



*REPORT ON THE ACTIVITIES OF  
THE WESTERN BALKANS 6  
CHAMBER INVESTMENT FORUM  
IN 2022*

## Contents

I.	SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON REGIONAL MARKET (CRM) ACTION PLAN .....	4
II.	ACTIVITIES FOR INFORMING THE WB BUSINESS COMMUNITY ON THE BENEFITS OF THE CRM .....	20
III.	TRAININGS FOR COMPANIES IN WB6 ECONOMIES .....	28
IV.	ADVOCATING THE INTERESTS OF WB6 COMPANIES .....	30
V.	TAILOR MADE SUPPORT FOR WB6 COMPANIES .....	33
VI.	ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE WB6 CIF .....	48

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**In 2022 WB6 CIF conducted different activities in the following areas:**

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- ✓ 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

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***In 2022 more than 6500 Western Balkans companies participated in different events or initiatives launched by WB6 CIF - free online seminars and training, conferences, business forums, consultative meetings, promotional events, surveys, etc.***

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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.

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## I. SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON REGIONAL MARKET (CRM) ACTION PLAN

### 1. Implementation of the Regional Supplier Development Programme

The Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF), being focused on supporting the establishment of the Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans, 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 the framework of Regional Supplier Development program and WB6 CIF support to facilitating implementation of joint CRM AP actions, **2600 WB6 SMEs have been** reached with trade promotion activities, **950 SMEs** received individual, tailor-made support to look for business and funding opportunities across borders.

The implementation of the programme includes the following activities:

#### ❖ Mapping of suppliers in the Western Balkans region<sup>1</sup>

More than 2100 Western Balkans companies-investors and potential suppliers, have been mapped and included in the Market Access Database (<https://www.market-access.wb6cif.eu/>) in order to foster creation of new regional supply chains and include them in the WB6 CIF activities related to the Regional Supplier Development Program. The database contains the relevant data about potential suppliers in four sectors:

- light manufacturing (including electrical and electronic systems and elements of electronic and electrical systems) – in total 1140 companies
- automotive industry (including devices and components for the automotive industry, plastics rubber, machinery/equipment) – in total 264 companies

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<sup>1</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

- agri-food – in total 700 companies
- circular economy (as a horizontal topic);

Additionally, 38 clusters in the same sectors have been mapped.

Data about WB6 companies that have been collected are: basic company data, data on production capacities (key products, key applied technologies, applied certificates, position in the supply chain, countries in which they export, etc.), financial data, product capacity (for each HS code), specific product details, etc. Use of the database is free of charge for all registered users/companies and the number of users, products and services is updated daily. Representatives of the national chambers of commerce from WB6 are in charge for data verification.

#### ❖ **Market Access Database<sup>2</sup>**

All data collected within the activity “Mapping of suppliers from WB6” have been included in the Market Access database <https://www.market-access.wb6cif.eu/>. The platform represents a virtual market place where registered companies can identify products, services or partners that they demand, or are able to supply, making it easier to source regional goods and services. It is also a unique location for preliminary business discussions to take place. It consists of the following modules:

- *Supply Chain Module* - Supply Chain Module aims to connect the WB6 companies which are interested in participating in global and regional supply chains with multinational corporations (MNC) looking for new suppliers from the Western Balkans region. This online module provides initial business-to-business support by enabling supply chain interactions of WB6 companies with potential multinational corporations and other strategic partners, allowing them to showcase their products and/or services.
- *Business to Business (B2B)* - B2B module is used as a place where WB6 companies can find potential partners, promote their goods and/or services and find appropriate partner(s) from the region.
- *Event management* - Event management module provides possibility to companies to participate in relevant events organized by WB6 chambers of economy and to prepare for active participation, acquire knowledge, etc. Within this module companies have opportunity to organize meeting with potential partners and establish cooperation. In order to make it easier to navigate and organize, a mobile application is also available.
- *Supply and demand* - Supply and Demand module allows to companies to promote and offer their products and/or services and find distributors in WB countries. According to their needs,

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<sup>2</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

companies have the opportunity to find a supplier partner and procure the necessary products and/or services from partners from the WB region.

Companies included in the database have the priority when implementing other WB6 CIF activities in 2022.

#### ❖ **Market Intelligence Database**

Market intelligence Database (<http://market-info.wb6cif.eu/>) summarizes a set of relevant information for the market, economy of the country, or several countries, their companies, information about trends, competition, monitoring of clients/customers (existing, targeted, former), which are collected and analyzed specifically for accurate and reliable decision making and determining strategies in areas such as market opportunities, market penetration strategies, and market development. The main objective of this database is to help companies conduct market research when assessing the feasibility of entering new markets or expanding existing ones. The structure and contents of the product/market reports include data such as production and import trends, demand and consumption trends, market standards, typical distribution channels, prices, sources of business information, key events, etc.

The database integrates data from external sources (Trade Map, FAO.org – FAOSTAT, WTO – World Trade Organization, National Bureau of Statistics of the WB6 economies, Central Banks of the WB6 economies, Trade agreements of the WB6 economies, National Customs of the WB6 economies, Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries, World bank, United nations) and internal sources (WB6 CIF members -chambers of commerce from the Western Balkans region) to enable search and report-generation functions by country, product/service, by year and other indicators. Data will be semi-automatically updated on a monthly, quarterly, semi-annual or annual basis, depending on the updating dynamics practiced by the source organization/institution.

Data are presented in tables, charts and maps, and allow queries on exports or imports by product/service or group of products (2 digits, 4 digits, 6 digits, 8 digit) and by country or group of countries. The Market Intelligence Database enables companies to:

- Analyze current export performance: examine the performance and dynamics of a country's export markets for any product/service; identify the number and size of export markets and the concentration of exports; highlight countries where market share has increased; identify promising export markets (view the world's major importing countries for a specific product, with indicators illustrating the concentration and growth rate of imports in each market).
- Evaluate the level of competition in the global market: competing countries, exporting the same product, are ranked in terms of value of exports, and availability of additional indicators on quantities, growth and market share.

- Assess the level of competition in a specific export market: view a country's competitors in any target market, with information on the export performance of each competitor, the number of supplying countries and their performance in the market.
- Identify new supplying markets: countries exporting a product both to the world and to a specific market are ranked against one another thus allowing direct comparisons of current and potential national suppliers.
- Review opportunities for diversification in a specific market by comparing the demand for a set of similar or related products/services in the market under review.
- Assess national trade performance: make an overall evaluation of national trade performance and identify sectors and products/services in terms of their potential for investment and trade promotion.
- Identify existing and potential bilateral trade with any partner country or region: bilateral trade opportunities can be identified by comparing the actual bilateral trade, the partner countries' demand of a specific product/service in terms of imports and the global export capacity of the home country.

#### ❖ **Technical assistance for WB SMEs for providing access to finance<sup>3</sup>**

WB6 CIF in 2022 published an open call for MSMEs to participate in the project of providing technical assistance to ease the access to EU funded and national programs – support in securing access to finance is being provided to 60 MSMEs from the Western Balkans region, 10 per each of the WB economies.

The application was done online, via Application Platform, which was specifically designed to implement this activity and select potential participants in the program. The platform served as a key contact point, help desk and knowledge center for potential learners. It was used to assess the readiness of MSMEs to participate in this program and to train on all aspects of participation. Upon completion of the training, an evaluation and assessment of companies that meet the set criteria has been performed and based on the results, 60 MSMEs from Western Balkan region are included in the further work process, with individual approach to each company being provided.

Under the open call that the WB6 CIF had published, directed to MSMEs to participate in the project of providing technical assistance to ease the access to EU funded programs, a total number of 210 companies applied to the call, through the [Application Platform](#).

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<sup>3</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

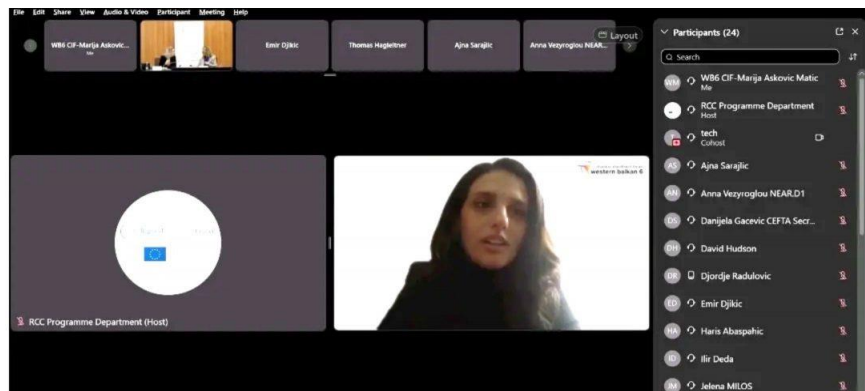
During 2022, a total of 36 applications has been submitted, and a total of 5 projects has been approved (2 companies from North Macedonia, 3 companies from Serbia), with a total value of the approved financing to the successful companies in the amount of 773.580 EUR. Some applications are still under preparation and others are in the evaluation phase.

