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WORKING DOCUMENT

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: **EU-Western Balkans Transport Community**

- Information from the Commission on TC initiative for improving border crossing capacity

Delegations find attached, as background information for the meeting of the working party on Transport - intermodal questions and networks on 10 June 2020, working documents received from the Commission services:

ANNEX 1 (initiative in implementation): Joint proposal of the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community and the CEFTA Secretariat to facilitate the transport and trade of goods of first necessity within the Western Balkans

ANNEX 2 (in preparation): “Ensuring the fast flow of goods through Green Lanes linking the EU and Western Balkans” - A potential response of the Transport Community to the objectives set out at the EU-Western Balkans Leaders’ summit of 6 May (Zagreb summit)

ANNEX 3 (in preparation): Facilitation of road passenger transport post COVID-19.

Joint proposal of the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community and the CEFTA Secretariat to facilitate the transport and trade of goods of first necessity within the Western Balkans

(implemented since 22 March 2020)

The spreading of COVID-19 in the last days across the European continent led to the setting up (or proposal of setting up) of very strong measures by several EU MS at the EU level in view to contain the risk of transmission. The most visible examples of such policy are the travel bans imposed by several MS and the restoration of border controls (including with sanitary purposes) at internal and external borders of the EU. To reduce the impact of these measures on the EU internal market, the Commission has proposed on Monday 16 March to close the external borders of the EU for a duration for the time being of 30 days. The proposal targets first and foremost the movement of passengers at all external borders of the EU and should – in principle – not affect the transport and trade with the neighbours.

The Western Balkan partners have, in the meantime, also taken some restrictive – and often uncoordinated - measures for travel and transport of goods which combined with the ones taken by the EU MS are increasing the congestion at some border-crossings, with long queues and long delays to pass the border, with potentially adverse effect on the sanitary situation but also on the supply of essential goods.

However, despite the sanitary emergency, the flow of goods – in particular goods of primary needs (human and animal food – medicines – medical equipment) must not be interrupted.

As this sanitary emergency will last for a certain time, beyond the consequences in terms of loss of human lives, the overall economy of the continent and its trade component might be heavily affected. Western Balkan regional partners have expressed their fear that there could be a disruption of cargo traffic which could lead to shortage of essential goods affecting the life of millions of citizens in the region.

The following document represents an attempt to propose a more coordinated and proportionate approach in response to the challenge we are **all** facing to contain the spreading of COVID-19. It is aiming at avoiding that none of the interested parties would be facing a too severe isolation leading to the shortage of **goods of first necessity**.

Transport Community Permanent Secretariat and CEFTA Secretariat propose a set of measures to support the Western Balkans partners but also the EU MS to cope with transport and trade challenges linked to the outbreak of the COVID-19 disease.

The proposed approach is based on two pillars and two stages:

First, the identification of a restricted number of road priority border/common crossing points and key ports that should continue to operate in all circumstances. For all these connecting points, a series of measures is proposed to ease the work / cooperation between the different administrations involved.

It also identifies a series a “green axes” linking the Western Balkan Six together on which free traffic flow should be granted, together with a restricted number of gas stations which may remain opened even in case of potential containment of the population. This point is essential to ensure that for lorry drivers/trucks could continue to operate despite this degraded situation.

As a second stage, it is also proposed to identify a series of priority border crossing points linking the Western Balkans with the EU MS (Croatia – Hungary – Romania – Bulgaria and Greece) where similar principles should apply in order to avoid the interruption of critical flows of goods originating from the EU or at destination of the EU (including cargo in transit). This second step will require a strong coordination and the support of the competent services of the European Commission. These aspects will be covered in a separate proposal.

1. COLLECTING INFORMATION

The Transport Community Permanent Secretariat’s Role: following a similar approach of the recently published EU Guidelines C(2020) 1753 final of 16.03.2020 “*Any planned transport-related restrictions should be notified to the Commission and to all other Member States in a timely manner and, in any event, before they are implemented,*” SEE partners should be instructed to inform Transport Community Permanent Secretariat on any such measure they are taking or plan to take in the short term and having an impact on the movement of goods and persons.

It is equally important that the TCT Secretariat is informed about the measures which are taken at EU level or by single EU MS, in particular the ones having common borders with WB6 parties.

Communication: the Secretariat has started from Monday 16 March to monitor the measures and collect all information pertaining to the travel restrictions taken by Western Balkan partners and at EU level. The Secretariat provides a full picture of the situation to the public (administrations – citizens – business) on the current status of transport related restrictions in the region on its website www.transport-community.org and via its *twitter* account. The information is updated daily.

