

REPORT ON WB6 CIF ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED FROM JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2025

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From January to June 2025, the WB6 CIF conducted various activities in the following areas:

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

*Note that in the reporting period there has been a change of the Secretary General of WB6 CIF, therefore actions implemented until March 2025 were coordinated by the Secretary General Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska and the actions starting from April 2025 were coordinated by the new WB6 CIF Secretary General David Piegazki.

1. SUPPORTING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMON REGIONAL MARKET (CRM) ACTION PLAN AND PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION TO THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

1.1. WB6 CIF participation in Berlin Process Sherpa Briefing

WB6 CIF Secretary General, Mr. David Piegazki, participated in the Berlin Process Sherpa Briefing held in Vienna on 18th June 2025., which brought together key EU and regional stakeholders ahead of the Berlin Process Summit 2025.

The meeting addressed key regional topics including economic growth, security cooperation, and migration, with a focus on shaping joint positions and aligning expectations in the lead-up to the Summit. As part of the core preparatory mechanism of the Berlin Process, the Sherpa Briefing serves to ensure that strategic themes are addressed in a coordinated and inclusive manner.

The participation of WB6 CIF ensured that the business community's voice was reflected in the ongoing strategic planning for the 2025 Berlin Summit, reinforcing the Forum's role as a key institutional partner in shaping the economic agenda of the Western Balkans.



The Vienna meeting provided a timely opportunity for stakeholders to exchange views on current challenges and to outline proposals that will feed into the agenda of the Berlin Process Summit, scheduled to take place later this year. The active presence of WB6 CIF ensures that the voice of the private sector continues to be reflected in regional policy discussions under the Berlin Process framework.

1.2. WB6 CIF participation at the European Commission Implementation Dialogue



The Secretary General of the WB6 CIF, Mr. David Piegazki, participated in the Implementation Dialogue hosted by Commissioner Marta Kos on 10th June 2025. The high-level meeting brought together 15 representatives from business support organisations and companies to discuss how the European Union can enhance its engagement with the private sector in the context of its ambitious investment agenda across the EU, Enlargement countries, and the

Eastern Neighbourhood.

The discussion focused on identifying concrete obstacles to investment flows and gathering stakeholder input on how the EU can better align its financial tools and policy instruments with the practical needs of businesses. Mr. Piegazki contributed to the dialogue by sharing insights from the Western Balkans region, underlining the importance of involving regional chambers of commerce and SMEs in EU-funded initiatives, particularly through mechanisms like the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) and the Common Regional Market.

Commissioner Kos emphasised the strategic role of the private sector in delivering on the EU's investment objectives and noted that the accession process provides tangible benefits for businesses—through regulatory alignment, improved transparency, and a more predictable investment climate. She underlined that deeper economic integration with neighbouring regions depends not only on political dialogue but also on active and sustained collaboration with business communities.

Mr. Piegazki welcomed the open exchange and reiterated the WB6 CIF's readiness to act as a bridge between EU institutions and the Western Balkans private sector, ensuring that feedback from the ground informs future EU programming. The dialogue also highlighted the value of targeted consultation in shaping more effective and business-relevant EU policies.

This meeting was part of the EU's broader Implementation Dialogue mechanism, a tool introduced by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to improve the delivery of EU policies through structured engagement with key stakeholders. The participation of WB6 CIF reaffirms the commitment of association to contribute aligning with EU standards and enhancing regional economic cooperation through constructive dialogue.



1.3. WB6 CIF Participation at the 2nd Steering Committee Meeting of the Western Balkans Digital Summit 2025

The Secretary General of the WB6 CIF, Mr. David Piegazki, participated in the 2nd Steering Committee Meeting of the Western Balkans Digital Summit 2025, held in Skopje on May 27th 2025. The meeting brought together representatives of the European Commission (DG ENER and DG CONNECT), the Regional Cooperation Council, the German Federal Ministry for Digitalisation and Transport, and institutions from across the Western Balkans region.



During the session, the first draft agenda of the 7th Western Balkans Digital Summit was presented, followed by structured discussions focused on the key thematic panels and institutional responsibilities for the upcoming event. The Western Balkans Digital Summit is one of the most important regional platforms dedicated to advancing digital transformation. It aims to enhance regional cooperation, improve digital capacities, and align the region with EU digital standards. In this context, WB6 CIF continues to play an active role in shaping the region's digital future, supporting greater competitiveness, innovation, and market integration. Participants were invited to provide their input on the proposed agenda, suggest potential speakers, and confirm their readiness to lead or contribute to specific panels in preparation for the Summit later this year.

