



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENLARGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

The Director-General

Brussels, 27 March 2020

Dear Mr Čadež,

I would like to thank you for your letters of 22 and 23 March 2020, which you have also addressed to President von der Leyen and Commissioners Várhelyi and Hogan, regarding challenges faced by the business community of the Western Balkans in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis.

Europe is facing an unprecedented public health crisis and far-reaching measures are being taken all over the continent. In these difficult times, cooperation and solidarity are key. The EU stands by our partners in the Western Balkans and seeks ways to help the region address both the outbreak and its aftermath.

We are looking at how to associate the whole region in initiatives that the EU is taking in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on how to best offer support in mitigating its socio-economic impact. We are also looking at reallocating EU financial assistance in view of the urgencies faced by the region due to the crisis – both in terms of health and socio-economic needs. Part of our support on the economic front will focus on helping the private sector to address the liquidity and financial challenges by mobilising EU-funded guarantee schemes, in cooperation with International Financial Institutions.

In relation with your two specific points, let me update you on the latest developments:

- Export authorisation for certain products

As a result of the evolving situation related to the epidemiological crisis caused by the coronavirus, the European Commission has decided to subject the export outside of the European Union of certain personal protective equipment to export authorisation. The measure is not an export ban. It is not the intention of the Union to restrict exports any more than absolutely necessary. In a guidance note issued on 19 March, the Commission asks Member States to take into account the degree of market integration achieved through trade agreement with the intended country of export. This provision applies to the Western Balkans which have both free trade agreements with the EU and a high level of market integration with the EU. The Commission advises Member States that it would be counterproductive to disrupt closely integrated value chains and distribution networks already established on the basis of those agreements or arrangements, in particular in the

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case of neighbouring countries and economies. Rest assured that the Commission urges Member States to grant authorisations and prevent any such disruption.

- Green lanes

The Commission issued on 23 March a Communication “on the implementation of the Green Lanes under the Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services<sup>1</sup>” relating to the coordination of the measures to prevent restriction of the trade flows within Member States, through the setting up of "green corridors". I am pleased to inform you that the Western Balkans are covered by this Communication, and the role of the Transport Community is acknowledged. This Communication opens the possibility for the implementation of green lanes between EU Member States and the Western Balkans at the border crossing points located on the TEN-T. It is now important that the region brings it forward, also in order to operationalise the establishment of such green lanes within the region, as already proposed by the Transport Community and CEFTA Secretariats. I count on the support of the Chambers of Commerce to ensure the governments of the region swiftly follow suit.

I am glad that regular communication channels exist between DG NEAR and the Chambers of Commerce of the region. This is one of the reasons why the European Commission is providing EU funding to the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum: to create the best possible conditions for facilitating trade between the Western Balkans and the EU and within the region. In this sense, I would appreciate that you ensure adequate visibility of our EU contribution in your branding and external communications (including your website, newsletters, etc.). We are following very closely the possible obstacles faced by companies from the region in this crisis moment: this is a rapidly evolving situation and we will need to adapt accordingly.

Working together, we will come through this crisis stronger.

Yours sincerely,

[e-signed]

Christian Danielsson

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<sup>1</sup> C(2020) 1897 final