CEFTA Secretariat is tasked to collect information on measures directly and indirectly affecting trade, including, but not being limited to: measures directly restricting import, export or transit, additional measures related to clearance of goods at the border, operational goods entry points. The CEFTA Parties inform the Secretariat regularly. The Secretariat distribute the information to the Parties and to the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum with a view of informing business community. The Secretariat will provide the information regularly on its website www.cefta.int and through its social network accounts.

The TCT Secretariat and the CEFTA Secretariat exchange information on a regular basis and coordinate data collection to provide support to the WB6 economies and ensure efficient flow of information.

2. IMPROVING COORDINATION

As stated above, one of the critical aspects that is challenging transport of goods in Western Balkans is keeping all partners connected together and as well as ensuring connections with the EU MS to guarantee essential trade flows for a region which is receiving in average 70% of its imports from EU MS.

As the first step towards comprehensive coordination, the Parties have established a **CEFTA Coordination Body** tasked with exchange of all information related to trade in goods. The body consists of representatives of ministries in charge of trade (CEFTA Contact Point) and customs administration. The work of the body is supported by CEFTA Secretariat.

2.1 “Green” priority corridors in the Western Balkans

As a first step, it is proposed to identify on the TEN-T Core road network of the Western Balkan partners “green priority corridors” on which free flow – for goods of first necessity - must be granted (see map in annex 1). These “green” priority corridors includes 3 branches:

- A. HU/SRB border - Belgrade – SRB/MK border - Skopje – MK/EL border (with a branch towards Kosovo*¹ and Pristina) || RO/SRB border – Belgrade SRB-MNE border– Podgorica – (port of) Bar.
- B. HR/BiH-border Sarajevo- (port of) Ploce (HR) || HR/SRB border - Belgrade-SRB/BG border.
- C. (Port of) Durrës- Tirana- ALB/MK border-Skopje- MK/BG border || ALB/KOS border -Pristina- KOS/MK border || ALB/MNE border-Podgorica

2.2 Maximising the use of road network

Given the exceptional circumstances, **exemption from road tolls** for freight vehicles should be allowed on the dedicated priority network. Distance-based tolling has already operational in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia while Montenegro has a tolled tunnel. All systems already in place are different and have interoperability issues across the region. This measure will aim to alleviate the interoperability issues and somehow the possible financial losses to the freight forwarders due to the current situation.

Unified transit allowed hours in each of the partners. The time spent on the territory of a WB6 partners for the trucks should allow this one to load/or unload and leave the territory. A period not exceeding 12 hours from the moment of entry seems to be reasonable. **Gas stations**, along these green corridors must be available to allow truck drivers to refuel / rest.

1 * This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ISJ Opinion on Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

2.3 “Green” priority border-common crossing points

A special attention should be paid to the border/common crossing points. All these points should set up “**green priority lanes**” dedicated to this traffic of primary importance, along the following lines:

1. Transport of goods of primary importance should have priority with respect to the other goods via “green lanes”. The traffic flow must be guaranteed through 24/24 hours operations at the key border/common crossing points where custom and phytosanitary proceedings shall be performed in the most efficient way for all goods considered as of primary necessity. Sanitary checks of the drivers and sanitation of the vehicles (if applicable) shall also be able to operate 24/24 hours.
2. Un-impeded transport at these key points will be crucial to maintain availability of goods, in particular of essential goods such as food supplies, livestock, animal food, chemicals and vital medical supplies and equipment. **CEFTA Coordination Body coordinates creation of single list of goods, identified by 8 digit tariff code.**
3. **Pre-arrival information** on essential goods will be exchanged electronically intra-CEFTA through the System of Electronic Exchange of Data (see annex 2) which is already in place and supports exchange of data between the Customs Administrations in CEFTA. The Customs Administrations in CEFTA will make sure that all export and transit declarations are sent to the SEED (both pre-arrival and exit). Pre-arrival notifications on essential goods shall also be sent not only customs administration, but also other relevant stakeholders, like sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary inspections. Border-crossings with the EU are out of the scope of the System and the possibility to extend the system or set up a similar approach to the EU-WB6 border-crossings listed below should be explored without delay.
4. The proposal relates to the following road BCPs/CCPs (a map is also attached).

On corridor A (within Western Balkans):

- SRB-MK (Presevo/ Tabanovce)
- SRB- MNE (Dobrakovo/Gostun)
- SRB-KOS (Merdare/Merdare)
- On corridor Port of Bar (MNE)

On Corridor C:

- Port of Durres (ALB)
- KOS-ALB (Vermice/Morine)
- MK-KOS (Blace/Hani i Elezit)
- ALB-MNE (Hani i Hotit/Bozaj)
- ALB-MK (Qafe Thane/Kjafasan)

