sector, career

development support to SMEs and identifying needs of chambers in this area. Small and medium-sized enterprises experience many challenges in growing and internationalizing their business.

4.10. WB6 CIF participation in the Connectivity Summit 2023

WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, took part in a panel discussion "Sustainable Transport Connectivity" during the Connectivity Summit 2023 "Sustainable Links-Stronger Economy", held in Budva on 15-16 May 2023.

The SEED+ and the Green Lanes initiative are some of the concrete and tangible steps toward paperless trade, and improved linkages within the region, but also toward the EU Single Market. **The Transport Community and the CEFTA Secretariat Brussels can count on the business's support and partnership in fully implementing these initiatives, as they relate to the core of the priorities the private sector has in relation to connectivity-** building the missing cross-border links, reduction of the waiting times at BCPs, simplification of procedures, reduction of formalities, which should also lead to reduction of costs, and increased competitiveness of WB companies on the global markets, stated Shterjova Dushkovska during the panel discussion.



4.11. WB6 CIF participation in the South-East Europe Leadership Dialogue “Paving the Way to a Regional Digital Compact”



Deputy Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board Branko Azeski was one of the main speakers at the South-East Europe Leadership Dialogue “Paving the Way to a Regional Digital Compact,” which took place on 24-25 May 2023 in Thessaloniki, Greece. At the roundtable dedicated to the topic of digital transformation in the era of cross-border investments and economic diplomacy, Mr. Azeski emphasized that joint or synchronized approach of the regional economic diplomacy will lead to better position

of the region as a Common Regional Market (CRM), and the region should be branded with a Western Balkans Region trademark – Made in the Western Balkans, which would position the region with a special identity.

Positioning the Western Balkan economies as a common market demands digital solutions to ensure uninterrupted cooperation and flow of goods and services that is free from barriers, time restraints, and long waiting times at borders. There are two aspects relating to digitalization that should be decisive in the upcoming steps to develop the Balkan economies, namely digitalization of businesses and economies in the region and e-government or e-WB6 – Digitalization of the economies in the region, of all institutions and documents related to the unhindered flow of goods and services, stated Mr. Azeski in the panel discussion.

4.12. WB6 CIF Business Forum for IT companies, members of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce

WB6 CIF, in cooperation with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS) and Kosovo Chamber of Commerce (KCC) selected 20 IT companies (IT Business Forum - WB6 CIF) that participated in the Business Forum in Berlin, Germany, on 31 May 2023. As the part of the program, German companies from IT industry were also present at the Forum.



The priority topic of the Business Forum was the application of artificial intelligence. The application of artificial intelligence and its impact on the development of the economies, small and medium-sized enterprises to use up-to-date solutions to increase productivity. Companies had the opportunity to participate in the B2B meetings at the SAP DATA SPACE in Berlin, where the Business Forum was held.

4.13. Second National Grant Award ceremonies of the Regional Challenge Fund organized in all 6 Western Balkan economies



On **4 April 2023 in Prishtina**, the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) organized the Second National Grant Award Ceremony in Kosovo in order to share the results of the second call and to award the grants to winning consortia. The second round of applications attracted a total of 123 Expressions of Interest from the Western Balkan 6. Out of this number, 22 Eols

were received from Kosovo. The Selection Committee's decision about the funds available for the second call resulted in 6 most successful projects from Kosovo being proposed for financing, allocating approximately EUR 2.85 million for the investments in equipment, infrastructure and training at the vocational training institutes implementing cooperative training. This number marked one of the highest selection rates per country.

On **6 April 2023 in Tirana**, the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) organized the Second National Grant Award Ceremony in Albania in order to share the results of the second call and to award the grants



to winning consortia. The second round of applications attracted a total of 123 Expressions of Interest from Western Balkan 6. Out of this number, 26 Eols were received from Albania. The Selection Committee's decision about the funds available for the second call resulted in 5 most successful projects

from Albania being proposed for financing, allocating approximately EUR 2.6 million for the investments in equipment, infrastructure and training at the vocational training institutes implementing cooperative training.