1.4. WB6 CIF Participation at the Economy Ministers meeting of the Berlin Process

The Secretary General of the WB6 CIF, Mr. David Piegazki, participated in the Economy ministers meeting in London, held on 16th October 2025. UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade hosted ministers and representatives from Western Balkans 6, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland and Slovenia. Western Balkan ministers endorsed a new set of economic deliverables, marking a significant step forward in the region's economic integration, competitiveness, and sustainability.

The newly endorsed package includes eleven major regional initiatives that form a practical and unified toolbox for advancing competitiveness, inclusion, and sustainability across the Western Balkans:



Declaration on Coordination and Portability of Social Security in the Western Balkans Six, Western Balkans Six Green Bond Standard, Whitelist of the Sustainable Finance Taxonomy for the Western Balkans Six, Regional Financial Literacy Framework for Individuals, Recommendation on Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment in the Western Balkans Six, Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment Policy Toolkit for the Western Balkans Six, Regional

Model Clauses on Sustainability, Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation in the Western Balkans Six, Declaration on Western Balkans Six Tourism Branding, Joint Statement on the Development and Adoption of Regional Green Public Procurement (GPP) Criteria in the Western Balkans Six, Joint Call for Action on Gender-Responsive Green Finance and Accompanying Recommendations.

1.5. WB6 CIF President at the Growth Plan Summit 2025 in Skopje

President of the WB6 CIF Lulzim Rafuna participated in the Growth Plan Summit held in Skopje on 1st of July 2025, gathering Western Balkans leaders, ministers and high-level EU representatives. The summit served as a key platform for reaffirming commitment to regional cooperation, structural reforms, and deeper economic integration with the European Union. Discussions focused on accelerating the implementation of the Common Regional Market, enhancing connectivity, and supporting sustainable growth.



In his remarks, Mr. Rafuna presented concrete proposals to ensure the Growth Plan delivers real impact, including: Establishing institutionalized public-private dialogue throughout the plan's implementation, removing non-tariff barriers and ensuring legal certainty and fair treatment for companies, Fast-tracking transport and digital infrastructure investments and expanding Green Lanes, Supporting youth, women in business, and green and digital transition initiatives. Advancing mutual recognition of standards and adoption of the ACAA agreement. The Growth Plan is not just a policy document — it is a unique opportunity to transform our region. Regional integration is not a detour from EU accession. It is the fast track, president Rafuna highlighted.

2. TRAININGS FOR COMPANIES IN WB6 ECONOMIES

2.1. Training on Global Financial Trends

On February 18, 2025, Chamber of Economy of Montenegro in cooperation with the WB6 CIF and with support from the European Commission, organized a training session titled “Where Are Our Finances Sailing?” The event featured Gojko Maksimović, CFA, Director of the Financial Markets Sector at Hipotekarna Banka AD Podgorica, as the keynote speaker.

During his presentation, Maksimović provided an in-depth analysis of the current state of international financial markets. He focused on the public finances of Western Balkan countries while addressing key economic challenges and opportunities anticipated for 2025. Maksimović warned that the global economy is poised to enter an unpredictable period, largely driven by potential political changes and pivotal decisions from leading central banks. He underscored the critical role of credit ratings as indicators of economic stability. As it was stated, a credit rating reflects a country’s ability to meet its obligations to investors. It is therefore crucial to enhance it through fiscal responsibility and stable economic policies. A favorable rating can significantly ease access to international financial markets and lower borrowing costs.



Analyzing Montenegro’s financial market and banking sector, Maksimović emphasized the strong link between the domestic economy and global financial trends. He noted that decisions made by the European Central Bank and the U.S. Federal Reserve will directly impact interest rates, capital availability, and investment flows throughout the region. Concluding his presentation, he asserted that 2025 will bring both challenges and opportunities for countries and investors. He called on policymakers to focus on maintaining fiscal discipline,

strengthening institutional frameworks, and attracting investments capable of fostering long-term, sustainable economic growth.

In addition to addressing market trends, Maksimović stressed the importance of ongoing education in finance and investments. He urged participants to remain informed about economic developments and to proactively adapt to evolving market conditions.

2.2. Training on How to Increase Export in WB6 Countries



On March 5, 2025, the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania organized a high-impact capacity-building training titled “How to Increase Export in WB6 Countries” in Tirana. This training brought together more than 30 SMEs from various sectors, eager to enhance their export strategies and expand their reach within the Western Balkans region.

The training focused on key aspects of export growth, including market access strategies, regulatory frameworks, trade facilitation, and digitalization in exports. Expert speakers and industry

professionals shared insights on overcoming trade barriers and leveraging regional cooperation to boost competitiveness.