5. The list of major BCPs/CCPs identified above is the minimum required to ensure the circulation of emergency supplies. Nevertheless, the authorities may decide to keep other BCPs open for freight transport, as well, provided that it does not affect the effective management of the major road BCPs/CCPs.
6. Regional partners should ensure that on the road BCPs/CCPs listed above:
 - No additional certifications should be imposed on goods legally circulating within CEFTA markets and EU single market.
 - Vehicles and crew members can be subject to health controls and sanitary measures on entrance on the basis of the WHO instructions and recommendations, but as a principle, there should not be entrance or traffic restrictions as soon as the good health can be demonstrated. Parties will enhance cooperation of competent authorities in order to facilitate cross-border movement of goods and attain high level sanitary standards.
 - restrictions to a certain maximum number of trucks per day may be imposed, provided they are agreed in coordinated manner through CEFTA Coordination Body and communicated clearly..
 - a simple system of “ scheduling” could be put in place, in order to avoid queuing on external borders with EU MS, whereby the freight forwarders can obtain information on approximate time for arriving of their trucks at the BCP, via a simple call centre, to be open by the Customs authorities. The system could gradually be made digital (as mentioned above) and allow electronic scheduling, until an electronic queuing management system (eQMS) is established.
 - Potentially (time and resources permitting) a digital platform should be set up to track the trucks along the green lanes, in order to plan and manage the border crossing times aiming to avoid queues and ensure social distancing at the border crossing points.
7. The authorities must ensure that the major road BCPs serving these priority “green” corridors should be given highest priority in terms of human resources (custom / police / sanitary staff) and equipment for efficient border management to be able to respond appropriately and to adjust to the current situations. All personnel from the closed BCPs should be relocated to the major ones and shifts should be accordingly planned. All sanitary facilities should be put in place without any delays.
8. It is also of primary importance that if these goods are carried through ports, all the custom operations are carried along the same lines as proposed for the land border-points, setting some “green lanes” to speed up the proceedings, granting a swift supply to the final users.

All the measures set in place must comply with relevant trade rule, in particular WTO, CEFTA and Stabilisation and Association Agreements, as well as EC guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services.

Annex 1 of the proposal provides a detailed description of the different border/common crossing points, extracted from a survey recently carried out by “CONNECTA” in the framework of the assistance of the EU to the Western Balkans. Given the reduction of traffic (passenger but also cargo) it should be possible to ensure that primary goods could cross borders and reach their area of destination in reasonable time. This implies that coordinated measures, as described in this proposal are taken in a coordinated manner by all Western Balkan 6 parties and implemented swiftly.

This also implies that the transport workers, in particular, lorry drivers can operate in safe conditions. This finally implied that also all staff at the borders can also operate safely. The “continuity” of the traffic can be granted under these conditions and would avoid a disruption of the supply of goods of primary importance which could affect severely and for a long period of time our economies and societies.

ANNEX 1: Technical characteristics of the key “green” road Border and Common crossing point: (data from 2017, extract from CONNECTA Study on road BCP facilitation)

SRB-MK (Presevo/ Tabanovce)

Number of lanes for passengers: 4+6/ 12
Number of lanes for freight: 2+2/2+2
Truck parking capacity: 100
Queue capacity (trucks) : 200
Annual number of trucks crossing the BCP: around 288.000

SRB- MNE (Dobrakovo/Gostun)

Number of lanes for passengers: 2 /
Number of lanes for freight: 2+1/ 1+2
Truck parking capacity: /
Queue capacity (trucks) : /
Annual number of trucks crossing the BCP: 150.000

SRB-KOS (Merdare-Merdare)

Number of lanes for passengers: 1+1/ 1+1
Number of lanes for freight: 1+1/ 1+1
Truck parking capacity:
Queue capacity (trucks) :
Annual number of trucks crossing the BCP: 94.000

ALB-MK (Qafe Thane/Kjafasan)

Number of lanes for passengers: 3/ 3+2
Number of lanes for freight: 1/1+2
Truck parking capacity: /
Queue capacity (trucks) : 50/
Annual number of trucks crossing the BCP:50.000

ALB-MNE (Hani i Hotit/Bozaj)

Number of lanes for passengers: 3+2/ 1+1
Number of lanes for freight: /1+1
Truck parking capacity: terminal/
Queue capacity (trucks) : /
Annual number of trucks crossing the BCP:66.000

MK-KOS (Blace/Hani i Elezit)

Number of lanes for passengers: 1+1/
Number of lanes for freight: 3+4/ 1+2
Truck parking capacity: 50+50
Queue capacity (trucks) : /
Annual number of trucks crossing the BCP:39.000

ALB-KOS (Morine-Vermice)

Number of lanes for passengers: 1+1/ 4

Number of lanes for freight: /2

Truck parking capacity:

Queue capacity (trucks) : /24

Annual number of trucks crossing the BCP:137.000



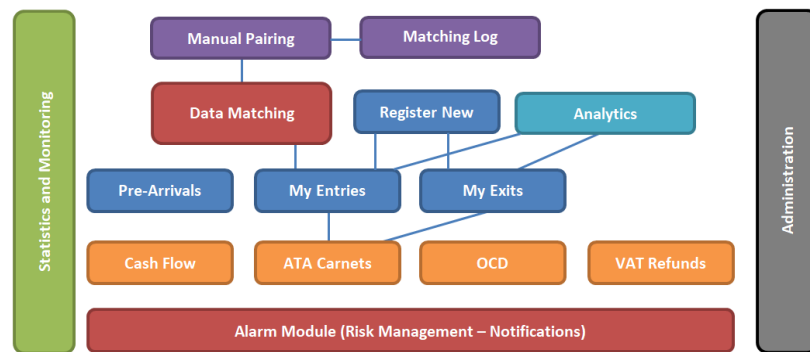
ANNEX 2: SEED – Systematic Electronic Exchange of Data

Short Overview

Since its first implementation phase in 2010, through several EU funded projects, the Systematic Electronic Exchange of Data (SEED) has enhanced border management in the Western Balkans, fostering the cooperation and the sharing of information among Customs Administrations. Over the years, SEED became a powerful tool to overcome the inefficiencies in the Western Balkans' border management systems and facilitated: simplification of export, transit and import procedures; reduction of time for legitimate trade flows; reduction of security risks; as well as reaching EU standards towards EU integration.

The SEED current state of play is as follows:

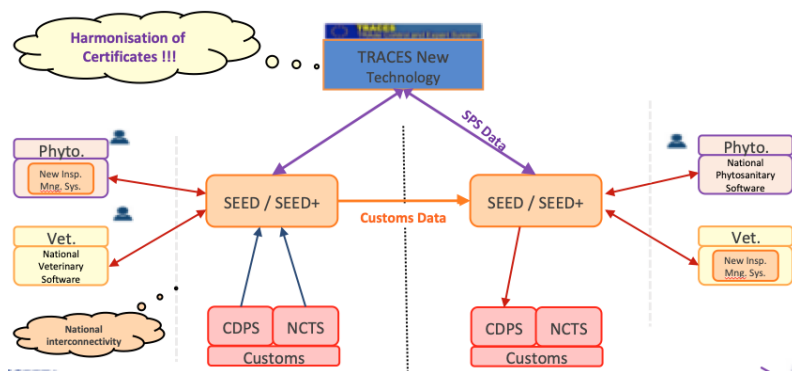
- Legal base for the electronic data exchange is provided throughout the region through bilateral protocols signed between neighbouring customs administrations and further strengthened and expanded through the adoption of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 5 and its Annexes;
- Operational guidelines and instructions for the SEED system usage have been adopted by each beneficiary customs administration;
- IT infrastructure and system is in place, operational 24/7 and enabling automatic customs data matching and alarm module on pre-arrival data, in particular:
 - SEED infrastructure is composed of 7 SEED nodes (Tirana, Banja Luka, Podgorica, Skopje, Belgrade, Pristina, Rome) and 9 direct bilateral data exchange links + 2 links to the “middle server”: Pristina-Rome and Belgrade-Rome. These links covered all crossing-points inside the region.
 - SEED software modules support: preview of exchanged data (pre-arrivals, my exits, my entries); manual entry of missing data; data matching; statistics; alarming; cash declarations; ATA carnets; VAT refund; customs debts calculation in passenger traffic; archiving data and



- administration.
- Exchange of data is established at all crossing points within the Western Balkan region. Every crossing of each track in the region is included in the system. This applies both to loaded means of transport (all types of procedures: export / transit / import, simplified procedures, TIR/ATA carnets), as well as, empty trucks.

Plans for future – SEED+

Implementation of the Additional Protocol 5 has been seen as a strong sign of readiness of CEFTA Parties to undertake all necessary efforts to deepen the regional trade through simplifying and facilitating customs procedures and reducing trade related formalities. SEED+ (an upgraded version of the SEED) is aimed to be the main technical tool for implementation of the AP5 and of a number of other activities from the MAP REA.



SEED+ system will include SPS authorities (phytosanitary and veterinary inspections) and Agencies for Medicines from the Western Balkans CEFTA Parties in regional electronic data exchange. Certificates and other relevant documents will be exchanged in advance, with aim to facilitate and speed-up border crossing procedures and clearance

formalities. Development of common databases and central services in accordance with the AP5 and its technical annexes is also encompassed, such as database of mutually recognised CEFTA AEOs (Authorized Economic Operators), database of unsafe/noncompliant products detected on the CEFTA market based on EUROPHYT and RAPEX and regional database of issued licences based on the TRACES New Technology (TNT). Apart from the obvious direct benefits for the WB6 parties mentioned above, the implementation of SEED+ will further facilitate harmonization of processes and data with the EU.