On **5 May 2023 in Sarajevo**, the three most successful consortia from Bosnia and Herzegovina received grants from the Regional Challenge Fund. The total amount of grants is EUR 1.012 million, and the winners are projects from Banja Luka, Žepče and Srbac. The three most successful consortia, out of a total of 26 applicants from Bosnia and Herzegovina, were selected as the winners of grants under the second call of the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) project. Owing to these funds, the winners will be able to invest in equipment, infrastructure and training in vocational training institutes.



On **8 May 2023 in Belgrade**, the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) organized the Second National Grant Award Ceremony in Serbia to share the results of the second call and award the grants to winning consortia. The second round of applications attracted 123 Expressions of Interest in six countries from Western Balkan (WB6). Out of this number, 19 Eols were received from Serbia. The Selection Committee's decision about the funds available for the second call resulted in the 5 most successful projects from Serbia, led by educational institutions, secondary schools, faculties, and academies of



professional studies in partnership with companies. They will receive support with a total value of up to EUR 2.34 million for the purchase of equipment and infrastructure works, as well as the training of their staff.



On **9 May 2023 in Skopje**, the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) organized the Second National Grant Award Ceremony in North Macedonia to share the second call results and award the grants to winning consortia. The second round of applications attracted 123

Expressions of Interest from the Western Balkan 6. Out of this number, 23 EoIs were received from North Macedonia. The Selection Committee's decision about the funds available for the second call resulted in 6 most successful projects from North Macedonia being proposed for financing, allocating approximately EUR 2.72 million for the investments in equipment, infrastructure, and training at the vocational training institutes implementing cooperative training.

On **11 May 2023 in Podgorica**, the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) organized the Second National Grant Award Ceremony in Montenegro to share the second call results and award the grants to winning consortia. Two most successful projects from Montenegro were proposed for financing under the second call of Regional Challenge Fund, allocating approximately EUR 693,000 for the investments in equipment, infrastructure and training at the vocational training institutes implementing cooperative training.



The Award Ceremonies gathered officials from the WB6 CIF, German Embassy, KfW, SDC, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Regional Challenge Fund and the awarded consortia from each of the WB6 economies, to mark the success.

4.14. Regional Challenge Fund regional conference



On 30 May 2023, the Regional Challenge Fund organized its Annual Conference, with the goal to promote the third call for Expressions of Interest, which was open by 7 July 2023. During the conference, **recent trends and challenges in human capital development in the Western Balkans were**

discussed, as well as topics such as attracting students to cooperative vocational education and training (VET) programs, innovation and digitalization in VET, and greening VET for green jobs.

Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board, delivered opening remarks at the conference, stating, “the RCF is contributing by empowering training providers to increase the skills of workers according to the needs of the business in respective sectors, which is the greatest contribution we can make to the society with long-term benefits for all Western Balkan 6.”

Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of WB6 CIF, had a keynote speech on the importance of digitalization as one of the pillars of the Common Regional Market Action Plan, and the challenges for regional SMEs to secure qualified workforce that can respond to the requirements of this new economy, in each of the sectors and industries.

4.15. WB6 CIF participation in a conference concerning the Importance of WBL and Social Inclusion for Development of the WB6 Economies

Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of WB6 CIF, participated in the regional conference “Importance of Work-Based Learning (WBL) and Social Inclusion for the WB6’s Economic Development”, co-organized by the project “Education for Employment”, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, and the WB6 CIF. During the panel discussion “Dual Education in Wb6 Companies – Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Dual Education in the WB6”, Shterjova Dushkovska reflected on the main challenges to influence and increase young people’s interest in dual education in the Western Balkans region and reduce the outflow of quality staff, and the prospects for adapting dual education to the needs of different sectors of the economy in the Western Balkans.

4.16. Third RCF Call for Expression of Interest

The Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) is a dynamic initiative aimed at enhancing youth employability and boosting enterprise competitiveness across the Western Balkan 6 (WB6) economies. Spearheaded by the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF), the RCF finances equipment and infrastructure investments for cooperative training projects. These projects involve partnerships between vocational training institutes and enterprises, emphasizing youth development and industry advancement through competitive regional challenges.