Participants had the opportunity to engage in interactive discussions, case studies, and networking sessions, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among SMEs. The event highlighted the importance of regional integration and the role of businesses in driving economic growth through cross-border trade.

This initiative aligns with the ongoing efforts to strengthen the WB6 economic landscape, equipping SMEs with the necessary tools to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market. The Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania remains committed to supporting businesses in their export journeys, ensuring sustainable growth and regional prosperity.

2.3. Seminar on “Supply Chain and Logistics Management”

As part of ongoing efforts to strengthen the export capacities of Macedonian businesses and enhance their presence in regional and international markets, the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, with the support of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF), organized a one-day free seminar on “Supply Chain and Logistics Management” on March 14, 2025.



The event was opened by Mihajlo Donev, M.Sc., Project Manager at the Economic Chamber of North Macedonia, who welcomed representatives of the business community and emphasized that the initiative is part of the “EU Support to the Western Balkan 6 Chamber Investment Forum” project, funded by the European Union.

The seminar aimed to provide participants with in-depth knowledge of supply chain management, a key component of modern business operations. The discussion covered the integration of organizations, people, information, products, and resources involved in the creation of goods and services—from suppliers to end consumers. Special attention was given to optimizing logistics processes and ensuring the efficient coordination of all stakeholders in the supply chain.

The event gathered 45 participants from 25 companies across various industries, including agriculture, retail, distribution, chemical production, confectionery, manufacturing, metalworking, and electronics. Attendees included company executives, department heads, and professionals working in procurement, logistics, production management, sales, quality control, and category management.

The seminar was led by Miljan Dimitrijević, a highly experienced consultant and international expert in sales, logistics, procurement, and large-scale team management, who has successfully implemented numerous consulting projects in sales and supply chain optimization.

2.4. Roundtable for harmonizing conditions for the trade of dietary supplements

The roundtable organized by the Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, supported by the European Commission, aimed at harmonizing the conditions for the trade of dietary supplements in the countries of the WB region, gathered representatives from the Inspection sector of the Ministries and from Medical, Food and Veterinary agencies who spoke about regulatory aspects and procedures for issuing approvals for trade. It was agreed between the parties to establish continuous cooperation to harmonize regulations and EU recommendations and ensure more efficient trade of dietary supplements among the countries of the region.



3. ADVOCATING THE INTERESTS OF WB6 COMPANIES

3.1. EU-WB6 Business Platform Meeting: Strengthening Regional Economic Integration

On March 27, 2025, in Brussels, the WB6 CIF Business Council and the European Commission convened highly anticipated EU-WB6 Business Platform Meeting. The event, held at the NH Collection Brussels Hotel, provided a unique opportunity for Western Balkans business leaders to engage directly with EU officials, discussing strategies to enhance regional economic integration and facilitate access to the EU Single Market.

The meeting began with a briefing session with Mr. Gert-Jan Koopman, Director General of DG ENEST, where CEOs from the WB6 CIF Business Council shared their insights on investment opportunities and challenges in the region. The discussion set the stage for the main session of the Business Platform Meeting, moderated by Ms. Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, Secretary General of WB6 CIF.



During the opening remarks, Mr. Koopman and Mr. Lulzim Rafuna, Chairman of the WB6 CIF Managing Board, reaffirmed their commitment to fostering closer ties between the EU and the Western Balkans, emphasizing the importance of the Growth Plan and the gradual integration of the region into the EU market.



The platform featured an open exchange where representatives of the WB6 Business Council addressed the main challenges faced by regional businesses, particularly in the context of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. Key thematic discussions included the trade of goods and services, led by Mr. Mihailo Vesović, where representatives from companies such as Milšped, Agna Group, Mikroelektronika, Bucaj, and Ananas highlighted the barriers and opportunities for boosting trade between WB6 economies and the EU. Investment and access to finance, moderated by Mrs. Nina Drakić, with contributions from Gray International, Philip Morris, and Dott., focused on strategies for improving access to finance for businesses in the region. Green transition and digital transformation, led by Mrs. Ines Mucostepa, featured companies including Lukavac Cement, Tikveš, Kolektor, and Tiki sharing their experiences and strategies for adapting to EU environmental and digitalization standards.



Representatives of the European Commission and private sector stakeholders explored investment potential and



discussed the future of EU-WB6 economic collaboration. The discussions emphasized the need for a structured dialogue between the EU and WB6 private sectors, particularly in the areas of B2B cooperation, foreign direct investment (FDI), and supply chain integration.