Possible usage in current emergency situation

Since the system enables electronic and automatic exchange of encrypted pre-arrival information in real-time among WB6 Customs Administrations, SEED could be used, in current emergency situation, for facilitation of flow of essential products throughout WB6. Namely, electronic messages on essential products could be highlighted among the other exchange messages and automatic notifications on movements of sensitive goods could be created and sent to all relevant stakeholders, like sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary inspectors at the crossing points concerned. For greater impact of such a measure, the possibilities (legal and technical preconditions) of pre-arrival data exchange with EU could also be explored (in addition to NCTS common domain consignments already in place in North Macedonia and Serbia).

**“Ensuring the fast flow of goods through Green Lanes linking the EU and Western Balkans”
A potential response of the Transport Community to the
objectives set out at the EU-Western Balkans Leaders’ summit of 6 May (Zagreb summit)**

Together and better Connected: working document prepared by the Permanent Secretariat

1. On 29 April 2020, the Commission adopted a communication (COM (2020) 315 final) in view to propose a certain number of priority actions together with financial support for Western Balkans partners to cope with the challenge of the economic recovery “post” COVID-19. This set of proposals was then submitted to the attention of the EU and Western Balkans leaders who virtually met on 6 May 2020 (Zagreb summit).
2. The conclusions of the Zagreb summit state that the ongoing pandemic demonstrated how the EU and the Western Balkans are and should continue to jointly tackling the common challenges. This cooperation is reflected in the need to ensure “*the fast flow of essential goods through Green Lanes linking the EU and Western Balkans*”.
3. Granting the free flow of goods across the borders is one of the top priorities for the EC, the WB partners and the regional organizations, including of the Transport Community since the beginning of the sanitary crisis.
4. The Permanent Secretariat responded timely to this challenge through the “Green Corridor / Green Lane” initiative¹ set up together with CEFTA in order to guarantee the free flow of essential goods within the Western Balkans during the sanitary crisis.
5. The Green Corridor initiative that has been endorsed and implemented by all regional partners represents a concrete example on how a good coordination between the different administrations of the Western Balkan partners could generate a positive effect on the region. The shortage of essential goods (such as food – medicines – animal feed) or the blockage at Western Balkan internal Border and Common crossing points – thanks to the proposed measures of coordination – has been avoided². Since the 16 March, when the Permanent Secretariat started to monitor on a daily basis the situation at the borders, no major jams have been reported.
6. This achievement is a tangible sign that when common interests prevail with respect to national ones, benefits can be shared all partners without exception.

¹ Details can be found at https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Joint-TCT-CEFTA-proposal-green-corridors_07042020.pdf

² See CEFTA presentation on the results, available on the TCT Website.

7. At the EU-WB borders the situation was kept under control and waiting times have never exceeded the ones registered in the pre-COVID period. The convoy regime (now lifted) and some restrictions of transit introduced by certain EU Member States have however generated the increase of the travel time needed to connect Western Balkan parties with the core of the EU. Border crossing management remains – however – an important issue affecting the overall connectivity of the region, but also of EU MS neighbouring Western Balkans.
8. **In this context, it is of utmost importance to capitalize the good results obtained at internal borders and continue to work to make more efficient Border-crossing operations with EU Member States.**
9. Both EU and Western Balkan partners are now preparing themselves to “exit” the sanitary emergency, although the path will be long before fully recovering from the human, economic and social consequences of this pandemia. The sanitary crisis showed how much un-coordinated actions taken by single countries could affect our logistic system. It also demonstrated (and this is positive) how much our respective economies are already interdependent.
10. It would be therefore crucial that the EU when starting planning the post-emergency step considers the Western Balkans as an integral part of the process. The Commission communication of 29 April clearly state that “*the Commission is ready to associate the region closely with the implementation of its ‘Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures’*”. The economic activity is going to recover and according to experts, road traffic is expected to grow at a rate of 4% per week in the coming months. To avoid major blockages at the land borders, we need to be as pro-active as possible.
11. Lifting of the last transit restrictions at EU internal borders should go in pair with the lifting of the transit restrictions still in place and that affect the fluidity of the EU-WB traffic.
12. In addition, the same communication states that “*beyond this sanitary emergency and its related restrictions on the movement of goods and passengers, the Commission is also committed in the long-term to contribute to better connectivity to the Western Balkans, addressing the structural bottlenecks at EU/Western Balkans borders*”.
13. Whilst the last temporary restrictions shall be lifted in the coming months, the priority will shift from the response to the emergency situation **to the focus on a longer term plan aiming at granting better intra WB connectivity and accessibility to the EU.**
14. As President von der Leyen recalled after the summit, the EU has associated its Western Balkan partners in the European Union initiatives that are normally only reserved for Member States “*in the concept of the so-called ‘green lanes’ crossing the borders that helped enormously to have the flow of goods going*”. **The “green lane” concept should not only cover the current sanitary emergency but it could become a driver in view to implement, on a permanent basis and in view of the future enlargement, a more efficient and cost-effective system for cross-border operations between EU-MS and Western Balkans.**