Funding for the RCF is substantial, with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development contributing EUR 64.43 million and the Swiss Government (SDC Swiss Development Cooperation) co-financing with CHF 9.7 million. WB6 CIF oversees fund execution in collaboration with consultant consortia.



The RCF's initial rounds garnered over 300 Expressions of Interest from various sectors in the WB6 economies, leading to the approval of 63 projects. These projects received approximately EUR 27 million for investments in training equipment, infrastructure, and vocational training providers, alongside partnering enterprises.

The opportunity from the Third Call for Expression of Interest was open by 7 July 2023, across all six Western Balkan economies. The Regional Challenge Fund has received a **total of 155 applications across WB6 in the third call.**

4.17. Western Balkans Circular Economy Summit

The Western Balkans Circular Economy Summit was organized at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia on 16 June 2023. This event provided a platform for key regional stakeholders to evaluate progress made in implementing the Green Agenda over the past three years. Highlighting the region's heavy reliance on traditional business models, the Summit stressed the urgency of transitioning to a circular economy.



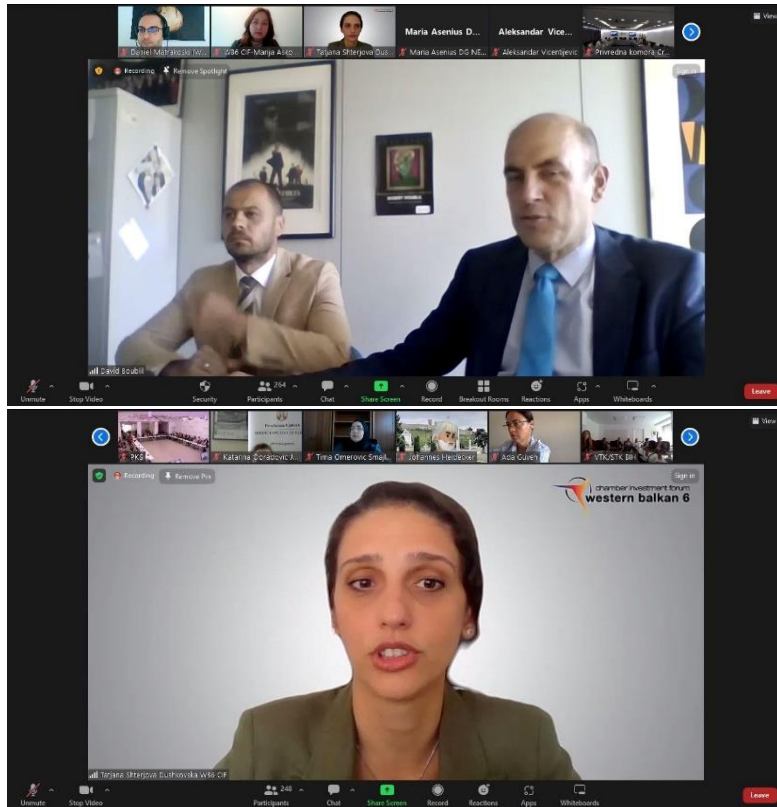
During the Summit, four panels assessed the Green Agenda's application, featuring insights from state authorities, international institutions, and chambers of commerce.

The Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) contributes significantly to the region's transformation into green, sustainable, and circular economies. CIF's representatives gathered at the Circular Economy Summit in Belgrade, hosted by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia.



WB6 CIF Secretary General, Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, moderated a panel discussion titled "Three Years of Green Agenda in the Western Balkans" at the summit, with participation of experts from the 6 Western Balkans chambers of commerce. The key focus was on harmonizing regional policies to align with circular economy principles and expedite access to the single European market for the entire Western Balkans region.

4.18. Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) workshop



The Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) played a crucial role in helping businesses navigate the complexities of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), a key element of the European Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans.

In collaboration with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD), WB6 CIF organized an online event titled “Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: What changes for Western Balkans Companies?” on 6

September 2023. This event, part of the WB6-EU Business Platform, fostered structured dialogue between EU and regional decision-makers and the Western Balkans business community.

CBAM aims to reshape the global business landscape and combat climate change. The event **gathered over 400 participants from all six Western Balkans economies, both online and in hybrid mode**, to provide insights into CBAM's specifics, guidance on implementation, and address inquiries.