The European Commission reaffirmed its commitment to facilitating this engagement through various upcoming initiatives, including upcoming thematic roundtables and a high-level EU-Western Balkans

Business and Investment Forum.

Mrs. Valentina Superti, Director for the Western Balkans, concluded the meeting with a strong commitment from both sides to continue the dialogue through WB6 CIF, ensuring that regional businesses have a clear pathway towards greater integration with the EU market. Experts from the European Commission actively participated in the discussions, providing insights and policy recommendations to support the region's economic development.

3.2. WB6 CIF at the Conference on Regional Economic Integration „Empower. Integrate. Grow“

WB6 CIF President Mr. Lulzim Rafuna, on 27-28 January 2025 in Montenegro, participated in the regional conference “Empower. Integrate. Grow.”, hosted by GIZ (Open Regional Fund for Southeast Europe – Foreign Trade) and in cooperation with the Ministry of European Affairs of Montenegro. The conference gathered policymakers, EU officials, business leaders, and experts to assess progress in enhancing regional trade and to outline the next steps toward deeper integration with the EU Single Market. A key focus was the implementation of reform agendas for the 2024–2027 period within the framework of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, as well as the role of regional partnerships in supporting the European integration process.



The conference was officially opened by Maida Gorčević, Montenegro's Minister of European Affairs, and Valentina Superti, Director for the Western Balkans at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. During discussions on the significance of the Growth Plan and the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan, participants reaffirmed that these initiatives serve as strategic frameworks for accelerating economic development in the region and aligning local economies with EU Single Market standards. The key objectives of the Growth Plan include:

- Reducing trade barriers and improving the business environment,
- Attracting investments through reforms and strengthening the rule of law,
- Enhancing the competitiveness of Western Balkans economies and their integration into global value

chains,

- Supporting regional initiatives that contribute to faster regulatory harmonization with EU standards.
- In this context, the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan, adopted by Western Balkans economies, plays a crucial role in facilitating the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. Its implementation enables faster economic integration, lowers trade costs, and enhances the region's attractiveness for foreign investment.

President Rafuna participated in the panel discussion “Moving Forward – Supporting Regional Integration and Integration with the EU,” where he highlighted both the achievements and priorities of the Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) for 2025. He emphasized that the Growth Plan will provide significant support to the private sector, enabling businesses to expand, become more competitive, and integrate not only into the European market but also into global markets.

3.3. WB6 CIF at the Launch of the New SME Policy Index Cycle: Strengthening Regional Businesses for a Competitive Future



WB6 CIF Secretary General, Tatjana Shterjova Dushkovska, delivered a keynote address at the official launch of the OECD's SME Policy Index for the Western Balkans and Türkiye 2026, reaffirming the commitment of WB6 CIF to fostering a more competitive and resilient business environment in the region.

Addressing an audience of policymakers, business leaders, and international experts, Ms. Shterjova Dushkovska shed light on the critical challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region. She emphasized the need for adaptive policies, innovative business solutions, and enhanced regional cooperation to navigate the evolving European and global economic landscape.

In the face of significant shifts in global markets and supply chains, she highlighted the importance of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, a strategic initiative designed to facilitate economic convergence with the EU and strengthen the regional business ecosystem. She also presented key obstacles and recommendations from regional SMEs in trade, quality infrastructure (QI), access to finance, green transition, digitalization, and human capital development, stressing that tackling these issues collectively is essential for unlocking the full potential of SMEs in the region.

Furthermore, Ms. Shterjova Dushkovska underscored that regional cooperation is not only a necessity but an opportunity, enabling SMEs to scale their businesses, attract investments, and integrate more effectively into European and global value chains. She reaffirmed WB6 CIF's dedication to advocating for policy reforms that create a more business-friendly environment, foster innovation, and drive sustainable economic growth.

As WB6 CIF continues to play a pivotal role in shaping policies that support SMEs, the organization remains

committed to ensuring that businesses in the region have the tools, knowledge, and networks they need to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market.

3.4. WB6 CIF at the “Open4Business” Regional Forum in Belgrade

WB6 CIF Secretary General, Mr. David Piegazki, participated Session III: “Challenges and opportunities of integrating value chains in the Western Balkans” at the event [Open4Business: Empowering MSMEs in the Western Balkans – Pathways to the EU](#).

The regional conference on enhancing the competitiveness of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises brought together around 500 participants in Belgrade, with 350 B2B meetings scheduled at the forum. The focus of the discussions was on how small and medium-sized enterprises can best leverage new financing instruments.