15. The role of the Permanent Secretariat would be twofold: **assist the parties, Western Balkans and EU Member States in the lifting of the last transit restrictions** which will follow the emergency situation. **Develop – with the support of the Commission and the regional cooperation organizations - a comprehensive and longer-term programme to foster the connectivity between the partners through more coordinated proceedings and updated border-crossing infrastructure and IT equipment.** This aspect is of particular relevance as, from March 2020, the first two Western Balkan candidate countries, Montenegro and Serbia have been joined by Albania and North Macedonia.
16. This implies, in particular, to tackle a series of important inefficiencies affecting border-crossing facilities within the Western Balkans and between the Western Balkans and the EU MS, both in terms of infrastructure, equipment, coordination and monitoring
17. The daily survey of the traffic at EU-Western Balkan borders carried out by the TCT secretariat provided an interesting illustration of some peculiarities of the traffic flows (such as the imbalances between outbound and inbound traffics – peak hours and days). Furthermore, the monitoring made clear that beyond the restrictions, the border-crossing infrastructure at several key border-crossing points, within Western Balkans and with the EU MS is unable to cope above a certain volume of traffic. This problem was already well known, but it has become even more acute with the closure of certain secondary border crossing points.
18. A more efficient monitoring of the traffic flow could provide some potential low-cost solutions to reduce congestion and waiting times at borders.
19. In this context, it is of utmost importance to offer the possibility for Western Balkans partners to be more closely associated to developing programmes at EU level. The “*Galileo Green lanes*” which aims at providing a better monitoring of the flows in view to easing traffic pressure at borders is a good example of what could be implemented very quickly at a very low cost.
20. EU-Western Balkan and intra traffic – by land - is expected to grow in the coming months, following the resuming of the economic activities and the possible re-opening of transit to private cars. In the meantime, it is not excluded that the offer of air transport representing a significant share of the EU-WB overall passenger transport would be reduced, at least for a certain period. In this context, the long waiting times- with peaks up to 24 hours at certain border points often registered in “*pre-COVID-19 situation*” would represent a sanitary risk hardly acceptable for drivers, passengers or border officers. It is also a risk that authorities from whatever country would not like to take.

21. Waiting time at WB borders (EU and intra ones) have been estimated by the World Bank at about 26 million hours per year in a study published in 2015³. A significant share of these waiting times could be avoided through improved systems and infrastructure and better coordination. The cost for Western Balkans of these existing unnecessary obstacles at borders was estimated, by the World Bank, in a range between 250 and 300 M€ per year. This includes the cost at the expenses of the transport sector (transport and logistic companies) but also missed opportunities in terms of economic attractiveness of the region in general. The first visible impact are the very high logistical costs⁴ - almost the double compared to EU MS – supported by Western Balkan economies which affect negatively the final cost of products manufactured in the region or imported by the region, undermining the overall competitiveness of Western Balkans. This situation partly explains the very bad ranking of all regional economies in the Logistic Performance Index⁵ developed by the World Bank.
22. These problems have been already identified at the level of the Transport Community and the removal of these unnecessary obstacles at the Border and Common crossing points (in road, but also rail) was addressed by Western Balkan partners through the adoption, in April 2018, of a Transport Facilitation Strategy. This strategy is part of the TCT Work programme for the 2019-2020 and generated an Action Plan including short, medium and long-term actions measures and investments⁶ presented to the Regional Partners for implementation at the beginning of the year.
23. The TCT/CEFTA “green corridor” initiative was set up to cope with the consequences of this crisis. It could now offer a new window of opportunity to “drive” an even more ambitious programme to improve transport connectivity in the region and with the EU. This implies the removal of all unnecessary obstacles and bottlenecks existing at EU-WB⁷ and at internal WB borders, building upon the already identified measures and projects but also capitalizing the good results obtained in setting the “green corridors/lanes” within the Western Balkans.
24. Such programme also aims at maximising the opportunities offered by the Commission – in particular in terms of funding – to assist the Western Balkan parties in their economic recovery and re-confirmed at the Zagreb summit.

³ World Bank Final Report – The Regional Balkans Infrastructure Study (REBIS) Update-Enhancing Regional Connectivity, Identifying Impediments and Priority Remedies

⁴ World Bank – Benchmarking Corridor Performance

⁵ Logistic Performance Index (LPI 2018 by the World Bank Group) : from rank n°68 (Serbia) to n°91 (Albania). But also EU MS of the region are poorly ranking: n°52 for Romania and n°55 for Bulgaria on a total of 163 countries considered.