Representatives from the European Commission provided essential insights into CBAM implementing guidelines and practical implementation, while local national authorities shared their progress regarding CBAM. Open discussions addressed various CBAM aspects, including carbon leakage prevention and the EU's climate ambitions, fostering a deeper understanding among participants.

4.19. Open4Business – Made in the Western Balkans – Supported by the EU

The regional hybrid event "Open4Business – Made in the Western Balkans – Supported by the EU" was organized by the European Commission Directorate General for European Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), along with the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment



Forum (WB6 CIF) and the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia on 5 October 2023.

With **over 500 participants in Skopje and remote connections to five other capital cities and online**, the event promoted the EU's new financial instruments for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the region. These instruments, available through the Investment Framework for the

Western Balkans (WBIF) in partnership with international financial institutions, include loans, capital, grants, guarantees, investment incentives, and technical assistance.

Gert Jan Koopman, Director-General of the European Commission Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations highlighted the importance of strengthening SMEs' competitiveness in the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans. Holger Schröder, European Commission Head of Unit, Western Balkans Regional Programs – Economic Investment Plan, reflected on WBIF achievements, emphasizing the EU's EUR 600 million contribution to the private sector, mobilizing €6 billion in further investments.

Branko Azeski, Deputy Chairman of WB6 CIF Managing Board and President of the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, emphasized the significance of the event in addressing the development gap through regional collaboration. Access to finance, crucial for private sector growth and development, was discussed, with a focus on the financing needs of companies



in the Western Balkans compared to those in the EU.

The event featured positive regional experiences with instruments supporting SME resilience, access to finance, and green investments. Business-to-finance speed meetings were organized in six cities, providing SMEs tailored guidance on applying for EU-co-financed programs. Over the past decade, the EU has offered more than EUR 500 million, leading to a total investment of EUR 10 billion, supporting 6,500 companies and creating over 100,000 jobs in the region.

4.20. WB6 CIF SEED+/CEFTA TRACES NT campaign and training courses



In September and October 2023, the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF), in collaboration with the CEFTA Secretariat and six regional chambers of commerce, conducted a comprehensive SEED+ sensitization campaign and training series.

Engaging over 700 company representatives and veterinary inspectors across the Western Balkans, the initiative aimed to equip participants with the knowledge and practical skills needed to use the SEED+ platform for facilitating trade in animals and animal products while ensuring compliance with veterinary health and safety standards.

Practical training sessions covered software functionality, enhancing participants' ability to assess the health state of animals or animal products for export or import, contributing to disease prevention and promoting food safety. The digitization of veterinary inspection processes through SEED+ brings efficiency, accuracy, and traceability, simplifying the issuance of certificates and supporting risk management.

Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of WB6 CIF, highlighted the significance of digitalization for the future of trade in the region, aiming to prepare economic operators for navigating and utilizing the SEED+ platform, contributing to swifter and more efficient regional

trade, reduced waiting times, and costs. The series of training sessions ensured that businesses in the Western Balkans are well-versed in SEED+/CEFTA TRACES, streamlining trade procedures, safeguarding animal and public health, and reinforcing their roles as key stakeholders in regional trade.

4.21. Signal

The “Signal” section on the WB6 CIF website is regularly updated with new information. It includes the latest regulations published by the European Commission that are relevant for WB6 companies.

4.22. Regional Center for Economic Analysis

The Regional center for economic analysis (RCEA) started functioning as interactive platform for the employees from WB6 CIF founding chambers from the analytical departments, providing the establishment of database for the preparation of automated market reports for the needs of chambers in the region and WB6 CIF.

Results of the RCEA in the previous period are the following:

- ✓ Joint WB6 CIF database with relevant data that are available for all chambers
- ✓ WB6 CIF Survey platform for data gathering and regional surveys
- ✓ Joint RCEA Internal Exchange Folder within the WB6 CIF IEP platform
- ✓ Training for all chambers’ analytical staff on how to use available data

All chambers now have direct access to the:

- WIIW database of economic indicators (The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies)
- Dun&Bradstreet Hoovers package, Boniteti International and Portfolio Intelligence – Linkages module (including data about the economic activities of all companies)

All these databases, tools and platforms are used in order to prepare sectorial reports, tailor-made national reports, foreign investors, etc.