During the forum it was highlighted that the Growth Plan entails support for the economies of this region and that the reforms, which our governments have committed to, will contribute to improving the business environment by strengthening competitiveness and the rule of law. Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises represent the backbone of the Western Balkans' economies and employ more than two-thirds of the working-age population and the longstanding issue that was pointed out during the conference was complicated access to financing for exactly those companies. The EU,

throughout past years of cooperation, has been actively involved in improving its instruments and helping our companies gain access to knowledge and capital.

Secretary General presented the role of the WB6 CIF in advancing regional prosperity and gradual integration to the European market, which tackled the contribution of the WB6 CIF in implementation of the Common Regional Market. He noted that our mission is to significantly enhance the business environment and to support enhancing competitiveness of WB6 companies in order to ensure their growth by fostering regional economic cooperation and prepare them for the demands of the European market, through the implementation of the WB6 CIF projects with our partners ([EC](#), [DIHK](#), [KfW](#)). In this sense our work is structured around Regional Supplier Development Program (RSDP) and key components of this work include:

- The creation of digital platforms and matchmaking tools to connect SMEs with regional and international buyers.
- Provision of customized market intelligence, including sector-specific analyses and country-level competitiveness analysis.
- Delivery of technical assistance and training for SMEs to achieve EU product compliance, improve production quality, and adopt environmentally sustainable practices.
- Facilitating access to export markets through participation in trade fairs, business delegations, and international B2B events.

3.5. WB6 CIF and BWA Business Roundtable

In the premises of Federal Association for Economic Development and Foreign Trade (BWA), Business Roundtable was organized between WB6 CIF delegation and BWA. The event brought together senior business representatives from Southeast Europe and Germany to explore opportunities for economic cooperation and joint engagement in third markets.

The roundtable was led by Mr. Urs Unkauf, Federal Managing Director of BWA, who opened the session with a warm welcome to the delegation and guests. The Western Balkans delegation was represented by Mr. Ahmet Egrlic, President of the Foreign Trade Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Zdravko Marinkovic, Vice President of the Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Mr. David Piegazki, Secretary General of the WB6 CIF. The agenda featured a series of structured exchanges beginning with mutual introductions and presentations by the participating organizations. Discussions centered on concrete approaches to bilateral cooperation, including co-organization of business events and sector-focused collaboration—both in terms of expanding Bosnian exports to Germany and encouraging German investment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The roundtable also examined opportunities for joint ventures in third markets, particularly in the Western Balkans, Black Sea region, the GCC, the European Union, and Central Asia.

Another key topic was the proposal to launch a joint economic publication to facilitate regular information exchange on market trends and policy developments. The session concluded with an open discussion where participants shared suggestions and outlined next steps for deepening strategic economic ties.

The event underscored the growing importance of Bosnia and Herzegovina as an important economic partner for Germany, and as a result of this meeting it was agreed to organize joint Business Forum this autumn, which reaffirmed the BWA's commitment to facilitating deeper cooperation between businesses across Western Balkans. The active participation of WB6 CIF also highlighted the regional dimension of economic development in the Western Balkans.



3.6. Berlin Process WB6 Business & Chambers Forum

WB6 CIF and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia with the support of British Embassy in Serbia organized business event where it was discussed about economic integration of Western Balkans through the Common Regional Market. Representatives of governments, chambers, and the diplomatic community reaffirmed their strong support for the development of the Common Regional Market (CRM) and the gradual integration of the Western Balkans into the EU Single Market. Event highlighted that economic and political

integration must progress in parallel with EU accession, ensuring coherence and long-term sustainability. Business representatives called for simplified procedures, including the creation of a single regional laboratory for product testing, the removal of quotas and safeguards for Western Balkan economies, and new measures to overcome barriers affecting labour mobility. Businesses emphasized the importance of investments in green technologies, stronger incentives for sustainable growth, and the elimination of non-tariff trade barriers.



The conclusions and key recommendations from the event were summarized in a Policy Paper, providing a set of private sector proposals to advance regional economic integration under the Berlin Process framework and they were included in the official material for the Ministerial meeting in London.

3.7. WB6 CIF cooperation with the United Arab Emirates at the Abu Dhabi - Balkan strategic Chamber Forum

Members of the WB6 CIF Managing Board – Nina Drakic, President of the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro and Lulzim Rafuna, President of the WB6 CIF Managing Board, together with WB6 CIF Secretary General, David Piegazki, participated in the Abu Dhabi – Balkan Strategic Chamber Forum, held on 29-30 September 2025 and hosted by the Albanian Business Council Abu Dhabi in cooperation with the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry.