⁶ Draft proposal available of the TCT Website.

⁷ While keeping untouched all measures which are related to the control of the EU external borders.

25. The Commission proposal comprises an ambitious investment plan to improve the regional connectivity and the better connections with the EU through renewed Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) infrastructure. This ambition would appear inconsistent and probably vain without resolving in parallel – but one could also say **in priority** – the long lasting connectivity issues at borders⁸. An economic recovery of the region, together with the strengthening of the Regional Economic Area (REA) should therefore rely on to pillars: (1) better infrastructure, but this could only be a medium-long term objective (2) better accessibility through the removal of unnecessary obstacles at borders preventing the good functioning of the REA and the access to the EU Market. This could be a **“quick win” providing an immediate result in terms of economic benefits for the whole region.**
26. This approach presents the following characteristics and advantages :
- it relates to infrastructure but also soft and innovative measures based on digital technology that could be quickly implemented;
 - it combines low cost measures but with high value with higher costs infrastructure investments.
 - it combines short term actions “quick wins” and longer-term ones.
 - for each Euro invested it will be easy to calculate the cost saving generated by the action⁹.
 - it contributes – to some extent - to the *greening* of transport in the region – by reducing the number of hours spent by trucks at borders with a significant consumption of fuel while not moving the goods;
27. To be a real success, this approach requires, however, the commitment of all parties belonging to the Transport Community, Western Balkans but also Member States. In the recent past, getting the parties’ commitment to jointly work to improve the connectivity through the removal of border crossing obstacles has not always been an easy task. It is therefore crucial, for the Permanent Secretariat, to demonstrate that the proposed measures will not only benefit to one party at the expenses of another one but that all parties can benefit from a smoother movement of goods across the borders. This would result in a better accessibility, the reduction of transport costs and pollution, but also the improvement working conditions of transport workers.

⁸ The “Cconnectivity reform measures” that also include “Transport Facilitation” and represent the core of the activity of the Permanent Secretariat are the pre-condition to make this investment plan a success.

⁹ For instance: the waiting time reduction (in other words the cost savings for road transport companies) could be easily compared with the investment needed to carry out the action that led to the reduction of waiting time. See CONNECTA Final Report - Study for border crossing facilitation and improvement of the cross-border road transport on the indicative extension of TEN-T Road Core/Comprehensive Network in the Western Balkans https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/CONN-TRA-CRM-REG-06-CBP_Final-Report.pdf

28. The proposed “Post-COVID-19 response” on transport facilitation does not replace but complements the action plan set up earlier this year by the Permanent Secretariat. It covers in addition to road transport also rail and goes in pair with the action plan to revitalize rail transport and is currently implemented by the Western Balkan partners. Rail will be instrumental in the post-COVID situation to grant better connections with EU Member States. It also proved to be more resilient than road as traffic levels registered from mid-February to mid-April did not register a reduction compared to the same period of 2019.
29. These measures complements the other priorities that the Permanent Secretariat is focussing on aiming at improving the overall quality of the transport system and of the infrastructure in the Western Balkan region. A sustainable improvement of the quality of the transport system requires that all these priorities are tackled in parallel, in particular the connectivity reform measures
30. The Transport Community has already set up a technical committee ran under the aegis of the Permanent Secretariat. This technical committee on “Transport Facilitation” met already four times in the last nine months. It gathers all interested parties, Western Balkans partners, EU Member States, International Financial Institutions, Regional cooperation organizations, Transport business and associations.
31. The proposal is – at this stage – a working document of the Permanent Secretariat but it can – if supported by the parties – quickly turn into an ambitious operational programme, including four priority pillars:
- **Priority 1** : ensuring a smooth and coordinated removal of the existing temporary transit restrictions affecting traffic and trade flows between EU and Western Balkans, developing reliable cross-border traffic monitoring systems (like the Galileo app.);
 - **Priority 2**: consolidating to good practices set up within Western Balkans (the “Green Corridor” initiative”) and capitalizing it in view to ensure an (almost) free flow of goods within the WB in line with the MAP REA’s objectives;
 - **Priority 3**: setting a joint EU-WB action plan to remove all unnecessary obstacles existing at EU-WB borders (inadequate infrastructure – redundancy in the proceedings – developing new IT/Digital solutions – strengthening the cooperation mechanisms – developing information and monitoring mechanisms);
 - **Priority 4**: identifying projects (“quick win”) on infrastructure improvement or soft measures beyond those already submitted at the last WB6 summit, which could provide benefits within 12 to 18 months as well as longer-term investments improving the road and rail connectivity between EU and WB. A first list should be ready on time in view to be submitted at the next WBIF call.