❖ **Organization of networking events for SMEs (elaborated in details throughout the report)<sup>4</sup>**

- Three regional business events organized – joint participation of WB6 companies at international/regional events and joint presentation in WB6 stands
- Three regional B2B events organized
- 2 joint WB6 Investment conferences organized
- 17 info days focusing on the Implementation of the CRM AP and the benefits and challenges it brings to the businesses from the WB
- 15 tailor made trainings, organized throughout the 6 WB economies to support business community in yielding the benefits of the regional economic integration

## 2. Meetings related to the Common Regional Market Action Plan

WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska and appointed coordinators participated in regular CRM AP coordination events and established working groups. Throughout the year, coordination meetings with European Commission, RCC, CEFTA have been organized in order to coordinate future activities, and WB6 CIF Secretary General regularly participated in the Meeting on Common Regional Market and Green Agenda for Western Balkans, attended by representatives of European Commission, regional partners involved in the implementation of the CRM AP and WB6 national authorities, providing update on the progress achieved in the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan in 2022 by the WB6 CIF, focusing mainly on the implementation of the deliverables in line with the 2022 priority actions list, focusing especially on the implementation of the Regional Supplier Development Programme.



<sup>4</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715



### 3. Preparation of a Report on the Monitoring of the Implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan<sup>5</sup>

The WB6 CIF Regional Center for Economic Analyses prepared the [third report “Monitoring the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan \(2021-2024\) – Key business insight on priority action points”](#) , which is composed of four separated parts:

- Economic analysis of recent developments in the Western Balkans, based on the statistical data (national statistics and WIIW database). The economic analysis includes national accounts, industrial production, foreign trade, labour market, investments, services (including tourism).
- Key Performance Indicators of implementation of the Common Region Market Action Plan 2021-2024, based on survey conducted among more than 1000 regional companies, which has been conducted on the representative sample covering all the regional economies, the leading economic branches (within agriculture, industry and services), as well as the companies by the size.
- Short interviews with the leading entrepreneurs from the region on their takes on regional economic integration process, compared to the last year.
- A broader research regarding the regional integration process, which will be quite useful for the understanding the local confidence regarding the further steps toward the single market in the Western Balkans.

An online presentation was organized for the Report, on 08<sup>th</sup> December 2022, as a side event during the CEFTA Week 2022, with the participation of more than 160 representatives of companies and institutions from the Western Balkan region.

The event was opened with introductory remarks of Mrs. Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) . Also introductory remarks had David Hudson, DG NEAR-Western Balkans Policy & Regional Strategy-Economic Governance and Trade in the Western Balkans, Emir Djikic, CEFTA Director and Pranvera



<sup>5</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

Kastrati, RCC Senior Expert on Economic and Digital Connectivity & Coordinator of Common Regional Market.

Throughout the presentation, Mr. Stanic, coordinator of the Regional Center for Economic Analysis, pointed out that was reached significant growth of Western Balkans economy in 2021 (7.6%), and were created 227,300 new jobs in the region with unemployment rate of 13.9%. The



export from Western Balkans in 2021 reached EUR 40.0 billion, which completely exceeded the volume of exports from the pre-pandemic year 2019 (EUR 33.1 billion). The export of services reached EUR 18.5 billion, slightly above the level of pre-pandemic exports. The economies of the Western Balkans now face an unusually uncertain outlook, the baseline projection for GDP growth in 2022 in the Western Balkans is now 3.1%, a downward revision by almost one percentage point.

For the stronger development of the Western Balkans (WB) region, it is important to facilitate the flow of goods, capital, services and people in the coming period, to reduce waiting time at the borders, as well as to create regional strategies for the development of the energy sector and the food industry for the next 10 years. These are the recommendations of the WB business community concluded from a survey which was conducted by the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) and in which their opinion gave 1150 companies from the region on the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan (2021-2024).

For the competitiveness of companies in the region, it is important to support them through the development of financial instruments for small and medium-sized enterprises, the creation of reliable supply chains, as well as the use of opportunities offered by the relocation of production of large European companies to the Western Balkans region, added Mr. Stanic.

#### 4. WB6 CIF participation in the Western Balkans Summit in Berlin

On the occasion of the Berlin Summit 2022, the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) in cooperation with the German Eastern Business Association, the network of Chambers of Commerce Abroad in the region, with the support of the DIHK and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), has supported the organization of the German-Western Balkans Business Forum “Towards a resilient common regional market”, held on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022, in Berlin, Germany.

Ms.Nina Dracic, president of the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro and member of the WB6 CIF Managing Board gave an impulse statement and pointed out that the period of uncertainty caused by COVID, and deepened by the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, makes it even more difficult for companies in our region to do business and opens up numerous questions. Debates about the implementation of



the European Green Deal are becoming more frequent due to the energy crisis, which is of global proportions, which raises a number of questions and challenges when it comes to the Green Agenda.

“There is no doubt that each of the economies of EU member states and outside it must find a formula for achieving a balance between energy security, energy price stability and the obligation to achieve climate neutrality. Therefore, the clean energy industry and RES must be significantly supported by common recovery and resilience mechanisms and must be part of the economic recovery of the countries of the Western Balkans that see their future within the European Union. The goal is difficult, and any delay would be price and ecologically unsustainable” said Drakić.

In the context of the implementation of the Green Agenda and the energy crisis, she emphasized the necessity to properly analyze all the parameters that influence decision-making, especially taking into account that the countries of the Western Balkans have an exceptional potential for the development of renewable energy sources.

## 5. WB6 CIF participation in CRM related activities

### 5.1. Kopaonik Business Forum 2022

Members of the WB6 CIF Managing Board, Mr Branko Azeski, president of Economic Chamber of North Macedonia and Ms. Nina Drakic, President of the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro and Director Mihailo Vesovic from Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia participated in the



Kopaonik Business Forum, within the Panel: Regional Cooperation as a Precondition for Sustainable Growth, on 6<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> March 2022 in Kopaonik.

President Azeski mentioned that in the framework of regional economic development WB6 CIF is increasingly strengthening the key role in this process, directing activities towards improving the competitiveness of the economies of the region, connecting the business communities, improving the business climate in the

region and increasing trade with the countries of the Western Balkans. President Drakić spoke about the economic situation in Montenegro, with an emphasis on overcoming the challenges related to the COVID 19 pandemic. She emphasized the importance of the green transition, which was made urgent by the health situation. Namely, the green transition in the Western Balkans offers significant opportunities, among other things, closer connection with global value chains facing Europe and access to significant EU resources, as an aid in financing the green transition.



## 5.2. Participation at the Western Balkans Ministerial Conference - Lifting Barriers for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Western Balkans

WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska participated at the Western Balkans Ministerial Conference - Lifting Barriers for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Western Balkans, organized by the Regional cooperation council on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2022 in Tirana, Albania. In the panel “Standing in the face of COVID 19 adversity”,



Ms.Dushkovska elaborated on the key activities that the chambers of commerce in the 6 WB economies have implemented, as well as those that still need to be undertaken in order to address the ongoing effects of the pandemic on tourism.

## 5.3. WB6 CIF Participation in the Skills for Enterprise Development (S4E) Launch event - Skilling up the Western Balkans agri-food sector: digitalizing, greening

On 29<sup>th</sup> June 2022, WB6 CIF Secretary General participated in the working meeting organized in the framework of the European Training Foundation (ETF) project Skills for Enterprise Development. It builds on the national Smart Specialization processes and the Joint Research Centre’s analysis of Western Balkan agri-food value chains to address the skills needs of agri-food niche markets with growth potential.

The launch event brought together SME’s, business associations, industry clusters, and various national stakeholders in the area of agri-food, as well as relevant EU institutions, discussed the opportunities and challenges in digitalizing and greening the agri-food sector. Working meeting brought together SME’s in agri-food, selected through a Call for participation.

#### 5.4. Participation in the Western Balkans Ministerial Conference on Public Administration Reforms



WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska participated in the Western Balkans Ministerial Conference on Public Administration Reforms, organized by the Regional School of Public Administration, with support of OECD/SIGMA, on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022, in Skopje, North Macedonia. The conference brought together ministers and high-ranking EC representatives in charge of PAR as well as the most important PAR actors from the region to

discuss the future of citizen-centered approach in governance, digitalization agenda, transparency, and decisive political leadership as a cornerstone of public administrations' organizational, technological, and cultural transformation. Ms.Shterjova Dushkovska provided the reflections following the Ministerial Panel "What can our public services do to better meet the needs of citizens?", regarding the needs of the WB business community in enhancing cooperation, and the services that should be provided by the public administrations in the region to that end.

#### 5.5. WB6 CIF participation at the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum

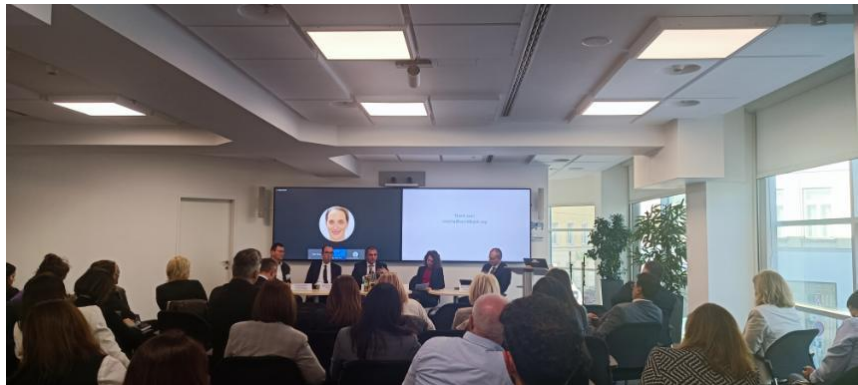
WB6 CIF representative Marko Mandić participated in the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum "Youth policy in the Western Balkans – an essential element for the future of the region and Europe", organized in Prague, Czech Republic on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022. Mr.Mandic had an address in the panel - Young people in the Western Balkans as an important force in regional cooperation and promoting European integration, where he elaborated on state of play and challenges, and the ways to possible solutions and opportunities on maximizing the impetus young people from the WB region can provide to the economic development of the region.