The Forum brought together representatives of chambers from across the Western Balkans and leading UAE institutions, including Masdar City, KEZAD Group, Abu Dhabi Investment Office (ADIO) and HUB71, to discuss new opportunities for economic cooperation, sustainable investment, and innovation partnerships. During the sessions, WB6 CIF representatives highlighted the key regional initiatives – the Common Regional Market Action Plan (CRM

2024–2028) and the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans – as essential frameworks for stronger regional integration and enhanced connectivity with the EU Single Market. This engagement marks another important step towards building a long-term platform for cooperation between the Western Balkans and the UAE, promoting shared growth, investment, and partnership opportunities.

3.8. WB6 CIF at German Ambassadors' Conference

The event brought together senior representatives from Germany's diplomatic network and regional stakeholders to exchange views on current economic and political developments in the Western Balkans and to explore avenues for deeper cooperation.

During the event, discussions with the German ambassadors accredited to the Western Balkan countries were highly engaging and insightful, focusing on shared priorities and opportunities for strengthening regional cooperation. The participants emphasized the importance of maintaining regular dialogue and agreed to meet more frequently throughout the year to jointly address the region's key economic priorities and advance common objectives within the Berlin Process framework.



3.9. WB6 CIF at CEFTA Week 2025

Productive discussions were held during the panel on regional support for CEFTA reforms. WB6 CIF Secretary General David Piegazki participated alongside representatives of GIZ, ReSPA, UNCTAD, the Regional Cooperation Council, the Accreditation Directorate, and the Embassy of Switzerland to examine how regional organizations can jointly advance reforms and deliver meaningful improvements for businesses across the Western Balkans. WB6 CIF is currently developing a new regional tool for reporting trade barriers, upgrading its digital platforms with additional services, and strengthening regional business linkages through practical, business-oriented solutions that facilitate smoother trade within the WB6 region.

A key takeaway from the panel was that stronger coordination and clearer communication among regional actors lead to faster progress, more efficient trade, and reforms that generate tangible impact. WB6 CIF remains committed to contributing to this collective effort.



3.10. WB6CIF at the Brezovica Economic Forum: Addressing Regional Challenges and Advancing Economic Integration

WB6 CIF participated in the Brezovica Economic Forum, joining representatives of Western Balkans chambers of commerce to discuss the key challenges shaping the regional business environment. Lulzim Rafuna, President of the WB6 CIF Managing Board, highlighted that the shortage of skilled workforce has become the most significant barrier for companies across the region—surpassing corruption and infrastructure challenges that were dominant a decade ago. He emphasized that sustainable economic progress begins with education and called for urgent structural reforms within education systems. WB6 CIF Secretary General David Piegazki presented ongoing initiatives aimed at strengthening cooperation with strategic partners, including the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and the Government of Italy. Through EU- and Germany-funded programs, WB6 CIF is implementing concrete measures to improve the regional business ecosystem. One important result is the forthcoming digital regional investment assistant, a platform designed to provide investors with essential information on legislation, incentives, market conditions, and investment opportunities across the Western Balkans.



Panel discussions also addressed the broader regional context. Albania and Montenegro were recognized for their progress in EU integration, while challenges such as judicial reform and limited labour mobility remain. The €72 million KfW-funded dual education project, implemented through WB6 CIF, was noted as a key initiative for aligning workforce skills with market requirements. Participants also welcomed the work of the Regional Cooperation Council on the Agreement on Freedom of Movement and Mutual Recognition of Diplomas, which is currently undergoing ratification in the region. Once adopted, it is expected to enhance labour mobility and reduce administrative barriers for workers.

4. TAILOR-MADE SUPPORT FOR WB6 COMPANIES

4.1. AI Workshop for member of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce and Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia: Driving Business Innovation and Regional Cooperation

The Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum, in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia and the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, and with the support of the European Commission, successfully organized IT workshop in Vienna. The focus of this event was the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in business, offering an invaluable platform for industry leaders, experts, and entrepreneurs to exchange knowledge, explore best practices, and discuss the transformative potential of AI in enhancing efficiency, reducing costs, and driving productivity.



Bringing together key players from the IT sector, the workshop fostered dynamic discussions on AI-driven economic growth, sector-specific innovations, and practical applications for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) seeking to enhance their competitiveness through advanced technologies. Participants explored the latest developments in AI, its impact across various industries, and strategies for seamless adoption.

Mr. David Piegazki, at the time Special Advisor to the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, emphasized the significance of such gatherings in fostering regional economic cooperation. Recalling the Berlin Business Forum held a year and a half ago, he noted how AI has rapidly evolved from a promising technology to an essential component of modern business strategies.

