

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**Mr. Olivér Várhelyi, European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement**

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**Adina Vălean, European Commissioner for Mobility and Transport**

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Migration and Home Affairs**

10<sup>th</sup> May 2023

**Subject:** Joint WB6 CIF Initiative - eliminating restrictions on the stay of professional drivers from the WB6 in the territory of the European Union

Dear Madam/Sir,

The strong economic and social connection of the Western Balkan region with the European Union, with which it achieves the largest volume of trade, represents mutual interest and is one of the important integrative factors. The European Union has recognized the importance of good connection of the Western Balkans with the European Union and is engaged in its constant improvement, in order to support and promote the development of economic and other activities, as well as the integration of this region into the European Union.

In order not only to further develop, but also to preserve economic activities with the European Union at the required level, eliminating restrictions on the stay of professional drivers in the territory of the European Union (Schengen) is imposed as one of the priority issues. The restriction on staying up to 90 days in any period of 180 days in the territory of the European Union puts professional drivers in international road transport in a position where they can perform work activities for approximately six months of the year, which is economically unprofitable for both drivers and their employers, and makes this occupation increasingly unattractive. This practically halved the efficiency of the driving staff employed with the employers from WB6 region engaged in international transport of goods and passengers. This is particularly specific with drivers from the countries with external EU borders, where itinerary, i.e. time spent at work is mainly performed in the EU territory. Extending the restriction of 90 days or its abolition (for professional drivers only) would to a large extent impact the efficiency of the transport of goods and passengers throughout Europe, and would have positive effects on the entire economy and tourism.

If compared with other professions or needs of citizens that have the possibility of submitting request for a longer stay in certain EU Member States, such possibility is not a solution for drivers, because they would have to do it for all possible destinations and transit countries. We particularly note that transport in the international road transport (both cargo and passenger) is

performed according to bilateral and multilateral agreements, whereas a vehicle cabin is a workplace of professional drivers, which is confirmed by the regulations stipulating the working time of drivers, and best example from practice can be seen during the pandemic period. This is the reason why it is necessary to regulate this issue uniformly at the EU level, thus ensuring a coherent policy for professional drivers in all the EU Member States.

In the light of the global shortage of professional drivers, abolition or mitigation of this restriction would substantially contribute to popularization of this profession and attraction of new drivers in Europe. Abolishing or mitigating this restriction would to a large extent increase the competitiveness of companies performing the transport of goods and passengers, which would further decrease transport costs, increase competitiveness of products and services and indirectly mitigate the current inflation rate growth. Such measure would contribute to improving the cooperation and dialogue between the EU and Western Balkan region, as well as to strengthening of the position of the Transport Community, by providing examples and positive signals of the EU readiness to deal with international transport issues of the neighboring countries.

A new IRU report shows that truck, bus and coach driver shortages in Europe are spiraling out of control, fueled by increased transport demand and an ageing driver population. The growing gap between retiring and new drivers is set to triple the rate of unfilled truck driver positions, to over 60% by 2026. Driver demand in Europe already up 44% from January to September this year 30% of drivers will retire by 2026, but rate of younger replacements is 4–7 times less.

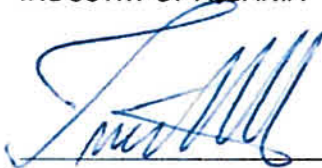
Total shortage in Europe could top two million by 2026. Given this drastic situation with EU truck drivers, we emphasize the need to redesign EU visa restriction on staying up to 90 days in any period of 180 days in the territory of the European Union for professional drivers for WB. We strongly believe that that will serve to mutually benefit of EU and Western Balkans.

The Initiative, i.e. proposal to abolish or mitigate the restriction on staying up to 90 days in any period of 180 days in the territory of the European Union refers exclusively to professional drivers.

Being convinced that the European Commission, as well as other bodies of the European Union, fully understand the importance and function that professional drivers have in the entire system of implementing mutual economic activities, we hope that your positive reaction to this Initiative will not fail, and we express our readiness for an open dialogue, as well as our possibly necessary additional involvement in the region of the Western Balkans, in order to resolve this problem in a mutually satisfactory manner and in the shortest possible period of time.

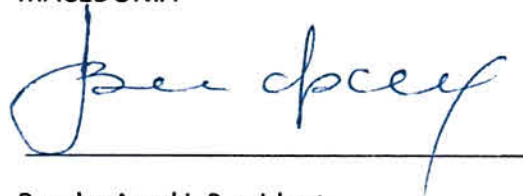
Respectfully,

UNION OF CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE AND  
INDUSTRY OF ALBANIA



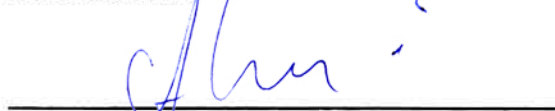
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