## 5.6. World Bank Group Conference on “Regional Economic Integration in the Western Balkans: Trade and Global Value Chains in an Uncertain World”

WB6 CIF representative Marko Mandić attended the World Bank Group Conference on “Regional Economic Integration in the Western Balkans: Trade and Global Value Chains in an Uncertain World” that was held in Vienna, Austria, on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2022. The conference brought together policy makers from the region to discuss how the regional integration agenda, within an EU integration perspective, can help the Western Balkans deal with the multiple economic shocks affecting trade and international production chains in a turbulent post-pandemic world.

Policy options and expected benefits of regional integration in a multipolar world were the main topics of the conference, addressing the Western Balkans’ experience in operationalizing the trade facilitation agenda and international best practices,



logistics and cross-border fluidity performance in the region, and how regional Deep Trade Agreements (DTAs) can foster economic integration in the face of growing fragmentation of international trade.

The conference was a positive example of how knowledge exchanges, lessons learned, and presentation of collaboration avenues among policymakers and institutional actors involved in the implementation of the Western Balkans Trade and Transport Facilitation Project can further the agenda of bringing the Western Balkans closer to the EU.

## 5.7. Participation in the Conference "Public-Private Partnership for Meeting Skills Needs and Making Vocational Education and Training an Attractive Learning Pathway"

Within the opening of the two-day event "Public-Private Partnership for Meeting Skills Needs and Making Vocational Education and Training an Attractive Learning Pathway" organized by ERI SEE

and OeAD-GmbH in partnership with WB6 CIF and WKO, on 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> October 2022, in Vienna, Austria, Project coordinator Marija Askovic Matic presented WB6 CIF activities related to the Vocational Educational Training-Study "Demographic crisis with an emphasis on youth" and first results of the Regional Challenge Fund, as well as opportunities that local companies get from WB6 CIF activities.



### 5.8. Participation in the Conference “The Adriatic as a geo-economic Community for Peace and Stability between Europe and the Mediterranean”

During the Conference “The Adriatic as a geo-economic Community for Peace and Stability between Europe and the Mediterranean”, organized in Bari, Italy, on 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> October 2022, representatives of WB6 CIF and national chambers participated in the Working Group “Constructing an Adriatic



economic space” jointly with Union of Chambers of Commerce of Italy, University Luiss Guido Carli, representatives of Chambers of commerce of the countries of the Adriatic region, Forum AIC, etc. WB6 delegation led by president Zdravko Marinkovic and president Vjekoslav Vukovic, exchanged on the potential cooperation and benefits of digitalization, trade facilitation and development of entrepreneurship in the region.



## 5.9. WB6 CIF Participation in the Balkan Economic Forum 2022



The 2022 edition of the “Balkan Economic Forum” was held in Skopje, North Macedonia, on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2022, under the auspices of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and with the support of the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, the delegation of the German economy, the Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6CIF) and the Austrian Embassy in Skopje.

Ms. Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of the WB6CIF participated in the panel

“Regional economic cooperation – myth or reality”. She pointed out in her address that regional cooperation is definitely not a myth, as the private sector likes to use the phrase that businesses have been moving borders even at times where politics has kept the doors shut, so it is there, its existing, it is not some imaginary paradigm. However, we should be honest and admit that the regional economic cooperation we have at the moment is definitely not the reality we want to see – although a slow progress has been made throughout the years, we are still very far from where we want to be – and again, the request for free movement of goods, services, people and capital remains a crucial need for the businesses from the region.

The regional market is quite important for the local business community, since many companies distribute their products across the whole region. A large number of suppliers come from the region, and a close connection among them was established in the past. The regional market is of essential importance for many firms for their business operations, especially in terms of sustainable and long-term export strategy, said Ms. Shterjova Dushkovska in her address.

## 5.10. Berlin Process 2022- Intensified Cooperation: The Renewed Berlin Process and the Future of Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe

Ms. Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, WB6 CIF Secretary General, participated in the panel that was part of the event – Berlin Process 2022- Intensified Cooperation: The Renewed Berlin Process and the Future of Regional Cooperation in Southeast Europe, organized by the Friedrich Eibert Stiftung, in Skopje, on 05<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Ms. Shterjova Dushkovska pointed out that WB6 CIF is monitoring the progress of Action Plan’s implementation with a focus on the private sector’s views and attitudes

related to the benefits that this regional economic cooperation brings, and the report for 2022 will be presented during this week. Regional cooperation is a key for overcoming the energy crisis. Solving the problems that arose from this crisis cannot be solved individually, but together with interconnection and competitiveness. The determination of the private sector is that the introduction of a region with full application of the four freedoms (free movement of people, goods, services and capital across the Western Balkans region) is key to ensuring more competitive and resilient companies in the region, and the Berlin Process plays a key role in the realization of this goal. The realization of the Green Agenda for the Balkans requires regional cooperation and the building of regionally harmonized green policies.



### 5.11. WB6 CIF participation at the CEFTA Week 2022 Conference “A stepping stone to the EU Single Market”

WB6 CIF representatives had active participation to the CEFTA Week 2022 Conference “A stepping stone to the EU Single Market”, organized in Brussels, on 09<sup>th</sup> December 2022. Ms.Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of the WB6 CIF had an opening address in the conference, elaborating some of the key findings of the monitoring of the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan, whilst Mr.Marko Mandic, WB6 CIF



national coordinator from the Chamber of commerce and Industry of Serbia participated in the panel “EU modelled facilitation of trade in goods – Shaping the CEFTA Parties’ EU future”.



### 5.12. Donor Coordination Meetings on the Common Regional Market (CRM) 2021-2024

The Donor Coordinating meeting on CRM 2021-2024 is convened with an objective to map and coordinate donor activities in WB6, as to facilitate the implementation of regional actions under CRM policy areas. The Donor Coordination meeting is held every six weeks with participation of WB6 CIF Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska and project coordinator and it includes representatives from EC, BMZ, ADA, EBRD, etc.

## II. ACTIVITIES FOR INFORMING THE WB BUSINESS COMMUNITY ON THE BENEFITS OF THE CRM

### 1. Organization of Info days focusing on the Implementation of the CRM AP and the benefits and challenges it brings to the businesses from the WB<sup>6</sup>

#### 1.1. 15<sup>th</sup> February 2022, Sarajevo

The Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina traditionally organized presentation of Bosnia and Herzegovina foreign trade exchange with the world. The event was attended by more than 80 representatives of embassies, domestic and international likewise institutions, representatives of more than 22 associations operating within the Chamber. At the very beginning, the President of the Foreign Trade Chamber of B&H Ahmet Egrić greeted and addressed the audience, saying that 2021 was a relatively successful business year, marked by export growth, exit from recession, and that the B&H economy followed the trends of its most important market, EU market.



In the introductory part, the Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of B&H Staša Košarac addressed the audience, pointing out the need to open new markets for product placement, emphasizing that this is one of the best measures to protect domestic production. The current data of the exchange were presented to the audience.

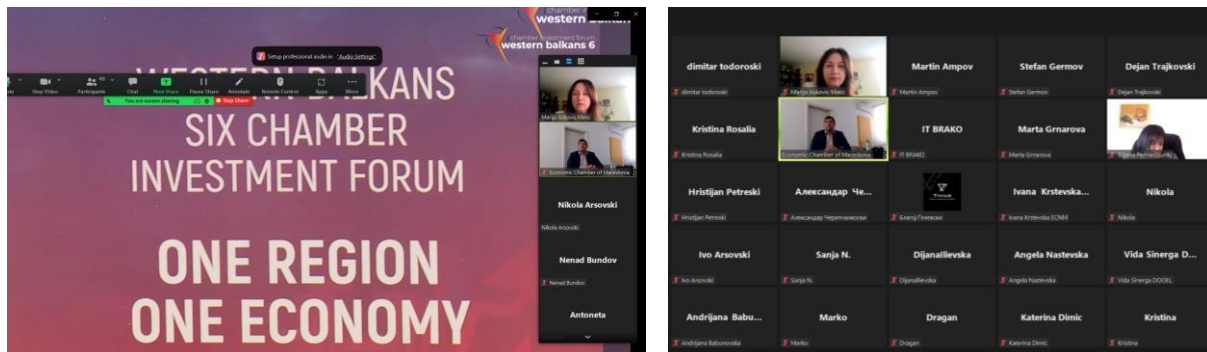
Vice-President of the Chamber Vjekoslav Vukovic, PhD, said that exports to the EU more than 72% points to the fact that the quality of goods produced in B&H is extremely high when it comes to European standards, and noted that every 10 KM of exports from BiH, 7.2 KM go to the EU. The activities of the Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) related to the implementation of the Common Regional Action Plan-Regional Supplier Development Program were presented by Marija Askovic Matic. She gave a presentation entitled "Implementation of the Action

<sup>6</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

Plan for the Common Regional Market of the Western Balkans – Regional Supplier Development Program, Market Access & Market Intelligence Database”.