On behalf of the Kosovo Chamber of Commerce, Besart Krasniqi, WB6 CIF National Coordinator, underscored the necessity of making these workshops a regular initiative. Given AI's increasing influence across industries, he highlighted the importance of continuous knowledge-sharing and collaboration to ensure businesses in the Western Balkans remain competitive in the global market.

The workshop was hosted at weXelerate, Austria's largest innovation hub, providing an inspiring setting for discussions on AI adoption, adaptation to industrial needs, and the empowerment of SMEs through digital transformation. WB6 CIF member chamber representatives actively participated in debates on overcoming technological challenges and seizing new business opportunities through AI-driven solutions.

With 30 engaged participants and over 50 B2B meetings, the event once again reaffirmed the importance of cross-border dialogue, collaboration, and strategic partnerships in overcoming barriers and strengthening regional economic ties. The success of this workshop highlights the growing need for businesses in the Western Balkans to embrace AI, ensuring they remain at the forefront of innovation and sustainable economic development.

5. ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE WB6 CIF

5.1. 34th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

On 17 January 2025, the WB6 CIF Managing Board held its meeting online, where it was discussed about the appointment of the new Secretary General of WB6 CIF;

5.2. 35th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

On 14 February 2025, the WB6 CIF Managing Board held its meeting in Podgorica, in addition representatives of DG NEAR/ENEST were present online. The Members of the Managing Board discussed topics of importance for the association, such as appointment of the new Secretary General of WB6 CIF, proposal for establishment of a new association in Podgorica/moving the seat of WB6 CIF and topics related to the project „EU support to WB6 CIF for the Development of a Common Regional Market 2024/454-229“ and potential new project.

5.3. 36th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

On 3 December 2025, the WB6 CIF Managing Board held electronic session, for the purpose of the adoption of the decisions related to the EU funded and GIZ project.

5.4. 37th Meeting of the WB6 CIF Managing Board

On 18 December 2025, the WB6 CIF Managing Board held its meeting online. The Members of the Managing Board discussed topics of importance for the association, such as establishment of a new association in Podgorica, formalization of the WB6 CIF business council, organizational structure, upgrade of website with modern tools based on AI, Regional Challenge Fund project and WB6 CIF Regional Training and Certification centre.

5.5. WB6 CIF meeting with RCC

The General Secretary of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) recently visited Pristina, where he held a meeting with Lulzim Rafuna, President of the Managing Board of the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF).

During the discussion, they focused on key regional economic integration topics, including strengthening public-private dialogue and facilitating trade and investment across the Western Balkans. The meeting highlighted the importance of cooperation between RCC and WB6 CIF in promoting the Common Regional Market and supporting businesses in the region.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening collaboration to enhance economic growth and competitiveness in the Western Balkans. A key point of discussion was the full commitment to the implementation of the Action Plan for the Common Regional Market (CRM 2.0), recognizing its crucial role in improving economic cooperation, mobility, and trade facilitation among the economies of the region.



This meeting marks another step in the continuous efforts to strengthen economic ties and cooperation among the Western Balkans economies, ensuring a more integrated and competitive market.

5.6. Western Balkans Emerging as a Labour Destination

President of the WB6 CIF, Mr. Lulzim Rafuna, participated at the Conference on Labour Migration: Supporting Economic Growth in the Western Balkans Six, held on 15th May 2025 in Budva, Montenegro, where he delivered his key message - the Western Balkans is undergoing a significant transformation in its labour market, evolving from a region primarily known for exporting workers to one increasingly attracting foreign labour.



Speaking to an audience of policy-makers, business leaders, and international development partners, Rafuna pointed to a striking statistic: the number of foreign work permits issued in the region has more than doubled in just five years, rising from 46,000 to over 100,000. He noted that the data clearly reflects a transformative shift in the labour dynamics of the Western Balkans and that this isn't just about labour shortages - it shows that our region is becoming a destination for labour, not just a source of it.

He described this shift as a strategic opportunity for the region, particularly in terms of strengthening economic

resilience and attracting new investment. For investors, the ability of a region to mobilize and integrate a diverse workforce is an essential signal. Whether in construction, manufacturing, or services, companies considering investment in our region need assurance that labour shortages won't stall their growth, he explained.

Mr. Rafuna also highlighted the broader implications of managed migration for the region's competitiveness. He noted that by reducing reliance on emigration and supporting a more balanced flow of labour, the Western Balkans can build a stronger foundation for long-term development. This, he argued, would allow businesses to shift their focus from survival to strategic planning and investment in human capital. In order to make this transition sustainable, Mr. Rafuna emphasized the need for institutional improvements - such as streamlined work permit procedures, decent working conditions, and fair treatment of all workers. These reforms, he said, benefit not only migrants but also local employees and the overall business environment.