4.23. WB6 CIF Newsletter

Regularly WB6 CIF newsletters have been prepared throughout 2023, and sent to more than **12.000 addresses**.

V. Organizational activities of the WB6 CIF

1. Meetings of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

24th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

2 February 2023, Podgorica – The 24th session of the WB6 CIF Management Board was successfully held on the premises of the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro in Podgorica. During the session, chamber presidents discussed the Report on WB6 CIF’s work in 2022 and the Plan of Activities for 2023. It was concluded that the WB6 CIF managed to successfully implement all the activities despite many challenges.



At the meeting, members of the Managing Board officially confirmed the appointment of the President of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce Lulzim Rafuna as the Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board. In this manner, the chambers of the region proved their willingness to work even more strongly and effectively to strengthen mutual ties and create a region without borders and obstacles for business.

The session of the Managing Board was preceded by a visit of WB6 CIF representatives to the company “Voli Trade,” a domestic trade chain and at the same time the largest company in Montenegro that records excellent results. During the visit, many topics of interest to

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businesspeople of the region were discussed. The message sent after the meeting was that we need regional cooperation more than ever.

25th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

29 March 2023, Skopje – The 25th session of the WB6 CIF Management Board was successfully held in Skopje, North Macedonia. At the meeting, Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska and Deputy Secretary General Nihad Bajramovic were unanimously appointed for a new term of office. The members of the Managing Board discussed about the proposed organizational changes, and several initiatives were adopted, including the joint WB6 CIF initiative for eliminating restrictions on the stay of professional drivers from the WB6 in the territory of the European Union.



26th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

6 June 2023, Pristina - The 26th session of the WB6 CIF Managing Board was successfully held on 6 June 2024 in Prishtina. During the session, the members reviewed the current activities of the association, discussed the challenges that inflation posed to the WB6 economies, and the WB6 CIF Training Center in Ferizaj/Urosevac was established.

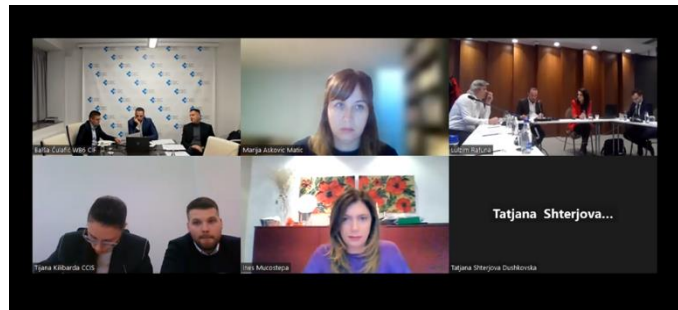
27th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

25 September 2023, Tirana- The 27th session of the WB6 CIF Managing Board took place on 25.09.2023 in Tirana, Albania. During the meeting, the Managing Board of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) covered various agenda items. It commenced with the Secretary General, Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, presenting a brief report on WB6 CIF activities from June to September 2023, focusing on ongoing and upcoming initiatives. The Board

unanimously endorsed the report. Discussions on internal organization led to agreements on preparing an organizational chart, appointing a new Financial Officer, and granting the Managing Board sole authority over fund disbursements. Proposals for landmark events in the six Western Balkan economies will be submitted in writing for future discussions. A notable achievement was the unanimous approval of a Memorandum of Understanding between MEDEF INTERNATIONAL and WB6 CIF.

28th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

14 December 2023, Pristina- The 28th session of the WB6 CIF Managing Board took place on 14.12.2023 in Prishtina, Kosovo. This session focused on several key agenda items. The Board extensively deliberated on the 2024 plan of activities for the WB6 CIF. A crucial aspect involved the approval of documents related to the Regional Challenge Fund (RCF), in collaboration with KfW, Frankfurt am Main. The approved documents included proposed grant agreements, an amendment and restatement agreement, financing agreements, and a grant agreement with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Internal procedures for conducting payments were proposed, and miscellaneous matters were discussed to round off the meeting agenda



2. Other meetings

2.1. Working meetings of WB6 CIF Chairman Rafuna with WB6 CIF Managing Board members

In February and March 2023, the WB6 CIF Managing Board Chairman Lulzim Rafuna held working meetings with the Deputy Chairman of WB6 CIF Managing Board and President of the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia Branko Azeski and the President of the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro Nina Drakic.