Video material: <https://youtu.be/OVbaarja4XE>

## 1.2. 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, Skopje



In organization of Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, online info event was organized with the aim to inform more than 40 export-oriented companies from North Macedonia about the current CIF activities of mapping Western Balkan suppliers and tools developed to support establishment of new supply chains. The event was opened by Biljana Peeva-Gjurikj, Operations Director for Member Representation and Networking, who pointed out that within the Chamber Investment Forum (CIF), two digital platforms (Market access Database and Market Intelligence Database) have been developed that should make it easier for companies finding information on access to one of the other markets in the region, networking opportunities with new trade and business partners and joint participation in promotional events.

Mr. Darko Lazarov, President of the Exporters’ Club of the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia presented the opportunities offered by the Market access Database platform and explained the manner and conditions for registration of all interested companies. The platform is an excellent digital tool for networking companies, especially in the area of supply chains, as well as for intensifying regional cooperation, pointed out Mr. Darko Lazarov.

Ms. Askovic Matic presented the other activities on which in the past period CIF in cooperation with WB6 worked intensively in order to create greater support to companies in the region. In the past two years, the events organized by WB6 CIF were attended by over 6000 participants in a total of 10 thematic seminars and trainings for companies, 10 info days, 2 major B2B events for construction and infrastructure and food processing and 2 major business events for networking.

### 1.3. 28<sup>th</sup> March 2022, Tirana - „Electronic commerce “

In organization of Union of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Albania, implemented within the regional Project “EU Support to the WB6 CIF” with a presence of more than 50 participants an info day with main topic “Electronic Commerce” was successfully held.



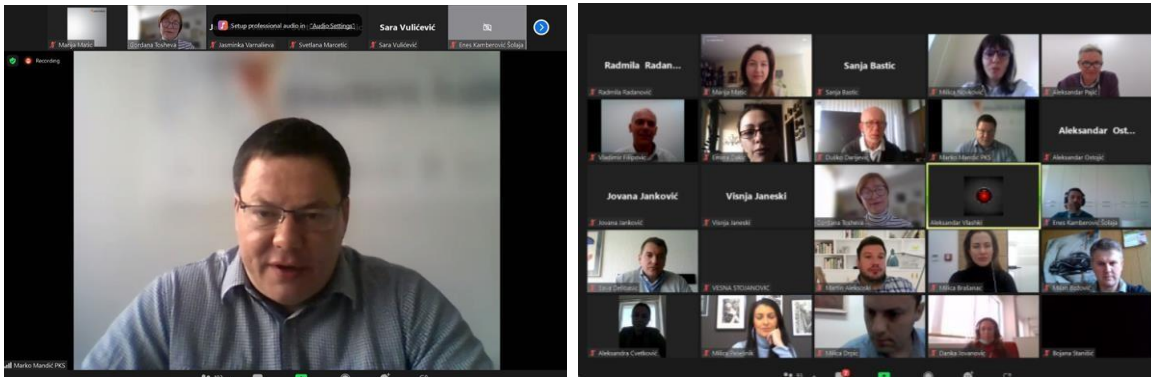
At the very beginning participants were welcomed by Ms Ines Mucostepa, President of the Union of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Albania, with introductory remarks and presentation about the implementation of WB6 CIF and CRM activities. Introductory remarks were also given by Mr Besart Kadia, Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Finance and Economy. Followed presentations of the participants related to the purpose and objectives of the meeting focusing on the importance of regional cooperation and implementation of CRM AP, moderated by Gerti Boshnjaku, Albanian Tech Platform Leader.

Ms Arjana Dyrmishi, Director of Directorate for Economic Policy Development at the Ministry of Finance and Economy held presentation about regional e-commerce development initiatives in the framework of CRM AP implementation. After this presentation followed presentation by Ms Olivera Ceni, responsible for customs e-commerce in CEFTA with main topic about “CEFTA and E-commerce: Perspectives”.

After all the presentations, a panel discussion followed. The event ended with a joint lunch where the participants had the opportunity to network and exchange experiences.

#### 1.4. 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022, online event, Serbia PEM rules

Within the series of events organized by the USAID EDGE Project (Economic Development, Governance and Enterprise Growth) in cooperation with the WB6 CIF, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, and with the support of the Customs Administration, online Workshop has been organized on implementation valid and revised rules on preferential origin of goods in accordance with the PEM Convention in the Republic of Serbia for more than 120 participants. The main goal of the workshop was to facilitate the implementation of the revised rules of origin by raising awareness of companies about specific changes introduced by the new simplified rules for determining the preferential origin of goods, benefits for the private sector and their application in practice.



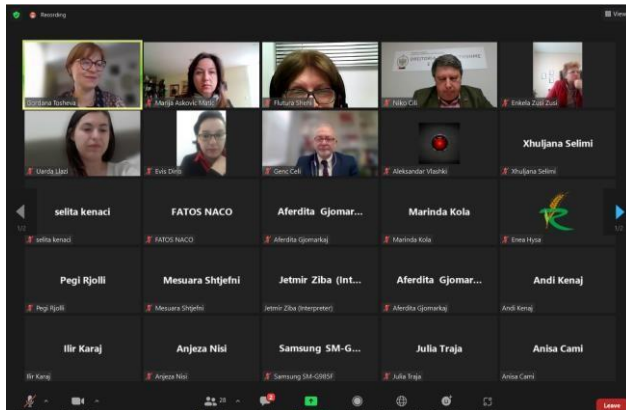
The workshop contained two lectures given by the expert for customs affairs from the Milsped group Aleksandar Pajić and the head of the Department of Origin and Value of Goods, Customs Administration of the Republic of Serbia, Vladimir Filipović. The online webinar was divided into two thematic units that dealt with the role of the PEM Convention in the implementation of free trade agreements within the PEM zone and the process of its revision, as well as innovations in the application of rules of origin introduced with amendments to the PEM Convention.

The companies were informed about the process of revising the PEM Convention and the agreed changes in the direction of simplifying and facilitating the application of the rules on determining the origin of goods, as well as the manner of their application in the Republic of Serbia.

#### 1.5. 20<sup>th</sup> April 2022, online event, Tirana – PEM rules

The second events organized by the USAID EDGE Project (Economic Development, Governance and Enterprise Growth) in cooperation with the WB6 CIF, the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania and the Albanian Customs Administration, online Workshop has been

organized for 35 participants. The main objective of the Workshop is to facilitate the process of implementation of the transitional rules of origin by informing the companies of the concrete changes introduced with the new modernized and simplified rules for determination of the preferential origin of goods, the benefits they will bring about for the private sector and the manner of their application in practice.



The Workshop included Information on the role, the structure and the content of the existing PEM Convention as a main regional agreement for regulation of the rules and procedures for determination of the origin of goods traded under the free trade agreements signed by Albania with the EU, CEFTA, EFTA and Turkey - Mr. Genc Celi, Customs Expert; The process of revising the PEM Convention and the content of the agreed

changes madetowards simplifying and facilitating the implementation of the rules for preferential origin of goods that will apply in the PEM zone on a transitional basis and their practical application in Albania – representative of the Customs Administration of Albania; Interactive discussion between companies and speakers enabling participants to ask questions and request clarifications related to various aspects of application of the transitional rules of origin.

### 1.6. 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022 – Info-day on Additional Protocol 6 in Montenegro



The CEFTA Secretariat in cooperation with the WB6 CIF and Chamber of Economy of Montenegro (CEM), organized a hybrid workshop on adopted CEFTA Additional Protocol 6 for trade in services for 20 companies from Montenegro. CEM Vice-president Pavle Radovanovic stated that adopted of the AP6 and similar regulations will create better integrated regional market and establish closer connections between Wb6 and EU market. Jelena Janković Kostic, Director General for trade and economic relations, Ministry of Economic Development of Montenegro highlighted the

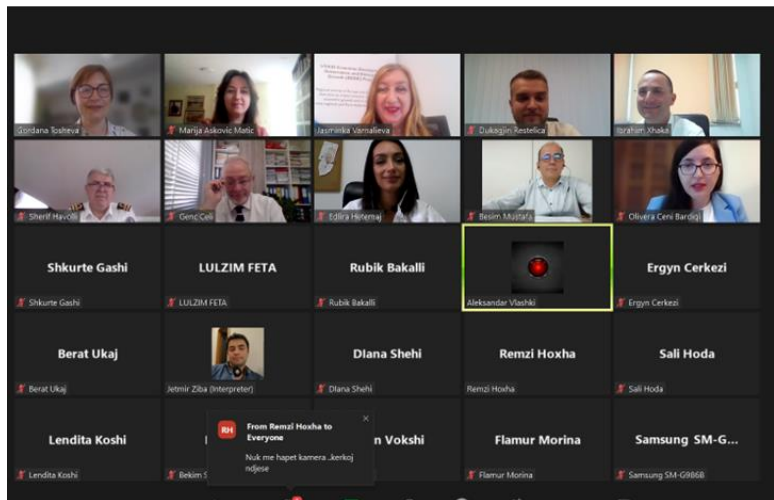


achievements of the Ministry in supporting regional cooperation in services which represent 29% of the overall trade of Montenegro with CEFTA parties.

Marija Askovic Matic presented free services developed by WB6 CIF for local companies that want to join regional and EU supply chains and Zdravko Ilic highlighted the benefits of the Additional Protocol 6 for Montenegrin companies that export touristic, digital, health or engineering services.