"A well-regulated and managed labour migration system is not just a demographic necessity—it's an economic development tool," he stated. "When paired with investments in infrastructure, education, and private sector growth, it can position the Western Balkans as a competitive production and service hub for Europe."

The WB6 Chamber Investment Forum sees the private sector as a key partner in shaping labour migration policies. Rafuna underlined the WB6 CIF commitment to working closely with governments, international organizations, and development partners to ensure migration frameworks are aligned with the real needs of the regional economy.

5.7. WB6 CIF meeting with Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Republic

WB6 CIF President Lulzim Rafuna and Secretary General David Piegazki, held a constructive meeting with Mr. Emanuele Loperfido, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Republic, on 10th of July 2025. The discussion focused on enhancing the partnership between Italy and the Western Balkans, with a particular emphasis on the role of economic integration, investment facilitation, and regional cooperation.

Mr. Loperfido underscored the strategic importance of having the WB6 CIF headquarters located in Trieste, highlighting Italy's continued support for regional development and EU integration efforts.

Both sides reaffirmed their shared vision of a prosperous and interconnected region, committed to strengthening economic ties, improving the business environment, and building bridges between the Western Balkans and the European Union.



5.8. WB6 CIF meeting with BMZ State Secretary

On 17th October 2025, highly constructive meeting was held between President Rafuna, President of WB6 CIF,

Johann Saathoff, State Secretary of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and David Piegazki, WB6 CIF Secretary General. The discussion reaffirmed the joint commitment to strengthening economic cooperation between Germany and the Western Balkans, particularly through initiatives that enhance regional competitiveness and private sector development. During the meeting, both sides highlighted the importance of the “extended German workbench” concept as a forward-looking approach to fostering sustainable industrial cooperation and job creation across the region. This model aims to deepen integration of the Western Balkans into European value chains and further connect regional enterprises with the German market. The Regional Challenge Fund (RCF) was recognized as one of the most successful initiatives supported by BMZ and KfW. The Fund has become a true milestone for the region, supporting economic development through dual education, vocational training, and closer cooperation between businesses and training institutions.



5.9. WB6 CIF at the RCF Annual Regional Conference

RCF Annual Regional Conference “Smart Balkans: Shaping Skills for a Sustainable, Competitive Future – Navigating VET in a Digital and AI World”, took place in Budva, Montenegro on 9th October 2025. Event brought together representatives of regional and EU institutions, vocational education and training (VET) authorities, chambers of commerce, and private sector leaders to discuss how education and business cooperation can drive competitiveness, innovation, and sustainability in the Western Balkans.

Representing WB6 CIF, Mr. David Piegazki, Secretary General, took part in the high-level opening session and thematic discussions, emphasizing the importance of linking skills development with labour market needs and fostering stronger public–private partnerships across the region. He highlighted that rapid technological transformation — driven by digitalization, artificial intelligence, and the green transition — requires a strategic alignment of education systems with business priorities, ensuring a skilled and adaptable workforce ready for the future. One of the key achievements of the RCF is the strong involvement of the business community. More than 1,500 companies have participated in RCF calls so far. By connecting businesses with vocational training institutions, the RCF helps create a new generation of skilled workers ready to meet market needs.



The insights and recommendations from the conference have contributed to ongoing efforts within the Berlin Process and the Common Regional Market framework, ensuring that human capital development, innovation, and workforce readiness remain at the heart of regional economic integration and sustainable growth.

5.10. WB6 CIF Meeting with the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy

The Managing Board President, Mr. Lulzim Rafuna, and the Secretary General, Mr. David Piegazki, held a strategic meeting with Mr. Jonas Kraeusel and Mr. Sascha Fuzul at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy of Germany.

The discussion focused on several priority areas: Establishing a long-term partnership between WB6 CIF and the Ministry, exploring opportunities for technical support to advance regional economic integration, addressing and reducing trade barriers between the Western Balkans and EU member states. During the meeting, WB6 CIF presented its structured methodology for supporting private-sector integration, including activities under the Berlin Process, the CIF Road Map, and the Final Proposal outlining concrete steps toward improving market access and regulatory alignment.

The Ministry expressed strong interest in WB6 CIF's systematic and results-driven approach, recognizing it as a credible pathway toward greater convergence with the European Single Market. This engagement represents an important step in expanding institutional partnerships and strengthening the region's economic ties with EU institutions.



