

European business community supports a more credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans

In the framework of the European Union and Western Balkans countries Summit in Sofia held on 17 May, EUROCHAMBRES and the Western Balkans Chamber Investment Forum (WB 6CIF) support the commitments from both sides to reaffirm the European perspective of the region.

Mr Arnaldo Abruzzini, EUROCHAMBRES' CEO, stressed at this occasion: *"A clear and credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans will bring mutual economic benefits and will strengthen stability in the region. It will improve business environment by making it more predictable and investment friendly, but more importantly it will renew hope within the societies, which is needed to carry out the ambitious and costly reforms required by the accession process"*.

As leading business representatives, Chambers are supporting the business community to prepare for enlargement in enhancing SME competitiveness as well as trade and investments between both regions. Chambers play also a crucial role in other areas key in the enlargement process, such as fight against corruption, regional cooperation, application of EU rules and standards, vocational education and training, and enhanced dialogue and mutual understanding between both business communities.

In this context, Mr Marko Cadez, President of the WB6 CIF managing board and President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia highlighted: *"EU enlargement to the Western Balkans holds great potential for supporting growth and job creation on both sides. To unlock it we need to start thinking how we can leverage the legal and policy harmonisation, for removing barriers to trade and investments between today's and future EU. To make this happen, we need to engage businesses more, by setting up a platform to facilitate on-going dialogue between decision makers and business community from the EU and Western Balkans."*

EUROCHAMBRES and WB6 CIF have prepared a joint position on the Commission's Strategy on *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans (COM (2018) 65)* to express support for EU policy in this area and offer input for its implementation.

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EUROCHAMBRES – The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry represents over 20 million enterprises in Europe – 98% of which are SMEs – through members in 43 countries and a European network of 1700 regional and local Chambers.

WESTERN BALKANS 6 CHAMBER INVESTMENT FORUM (WB6 CIF) was created in the framework of the Berlin Process as a joint initiative of the chambers of commerce and industry of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The WB6 CIF represents and supports around 200,000 businesses, mostly small and medium-sized enterprises