### 1.7. 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022 - Workshop on the Application of the Existing and Transitional Rules of Preferential Origin of Goods in Line with the PEM Convention in Kosovo

The Workshop is fourth in a series of events that the USAID EDGE (Economic Development, Governance and Enterprise Growth) Project has organized in every CEFTA Party as part of its support to the successful implementation of the transitional rules of origin. In Kosovo, the Workshop was organized in cooperation with the WB6 CIF, the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and the Customs Administration of



Kosovo. The main objective of the Workshop was to facilitate the process of implementation of the transitional rules of origin by informing the companies of the concrete changes introduced with the new modernized and simplified rules for determination of the preferential origin of goods, the benefits they will bring about for the private sector and the manner of their application in practice. More than 25 companies participated in the online presentation.

Mr. Genc Celi, Customs Expert informed participants on the role, the structure and the content of the existing PEM Convention as a main regional agreement for regulation of the rules and procedures for determination of the origin of goods traded under the free trade agreements signed by Kosovo with the EU, CEFTA and Turkey.

Interactive discussion has been enabled between companies and speakers enabling participants to ask questions and request clarifications related to various aspects of application of the transitional rules of origin. Marija Askovic Matic presented the achievements of the WB6 CIF and invited

participants to use free tools developed by WB6 CIF that support local companies in accessing EU and regional markets and in joining existing supply chains.

### 1.8. 27<sup>th</sup> May 2022 – Info-day on Additional Protocol 6 in Albania

The CEFTA Secretariat in cooperation with the WB6 CIF and Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania (UCCIAL), organized a workshop on CEFTA Additional Protocol 6 for trade in services, focusing on the benefits of the protocol for the Albanian economy and the region and how it can contribute to the more successful creation of a Common Regional Market in the Western Balkans. 30 Albanian companies participated in this online event.

Arjana Dyrmishi, Director of the Directorate of Economic Development Policies, Ministry of Finance and Economy of Albania gave introductory remarks, while UCCIAL president Ines Mucostepa, on behalf of WB6CIF presented the role of chambers of commerce in further integration of the Western Balkans economies. Zdravko Ilic from CEFTA presented the benefits of the adoption of the AP6 and expected achievements in the coming period. He answered to practical questions raised by companies.

### 1.9. 9<sup>th</sup> June 2022 – Workshop on implementation valid and revised rules on preferential origin of goods in accordance with the PEM Convention in Bosnia and Herzegovina



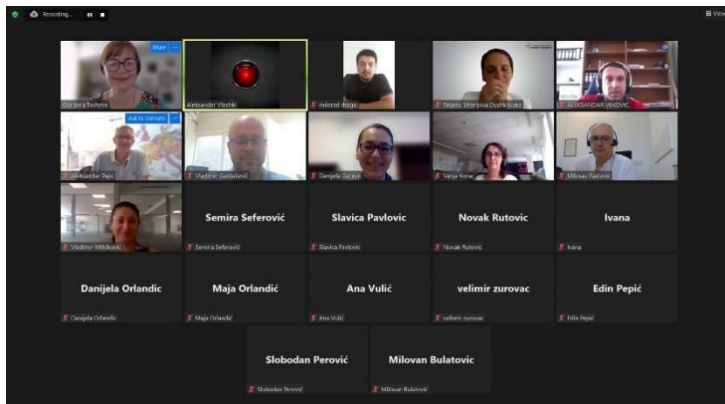
Within the series of events organized by the USAID EDGE Project (Economic Development, Governance and Enterprise Growth) in cooperation with the Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum, Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina and with the support of the Customs Administration, online Workshop on implementation valid and revised rules on preferential origin of goods in accordance with the PEM Convention was

organized on June 9<sup>th</sup> 2022. More than 60 B&H companies participated in the event.

The main goal of the workshop was to facilitate the implementation of the revised rules of origin by raising awareness of companies about specific changes introduced by the new simplified rules for determining the preferential origin of goods, benefits for the private sector and their application in practice. Nermin Jusic from the Customs authorities and Aleksandar Pajic customs expert presented

the PEM convention in detail and participated in the comprehensive discussion with the participants that raised practical questions. Marija Askovic Matic presented tools that WB6 CIF has developed to support WB6 companies that want to join regional and EU supply chains.

**1.10. 24<sup>th</sup> June 2022 – Workshop on implementation valid and revised rules on preferential origin of goods in accordance with the PEM Convention in Montenegro**



The sixth of the series of events on the Application of the Existing and Transitional Rules of Preferential Origin of Goods in Line with the PEM Convention was organized by the USAID EDGE (Economic Development, Governance and Enterprise Growth) project, in cooperation with the WB6 CIF, the Revenue and Customs Administration of

Montenegro and the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro, was organized for import/export companies in Montenegro on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

The main objective of the Workshop was to facilitate the process of implementation of the transitional rules of origin by informing the companies of the concrete changes introduced with the new modernized and simplified rules for determination of the preferential origin of goods, the benefits they will bring about for the private sector and the manner of their application in practice.

### III. TRAININGS FOR COMPANIES IN WB6 ECONOMIES

#### 1. FREE TRAININGS FOR COMPANIES IN WB6 ECONOMIES<sup>7</sup>

##### 1.1. 13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Pristina

Kosovo Chamber of Commerce within the EU funded project “EU support to the WB6 CIF” successfully completed the two days training for companies from Kosovo - “Business networking and securing markets in times of crisis”.

The main subtopics of the training were:

- Analysis and understanding of economic /financial crises,
- Strengthening business in an economic crisis,
- PEST and SWOT analyze,
- Development of new marketing strategies,
- Networking with businesses from local and regional suppliers

The training was followed by 31 participants, from different companies, different sectors and from all regions of Kosovo.



<sup>7</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

1.2. 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022, Tirana

The training “Digital Marketing” was organized by Union of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Albania within the Project “EU support to the WB6 CIF”. It brought together representatives from about 50 Albanian companies, who had the opportunity not only to be trained, but also to be involved in discussions and exchanges of experiences and opinions on issues such as:

- Digital marketing strategies;
- Implementation of best practices;
- Marketing communication using digital media; etc.



The training was led by Prof. Mr. Mirdaim Axhami, with a wide portfolio of experiences in the field of digital marketing, who shared his experience with all those present, also doing brainstorming. At the end of the training, certificates were also given to all participants. This training is part of a good agenda organized by the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania, with topics dedicated to the service of entrepreneurship.

## IV. ADVOCATING THE INTERESTS OF WB6 COMPANIES

### 1. WB6 CIF – EU Meeting of the WB6 – EU Business Platform<sup>8</sup>

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Brussels, Belgium** - A meeting entitled *“Common Regional Market a catalyst for deeper regional economic integration and a stepping stone towards EU Single Market– 1,5 years of implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan”* was successfully held in Brussels, with the presence of EU Commission



representatives (DG NEAR, DG TAXUD, DG AGRI, DG GROW, DG TRADE, DG MOVE, DG SANTE), representatives of the WB6 CIF Business Council, presidents of the WB6 CIF member chambers, WB6 CIF Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, Project Management Team, likewise representatives of Eurochambers, CEFTA, RCC, Transport Community and WB EDIF.

The meeting was specially dedicated to current state of play of the Common Regional Market Action



Plan (CRM AP) and achieved results. The event ensured a continued and structured dialogue between EU decision makers and the WB6 business community represented by the WB6 CIF Business Council. The goal of the meeting was to bring together EU officials, business representatives and other relevant stakeholders in

<sup>8</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

order to bring forth a number of initiatives and through the dialogue with decision makers ensure political support for their implementation. In addition, the main role of the event is to convey the message to the public in the Western Balkans and the EU that enlargement creates direct benefits for companies and citizens of the acceding countries. The main topics that were tackled during the round table were related to the expectations of the Western Balkans business community related to the implementation of the CRM AP as well as to their views on how to enable faster integration of the region into the EU single market, which we believe is a long overdue process.

On a less political level, identified problems and opportunities are pushed up on the agenda of the administration and discussed further in additional consultations with Western Balkan SMEs in the respective sectors.

*Video material from the meeting <https://youtu.be/3jeys3lesWE>*

## 2. WB6 CIF – Eurochambres award to former president Leitl

**29<sup>th</sup> April 2022** – Representatives of the WB6 CIF Managing Board and WB6 CIF coordinators participated in the event organized by Eurochambres and presented the Award to Mr. Christoph Leitl, the former president of Eurochambres, in gratitude for his contribution and support to the work of the regional chamber and improvement of economic relations in the Western Balkans.



## 3. Study on obstacles and opportunities for doing business in the region<sup>9</sup>

External experts have finished a Study No 4. "Demographic crisis with an emphasis on youth". The first part of this report provides an overview of the global demographic crisis, with a focus on projections of declining total population growth. The second part presents detailed data on emigration and immigration within the Western Balkans. This section also provides a brief overview

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<sup>9</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

of youth immigration. After that part, the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans was presented, which aims to spur the long-term economic recovery of the region, support a green and digital transition, foster regional integration and convergence with the European Union. The third part of this report contains information on the recognition of professional qualifications, as well as the Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications in the Western Balkans. Following the information on the above, the following subsections provide an overview of the situation when it comes to legislation in the field of recognition of professional qualifications, and general information concerning this part, in the Western Balkans countries. The Study highlighted recommendations that policy makers should follow to improve the current situation in WB6 and the official letters for the relevant authorities in the WB6 will be prepared by Chamber of Economy of Montenegro.