Discussion at the meetings involved the activities WB6 CIF planned for this year, aimed at improving the competitiveness of regional companies for doing business in the EU single market and third markets, promoting the legal framework for doing business, reducing tax and non-tax obligations of companies, facilitating the access to EU programs and funds, harmonizing the educational system with the real labor market requirements, as

well as digital transformation. Discussions during the meetings also involved organizational issues of the association, in order to increase the efficiency and functionality of the WB6 CIF.

2.2. Working meeting between WB6 CIF Chairman Rafuna and WB6 CIF Deputy Chairman Azeski

Inflation, energy, the Green Agenda, but also new initiatives for gradual entry of companies into the EU single market were the focus of the meeting in Prishtina on 8 May 2023 between Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board and President of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, and Branko Azeski, Deputy



Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing and President of the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia. The key challenge to economies at this moment is the issue of inflation, especially imported inflation, the non-functioning of the market economy, the issue of the rule of law, where burden falls upon the business sector, which is why a regional approach is of key importance, agreed both presidents.

2.3. Working meetings with representatives of the CEFTA Secretariat

In April 2023, the WB6 CIF Managing Board Chairman Lulzim Rafuna and the WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska had working meetings in Prishtina and Brussels with the



Director of the CEFTA Secretariat, Mr. Emir Djikic and representatives of the CEFTA Secretariat, where the parties discussed the further support of CEFTA for the business community.

They agreed that the main issues related to full implementation of the Common Regional Market and further liberalization of trade in goods and services will be properly systematized in a Memorandum of Understanding between the

CEFTA Secretariat and the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF).

2.4. Project Management Team meeting in Trieste

On 27 and 28 June 2023, the members of the Project Management Team under the EU funded project “EU Support to the WB6 CIF” met in Trieste in order to wrap up all project activities implemented in the project, follow up about successful/less successful activities from the point of view of companies and chambers and analyze the project results and indicators, as well as to exchange proposals for potential project activities in the next program period.



2.5. Study trip in Berlin within the Chamber Partnership Western Balkans project



On 12-14 September 2023, representatives of WB6 CIF and the 6 national chambers of commerce from the Western Balkans made a study trip to Berlin, organized under the Chamber Partnership Western Balkans project. During the study trip, participants had the chance to get detailed information on different activities and projects implemented by DIHK, to visit companies and political stakeholders (Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, Unit for the Western Balkans and Berlin Process).

3. Institutional cooperation

3.1. WB6 CIF signed Memorandum of Understanding with MEDEF INTERNATIONAL



In a landmark moment during the Berlin Process Business Forum, held on 26 September 2023, a significant step forward in fostering economic cooperation was taken with the formal signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between MEDEF INTERNATIONAL and the Western Balkans 6 Chamber

Investment Forum (WB6 CIF). MEDEF INTERNATIONAL, the leading network of French companies operating internationally, brings together a diverse range of businesses, promoting their interests on the global stage. On the other hand, WB6 CIF, as a pivotal regional organization, plays a crucial role in enhancing economic ties and facilitating collaboration among the six Western Balkans economies.

This strategic alliance, solidified through the MoU, signifies a commitment to driving economic prosperity in the Western Balkans. MEDEF INTERNATIONAL's extensive network and expertise will undoubtedly complement the initiatives led by WB6 CIF, contributing to the region's economic growth and fostering a climate of enhanced collaboration. As both organizations share common goals in promoting trade, investment, and business development, the signing of the MoU opens up avenues for mutually beneficial partnerships and paves the way for joint initiatives that will further strengthen ties between the Western Balkans and international markets. This collaboration marks the beginning of an exciting chapter in the economic development of the Western Balkans, as MEDEF INTERNATIONAL and WB6 CIF join forces to unlock new opportunities and propel the region towards sustainable growth.