#### 4. WB6 CIF co-president meeting president of Montenegro

**18th April 2022, Podgorica, Montenegro** – Co-president of WB6 CIF Managing Board, Branko Azeski met with the President of Montenegro, Milo Djukanovic, for a working lunch. They discussed opened issues and main points related to the regional cooperation and perspectives for the further implementation of the WB6 Common Regional Market



#### 5. WB6 CIF co-president meeting President of TOBB



**19th April 2022, Ankara** – WB6 CIF Managing Board co-president Branko Azeski and the President of the Union of Turkish Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB) Rifad Hisarcikliolu agreed on several long-term joint business activities at a working meeting in Ankara. They agreed to sign an agreement for long-term cooperation between the WB6 CIF and the Union of Turkish Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), the highest legal entity in Turkey which has 365 members in the form of local chambers of commerce, industry, commerce and industry, maritime trade and commodity exchanges in 81 provinces and 160 districts in Turkey, in order to develop and deepen the business



activities between the two business associations.

## V. TAILOR MADE SUPPORT FOR WB6 COMPANIES

### 1. Joint participation at the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Economy Fair Mostar 2022<sup>10</sup>

**4<sup>th</sup> –7<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina** - Two-day participation of joint regional delegation at “23rd International Economy Fair Mostar 2022”, organized by the Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum within the Supplier Development Program and with the support of the European Commission was successfully realized.



More than 30 selected SMEs from the WB6 region from the agricultural and agri-food sector presented their products, explored new export opportunities, strengthened existing and established new business connections with partners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Western Balkans and other countries. After two-year break, Mostar fair, as the most important fair exhibition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was visited by the number of exhibitors and visitors including high delegation of prime ministers and relevant ministries both from neighboring countries and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Partner country of the Fair was Hungary, so large number of their exhibitors were also present.

Apart from the exhibition, selected companies had the opportunity to promote their companies and products in person and in the WB6 catalogue and brochure but also to meet retail chains/distributors from the WB6 region which presented themselves on the first day of the Fair

<sup>10</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

<https://ecatalogue.wb6cif.eu/agricultural-and-agri-food-organic-producers/>.

Opportunities for cooperation and their profiles were presented by regional distributors and chains Balkantina, Bingo, DM and Fan Commerce from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Uka Group from Kosovo, Domestic Trade from Montenegro and Mercator-S (Idea Organic) from Serbia.

Video material from the Fair: <https://youtu.be/ZXhtvvlX8SQ>

## 2. B2B event on different industries in WB6 (focus on agri-food-organic producers and circular economy, International Economy Fair Mostar 2022<sup>11</sup>)

**4<sup>th</sup> –7<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Mostar, Bosnia and Hercegovina** - On behalf of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) within the project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina in cooperation with chambers in the region and Enterprise

Europe Network organized a Conference „Opportunities for projects, networking and gathering information“, which was followed by B2B meetings covering all sectors of economy. 102 B2B meetings have been organized and were very positively evaluated. The main goal of the event was to create connections and cooperation between business entities and promote good and useful practices and it was achieved. During the Conference participants learned more about organic production



likewise useful platforms for companies, challenges in doing business, possibilities, benefits and applicability of circular economy in the WB6, benefits of CRM and regional cooperation, etc.

At the very beginning of the conference, the Deputy Secretary General of WB6 CIF/FTC B&H, Nihad Bajramović, addressed the audience and acquainted the participants in more detail with the essential goals and activities of WB6 CIF. Marija Askovic Matic, project coordinator of WB6 CIF, presented new useful and free tools for companies. In order to support intra-regional and international trade and support the export of companies from the Western Balkans, WB6 CIF has developed a unique digital tool – Market Access database consisting of 4 modules with different functions and roles, while the database “Market Intelligence” companies in one place provides an

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<sup>11</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715

overview of a wide range of information on macroeconomic indicators for the Western Balkans region, prices of products that companies want to export or import, taxes on certain products, market trends by country, regulations before placing products on world markets, etc.

On behalf of the European Entrepreneurship Network (EEN), Nikola Balić, Head of the Department of Science and Innovation at the University of Split, presented the FINNO Platform for Access to Finance and Innovation, as well as open calls for projects / grants. A broad support program was presented that companies can take advantage of.

Natasa Bakreska spoke on the topic of circular economy, cost reduction, zero waste, and waste as a global problem, types of waste, classification, and unfavourable waste management in the region. Jelena Vlajić, expert on agri-food supply chains, spoke to the audience about the potential for creating international agri-food supply chains in the Western Balkans, as well as developing a circular economy to achieve economic, environmental and social sustainability.

After the conference, over 100 business meetings were held, attended by more than 100 companies from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary and Croatia.



### 3. ORGANIZATION OF CONFERENCE IN TREBINJE “FOSTERING REGIONAL TOURISM PRODUCTS”<sup>12</sup>

**17<sup>th</sup> May 2022, Trebinje, Bosnia and Hercegovina** - At the conference organized by the WB6 CIF together with the host of the event – Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina representatives of the tourism sector agreed that regional cooperation and a joint tourism product are key to success in recovering of this branch of the economy. Within the conference, two panels were realized: “Regional cooperation in tourism – the role of private sector in promoting the region as a tourist destination” and “Developing sustainable tourism – best world practices”.

<sup>12</sup> Activity implemented within the Project “Partnership Program between Association of the German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) and national chambers of the states of Western Balkans - KVP WB6”



The panelists had the opportunity to share with the audience their views of the current situation in the field of tourism, obstacles that they are facing every day, and also to propose certain solutions in this matter. They highlighted the importance of tourism as an economic branch whose development contributes to the development of many other branches directly or indirectly and thus contributes to the improvement of the

economy in general. As it was pointed out, the problems are more or less the same in all Western Balkans countries, which is why their solution requires joint action of all tourism workers as well as representatives of relevant government institutions.

In order to bring the tourism activity to a higher level, businessmen and investors from tourism believe that it is necessary to modify certain legal acts, and consider abolishing VAT on tourist services or introduce a differential rate, or significantly reduce its amount for tourism services, due to the importance of the accelerated development of this sector.



#### 4. “EU and WB6 Chambers Digital Services Academy” – side event to the 5th Western Balkans Digital Summit organized in Prishtina<sup>13</sup>

**20<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> September 2022, Brezovica, Kosovo** - WB6 CIF in cooperation with the Eurochambres organized an Academy on joint challenges for business in the region, with specific focus on European



accession perspective and topics of interest for regional cooperation. In order to strengthen the role that the Chambers of Commerce play as business support providers to local businesses on important matters regarding SME competitiveness, the Academy supported exchanges of best practices developed by the Chambers of Commerce in the EU member states and with relevant experts for different services, focusing on digitalized services as a tool and service for companies/customers.

During 4 days, in 5 sessions the Academy enjoyed high-level speakers from the European Commission, EU member states, RCC, representatives of the Western Balkan countries, International Financial Institutions, renowned experts in the ICT sector, and representatives of the private sector. It gathered more than forty representatives of regional chambers and experts for the development of digital services from Italy, Hungary, Germany, Austria, Croatia, Turkey and from the Western Balkans.



<sup>13</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

Representatives from then different WB6 CIF chambers had the opportunity to present best practices related to digital services that they offer to members/companies and based on the gathered knowledge they will introduce new tools or upgrade existed services of their chambers. Participants have created sustainable network in order to communicate more in the future.

All presentations are available in the Digital Services catalogue - <https://ecatalogue.wb6cif.eu/digital-services-academy/>.

## 5. InterConnect Executive Summit<sup>14</sup>

**28<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> September 2022, Belgrade, Serbia** - Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia organized the InterConnect Executive Summit, the top business network event in the Western Balkans region that was held from September 28<sup>th</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022 in Hilton Hotel, Belgrade, Serbia.



The event in Belgrade brought together representatives of multinational companies whose total annual turnover exceeds 50 billion euros and almost 200 companies from the Western Balkans that export to 124 markets around the world. During the two days of the Summit, they discussed global business challenges, digitalization and the inclusion of companies of the Western Balkans in global supply chains. On the second day of the Summit, Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6CIF) hosted a panel „Western Balkans as the new nearshoring destination that can strengthen

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<sup>14</sup> Activity supported within EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715



EU supply chain resilience “. The second part of the event - exclusive networking sessions, were dedicated to exclusive B2B meetings, where open networking business meetings between attendees, speakers, panelists and guests were held.

## 6. Organization of Western Balkan Regional commercial conference and business to business event

**02<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, Belgrade, Serbia** - The Chamber of Commerce of Serbia (CCIS), in partnership with the US Embassy in Serbia, the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham), with the support of



the Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6CIF), organized the regional conference "Western Balkan Regional Commercial Conference and Business-to-Business Event" on 02.11.2022 in Belgrade, Serbia, dedicated to the improvement economic relations of the region with the USA, where expert panels and B2B meetings were held.

The event was one of largest regional meeting in the sector of ICT, energy and green technologies that took place in Belgrade and when it comes to cooperation between the WB6 region and the USA. More than 160 companies from the WB region were present, from Belgrade, Skopje, Pristina and Pec, to Banja Luka and Sarajevo, who have scheduled 260 B2B meetings with American companies.



I am sure that after today's event, we will have new investments and jobs. If we invest in people together, then our region will be a place where people don't leave, but come back to, said Mr. Marko Čadež, President of the Managing Board of the Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum and President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS)

## 7. Western Balkans Investment Conference 2022 Ljubljana, Slovenia<sup>15</sup>

**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, Ljubljana, Slovenia** - The Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WBCIF) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) gathered European investors from Austria, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia, WB investment promotion agencies, ministries responsible for investment policy and promotion, regional organizations and international financial institutions to present opportunities and benefits of investing in the region at the Western Balkans 6 Investment Conference, in Ljubljana on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022.

The conference disseminated information on the investment framework, presenting opportunities and advantages of doing business in the Western Balkans, showcased examples of successful investments to the region and supported networking. Furthermore, the conference presented the comparative advantage of the Western Balkans region compared to other investment destinations in light of new global developments and nearshoring of supply chains.

At the opening of the conference in his address to the present guests from the government institutions, the business sector and international organizations Mr. Marko Čadež, President of the WBCIF Managing Board pointed out that: "When the story of Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum started, it was an initiative to invite all chambers of commerce and not only work and cooperate together, but create a perception of a successful region where people make money, and not a region that people leave. We live in two realities. The political reality is a story of conflict and lack of trust. The reality of business and regional cooperation is a positive reality that creates true success stories. The political reality makes the headlines, making the effort of business reality much larger. Our goal is to show that cooperation can create capital, new jobs and build trust, because business reality always starts from what brings us together"

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<sup>15</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715





“Since 2019, according to World Bank report, FDI contributed 4.9% of the region’s GDP, 5.3% in 2020, 5.8% in 2021 and this year it is estimated to contribute 5.2%, with a similar percentage forecasted also for the upcoming two years. While we cannot guarantee how the economic outlook will look like in the years to come, we are certain that the Western Balkans has becoming increasingly important investment destination and a place where transparency, all-inclusiveness and confidence is widely shared and promoted. This cannot be built over night but can be continuously consolidated through different areas, be it through transport, mobility, roaming, innovation, industry, you name it. That the regional cooperation is the only viable way thinks 76% of Western Balkan citizens and 69% of Western Balkan businesses who understand and support the importance of working together in addressing challenges that come from outside and within the region,” said Pranvera Kastrati, RCC Coordinator of the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan, in her opening remarks.



WB6 investment potentials have been presented at the conference, but also testimonials of the lead investors, such as NLB Group, KOLEKTOR CCL, ATLANTIC GRUPA, SOL GROUP / TGS TEHNICKI GASOVI, SIGAL UNIQA GROUP AUSTRIA, MIKROELEKTRONIKA, and many others, focusing on experience gained, as well as key issues of WB6 governments in light of new global and regional developments. In addition, the conference offered the opportunity for B2G meetings during the networking phase of the event.

Video material from the Investment Conference [https://youtu.be/OCc\\_qsb\\_uro](https://youtu.be/OCc_qsb_uro)

## 8. EU-WB6 Chambers Academy – Chamber’s Services - Bringing EU Standards closer to companies<sup>16</sup>



**13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> December 2022, Vienna, Austria** - In order to strengthen the role that chambers of commerce play as business support providers to local businesses, the Academy “Chamber’s Services - Bringing EU Standards closer to companies”, organized in Vienna, 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> December 2022, organized by the WB6 CIF with the support of the Eurochambres, supports exchanges of best practices developed by the Chambers of Commerce in the EU member states. In the Academy, emphasis was put on sharing best practices among participants and networking among colleagues from the EU and WB6.

During two days, 12 speakers in a total of 6 sessions shared their experiences with over 40 participants from the Western Balkans Chambers of commerce. The Academy helped in the exchange of best practices developed by the Chambers of Commerce of the EU Member States to the

<sup>16</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

Chambers of the WB region. The main topics that were covered within the Academy were: green transition, standardization and other services.

The presentations are available in the E-catalogue - [EU – WB6 CHAMBERS ACADEMY "Chambers' Services" - WB6 CIF](#)



## 9. Regional Challenge Fund Award Ceremonies Held Across the Western Balkans 6<sup>17</sup>

January-February 2022

The RCF organized the Award Ceremonies in each economy participating in the project. The series of the Award Ceremony started in **Pristina on 28<sup>th</sup> January**, continued in **Skopje on 31<sup>st</sup> January**, **Belgrade on 01<sup>st</sup> February**, and **Podgorica on 02<sup>nd</sup> February**, **Tirana on 04<sup>th</sup> February** and **Sarajevo on 08<sup>th</sup> February**.



The awarded consortia consisting of educational institutions and businesses that set up a partnership aimed at the development and implementation of dual or cooperative education were proposed for financing within the first phase of the Regional Challenge Fund project, for investments in equipment and infrastructure works in educational institutions, as well as for financing training of personnel in schools and businesses.

Furthermore, the funds will also be allocated to adapt and refurbish classrooms, workshops, and

<sup>17</sup> Activity implemented within Regional Challenge Fund

laboratories.

At the Ceremony announcing the selected consortia within the first phase of the regional Challenge Fund, the projects that would receive the funds were presented, and the relevance of financing such projects for further development of the business sector and economy of the Western Balkans was underlined.

During the ceremony in Pristina, Mr. Berat Rukiqi, President of Kosovo Chamber of Commerce stated that concerns continue to relate to the labor market and the situation in the private sector with regard to the shortage of qualified labour; skilled workers are becoming one of the main obstacles to the growth of the private sector in the country. He commended the work of Regional Challenge Fund in funding the consortia and addressed special thanks to the German Government. “The system of vocational education and training plays an important and crucial role in the social and economic development of a country, as such, it is extremely important for Kosovo and our Government,” stated Ms. Arberie Nagavci, Minister of Education and Science.

Ceremony in Skopje was hosted by Mr. Branko Azeski, President of the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia and attended by high official from German Embassy Mr. Otto Graf and KfW Director Mr. Rene Eschemann.



On the occasion of the Award Ceremony organized by the RCF in Belgrade, Mr. Marko Cadez, President of the Board of Directors of the WB6 CIF and President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, pointed out that the Regional Challenge Fund project contributed to the higher competitiveness of the local economy and emphasized its relevance for the education of young professionals via dual education. He invited governments from the region to work together toward improving the educational system reforms because that brings inevitable benefits for the economy.



The Award Ceremony in Podgorica was hosted by Ms. Nina Drakic, President of the Chamber of Economy in Montenegro, H.E. Robert Heinrich Weber, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Montenegro, Mr. Zeljko Uljarevic, KfW Director and Ms. Marija Lalatovic, Director of the Directorate for General Secondary Education, Vocational Education and Adult Education at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports in Montenegro. The ceremony was moderated by Mr. Balsa Culafic, the RCF project coordinator on behalf of the CIF and Coordinator for Cooperation with international organizations at the Economic Chamber of Montenegro.

On the occasion of the Award Ceremony in Tirana, Ms. Ines Muçostepa, President of Albania Union of Chambers, expressed her gratitude to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and KfW for the continuous support provided to all Western Balkans countries and in particular to Albania. We are confident, that long-term cooperation between companies and vocational training institutions is a solid base for a stable and stronger economy and therefore we consider it very important to improve dual education in Albania.



Award Ceremony in Sarajevo was hosted by Mr. Ahmet Egrić, President, Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ms. Petra Sabine Kochendoerfer, Deputy Ambassador, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Adam Drosdzol, Director, KfW German Development Bank Office in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Minister of Education of Sarajevo Canton, Naida Hota-Muminović, Jasmina Boloban, assistant minister for secondary education and training and adult education on behalf of RS Ministry of Education and Culture, moderated by Ms. Elma Kovacevic Bajtal from the Foreign Trade Chamber.

## 10. Second call in the Regional Challenge Fund

The Second call in the Regional Challenge Fund was launched on 07<sup>th</sup> March 2022 simultaneously in the six Western Balkan countries and was accompanied by media coverage and social media activities. The communication of objectives, eligibility criteria and selection criteria was carried out in the form of online events which were followed by around 845 participants in the period from the launch of the call until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. The deadline for submissions of expressions of interest was April 14, 2022. All expressions of interest were submitted electronically via the dedicated grant management system. A total of 123 expressions of interest were submitted, which amounted for EUR 47.9 million EUR.

Invitations to submit full applications were sent to 47 shortlisted consortia which were identified as a result of the evaluation process carried out following the second call for expressions of interest. The deadline for submitting full applications was set on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The application phase was accompanied by tutorials provided by the RCF and targeted the members of the shortlisted consortia. A total of 6 online tutorials were held and followed by around 180 participants in the six countries. All full applications were submitted electronically via the RCF grant management system.

The budget set for the 2<sup>nd</sup> call envisaged to select 19 projects in an approximate value of Euro 7,69 million EUR.

With the additional funding committed to the regional window by the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC), additional funding potentially available from the BMZ in the form of an increase for the Serbian national window and the creation of an Albanian and a Kosovar national window in Q1 2023, a total of 27 projects has been proposed for financing in the total value of 12,1 million EUR (including projects on the waiting list, whose financing is subject to the availability of funding in the announced national windows):

Country	Applications proposed for funding	EUR Mio
Albania	5	2,580,734
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3	1.012,217
Kosovo	6	2,846,836
Montenegro	2	693,000
North Macedonia	6	2,722,817
Serbia	5	2,342,004
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12,197,608</b>

## 11. 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.

## 12. Signal

Experts from the chambers are examining latest regulations published by European Commission and selecting and publishing relevant information for WB6 companies in the “**Signal**” section on the WB6 CIF web site ([signal - WB6 CIF](#)).

## 13. Information about waiting times on border crossings

Latest information regarding the **current situation at border crossings** is published on WB6 CIF web site twice a day in cooperation with Milsped company.

## 14. WB6 CIF Newsletter

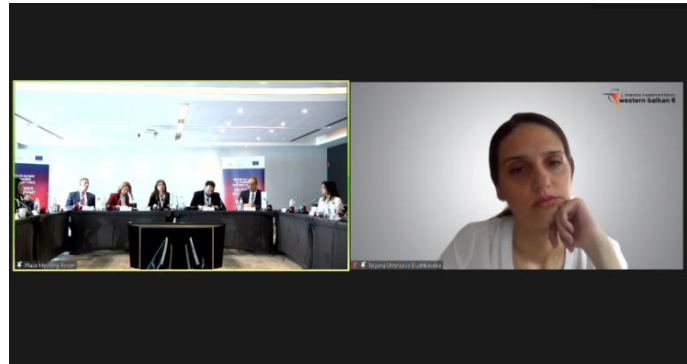
Two WB6 CIF newsletters have been prepared and sent to more than 8000 addresses.

## VI. ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE WB6 CIF

### 1. Sessions of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

#### 19<sup>th</sup> Session of the WB6 CIF Managing Board <sup>18</sup>

**28<sup>th</sup> April 2022, Brussels, Belgium** - During the Session in Brussels, members of the Managing Boards adopted Annual report for the activities of the WB6 CIF in 2021 and Annual Action Plan for 2022. Secretary General presented the Report for the activities of WB6 CIF from January to April 2022 and planned activities of the association in the forthcoming months and Financial report on the operations of WB6 CIF from January to April 2022, Members of the Board discusses proposal for Establishment of the WB6 CIF Regional Centre for Economic Analysis and proposal for cooperation and joint promotional activities with the service delivery platform of the SEE Regional Business Registry Portal Bifidex. Members were also informed about the external Expenditure verification and Systems Audit in the EU funded project “EU support to Western Balkan Six Chamber Investment Forum” (Grant Contract IPA/2019/408-715) that has been conducted in December 2021.



#### 20<sup>th</sup> Session of the WB6 CIF Managing Board <sup>19</sup>

**23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022, online** - During the online Session of the Managing Board, members unanimously extended the mandate of Marko Cadez, The President of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia (CCIS) for another four years at position of the Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board. The mandate of Deputy-Chairmen Branko Azeski, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Northern Macedonia, has also been extended.



<sup>18</sup> Activity supported within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

<sup>19</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715



## 21st meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board<sup>20</sup>

**21<sup>st</sup> July, Ohrid, North Macedonia** - Regional initiatives such as the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) are the best way to strengthen economic cooperation and the growth of Western Balkan economies, improve the business climate, attract foreign investment and increase employment, but also an effective response to the major challenges facing the global economy, was one of the conclusions from the 21<sup>st</sup> session of the WB6 CIF Managing Board. The meeting was held in the premises of the factory Kostal in Ohrid, one of the leading FDI companies in North Macedonia, employing more than 1000 workers, whose main products are mechatronic modules, automatic gearboxes, electronic control units, switches, and internal chargers for electric cars, while the export markets were EU, Great Britain, USA, Mexico, and China, and is particularly focused on developing the local supply chains, being one of the rare FDI companies present in the WB region which has developed its own supplier development department, and is currently cooperating with several suppliers from the WB economies.



During the visit, the members of the WB6 CIF Managing Board had a meeting with the Primeminister of North Macedonia Dimitar Kovacevski, and with the Mayor of Ohrid Kiril Pecakov, where they discussed on the biggest challenges relating to enhancing the regional economic cooperation.

<sup>20</sup> Activity supported within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715



## 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board<sup>21</sup>

**25<sup>th</sup> August, Tesanj, Bosnia and Hercegovina** - The WB6 CIF Managing Board had several working meetings with companies from Tešanj, a municipality in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where around 2.500 commercial entities operate, 43.000 inhabitants, its annual economic income is 1.7 billion BAM. Tešanj exports into 70 countries worldwide and its annual value is 480 million KM. Many foreign investors from Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Slovenia operate in this municipality. The visit started with the meeting of WB6 CIF representatives with the Association of Entrepreneurs Business

<sup>21</sup> Activity supported within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715

<sup>22</sup> Activity supported within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715

Center Jelah – Tesanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a working meeting with the companies HIFA Doo, AS HOLDING and MADI Doo Was Held. The representatives of WB6CIF visited the production facilities of the companies: INOX AJANOVIC, AP ATELIER , ARTISAN in Tešanj and LB PROFILE in Doboj, when the members of the Managign Board were introduced to an excellent example of regional business cooperation, between the company “LB Profile” from Doboj and the Serbian company “Alatnica Barovic” from Obrenovac - the machine for the production of reinforcement for PVC was purchased in Serbia and will enable “LB Profile“ to market its products worldwide.



WB6 CIF delegation also had a working lunch with the Mayor of Tešanj, Mr. Suad Huskić. Presidents Čadež and Egrić, on behalf of WB6 CIF, awarded Mr. Golubović, ex-president of the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro. They thanked Mr. Golubović for sharing his knowledge and experience and for making an invaluable contribution to the improvement and strengthening of WB6 CIF.

## 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board<sup>23</sup>

**02<sup>nd</sup> November, Belgrade, Serbia** - The 23rd meeting of the Western Balkans Chamber Investment Forum Managing Board took place in the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, where was discussed on the key issues and challenges of the Western Balkans economy.

President of the Economic Chamber of Macedonia, Branko Azeski, proposed making an action plan for the establishment of a team that will quarterly analyze the progress achieved in the key fields of regional cooperation, such as the flow of goods, working permits and which will, in cooperation with the WB6 CIF Business Council, consider next steps in the struggle against high inflation and energy crisis.



Managing Board also announced additional funding of the budget of the Regional Challenge Fund, in the amount of 9.7 million euros, provided by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and the process is expected to be finalized by the end of the year, which means additional funds for equipment, infrastructure and advisory services or vocational trainings, in the form of grants.

The Regional Challenge Fund was launched with funding support from the German Development Bank and is intended to support a consortium of educational institutions and companies which will support the introduction of a dual education system in the Western Balkans. The third consecutive public call for the allocation of funds is planned for April 2023.

Members of the CIF Managing Board once again highlighted the importance of the upcoming Investment conference in Ljubljana, which will gather investors from Austria, Croatia, Italy and Slovenia. Decision makers from the Western Balkans region, together with foreign companies that have been operating in the region for many years, will try to present the advantages of the region in comparison to other investment destinations.

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<sup>23</sup> Activity supported within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715

## 2. Other meetings

### Meeting of the Project Management Team in Budva<sup>24</sup>

**13<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> June, Budva, Montenegro** - During the EU funded project team meeting coordinators discussed current and planned activities by the end of the Project.

Special attention has been given to the following upcoming activities:

1. Information about the Technical Assistance to ease use of EU funds
2. Agreement has been achieved on joint preparation of the EU-WB6 Academy on digital services and data analysis during the Digital Summit in Pristina,
3. Agreement on the Concept of the Regional Competition



### First Meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee of the Regional Challenge Fund<sup>25</sup>



**16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June 2022, Budva, Montenegro** - The First Meeting of the Technical Advisory Committee of the Regional Challenge Fund in Western Balkans 6 was held June 16-18 in Budva, Montenegro. Apart from the RCF Fund Management Unit, the meeting gathered VET experts from CIF member chambers and KfW offices from around the region.

The first day of the meeting was also dedicated to the updates on the RCF's ongoing activities such as the status of the projects awarded in the First Call and the Second Call selection process status, as well as the next steps of the development of the full application forms and the selection. The second day was dedicated to sharing the lessons learned from the enterprises' experience in cooperative training applications. The RCF analyzed the survey conducted among the enterprises that supported the consortia and discussed the benefits and

<sup>24</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF“, CN 2019/408-715

<sup>25</sup> Activity implemented within Regional Challenge Fund

challenges perceived by the businesses in the region as well as the quality of the cooperative training programmes.

### Project planning Workshop – Chamber Partnership project<sup>26</sup>

**12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> October 2022, Budva, Montenegro** - Chamber representatives and WB6 CIF representatives attended the project planning workshop within the Chamber Partnership project. In the workshop, the work plan and schedule of activities was agreed for the second project phase (01.10.2022-30.09.2025), granted by Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.



### Meeting of the Project Management Team in Ljubljana<sup>27</sup>

**22<sup>nd</sup> November 2022, Ljubljana, Slovenia** - During the EU funded Project team meeting, coordinators discussed current and planned activities by the end of the Project and coordinated on forthcoming activities, including the planned launch of the Regional competition, Technical Assistance program for entering the European and global markets, joint participation in Fairs in 2023 and organization of B2B meetings and investment conference in Hanover, Germany.

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<sup>26</sup> Activity implemented within the Project “Partnership Program between Association of the German Chambers of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) and national chambers of the states of Western Balkans - KVP WB6”

<sup>27</sup> Activity implemented within the EU funded project „EU support to the WB6 CIF”, CN 2019/408-715

#### 4. Institutional cooperation

During 2022, the WB6 CIF has signed/renewed Memorandums for cooperation with the European Training Foundation (ETF), the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the Education Reform Initiative of South East Europe (ERI SEE).