Done in Brussels / Belgrade, on 8 May 2020

FACILITATION OF ROAD PASSENGER TRANSPORT POST COVID-19*Working document of the TCT version 25.05***Context**

The EC Communication on ‘*Covid-19: Guidelines on the progressive restoration of transport services and connectivity*’ points out the impact that the sanitary crisis would have passenger transport. While transport of goods was not interrupted (despite a significant reduction of the traffic), EU MS and WB regional partners, decided to put passenger transport for non-essential needs in a standstill mode. Western Balkans borders still remain closed for passenger movement by road and rail and only Serbia has opened recently limited air travel to few destinations in Europe. In absence of a competitive rail offer and while air connections (in the pre-COVID-19 situation) were not covering homogenously all Western Balkan partners¹, transport trends in Western Balkans show that road transport was the preferred mode of transport, with passenger road transport counting for almost 80-85% of all movement in the region². During 2018, 24 million passengers entered the region through land border crossings (almost the same number in exit), 50-60 % foreigner citizens, with an average yearly increase of the passenger numbers between 5-10%. The highest peak of passenger traffic is experienced in summer with an increase up to 50% in terms of passengers at some border crossings³. Tourism in Western Balkans represents a significant source of income for a majority of the partners.

The foreseen relaxation, and then lifting the restrictions on transport by car, followed by collective transport (busses, vans), will allow an early resumption of mobility. The lifting of the restrictions to facilitate passenger transport is supposed to remain aligned with the broad distancing measures and prevention measures required or recommended by each Party. The limited availability of air transport combined with the lack of connectivity by rail is expected to increase the demand for road transport in the coming period and, as a consequence, also the pressure on border-crossings (at EU and internal borders).

¹ Also affected by the bankruptcy of some regional companies like Adria Airways playing an important role in connecting Western Balkans to the EU.

² Based on the statistical data provided by Statistical Offices of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia.

³ Based on the statistical data provided by Statistical Offices of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia.

Hence, in addition to the proposed measures by the Transport Community Secretariat for Post-COVID 19 transport facilitation relating to freight transport⁴, the following *phased approach* concerns the progressive restoration of the passenger transport services with the overall purpose to ensure **sanitary risk prevention** and support the Post-Covid19 **economic recovery through an efficient management of the border crossing operation**. In that sense, it shall complement the proposed Post-Covid-19 Action Plan on Transport Facilitation for intra Western Balkan Border/Common Crossing points and EU-WB BCPs.

General principles

- It is recommended that road passenger traffic restrictions are being lifted **gradually** and in a **coordinated manner** across the region, all such actions being duly associated with **public health protection measures**. The relevance and impact of the measures taken in respect of both public health and transport fluency should be under **constant monitoring**, so that to ensure quick adjustments whenever needed.
- The proposed measures could be set up first within Western Balkans. However, it would be desirable to gradually extend them to the neighbouring EU Member States. The restrictions at EU external borders will remain in place until at least 15 June 2020. It is therefore important that EU-MS and Western Balkan authorities initiate a dialogue as soon as possible to avoid a potential increase of flow of cars going through the border-points that might not be compatible with the existing capacity of these borders points and might be in contradiction with the principles of sanitary prevention deriving from the COVID-19 experience
- All BCPs/CCPs on the extended TEN-T Network in the Western Balkans connecting WB6 parties EU-WB6 shall ensure appropriate conditions for efficient and safe crossing before their re-opening for passenger cars.
- The restoration of road passenger transport in the Western Balkan region shall be accompanied by **short-term measures** aimed at tackling the immediate challenges but also **mid and long terms actions** seeking to address the long-lasting bottlenecks at the borders and ultimately facilitate better connectivity for the entire region. While the TCT has already put forward a comprehensive proposal and action plan aiming to ensure better intra WB connectivity and accessibility to the EU, the current proposal concentrates upon those immediate actions that could potentially avert border congestions with all associated health and economic risks.

⁴ Potential contribution of the Transport Community to the Commission Communication on Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery: Draft Action Plan on Transport Facilitation

Coordination

- In order to restore the cross-border provision of transport services, full effectiveness of health-related measures, and the confidence of the public, all parties (WB6 and EUMS) should take action in a coordinated and cooperative way. The experience with the green lanes proved that one of the major risks that could create uncertainties for the transport operations are the **unilateral actions** taken by any Party.
- While Member States should base decisions regarding the lifting of COVID-19 related travel restrictions on the Commission guidelines on internal borders, the decisions of the WB6 parties should take into account the same recommendations to the maximum extent possible.
- All decisions should be clearly communicated to the neighbouring party and to a wider audience, by using the established and functional network of national transport contact points on EU MS level and WB6 level. In the case of opening border crossing points/common crossing points in WB6, the decisions should be communicated to the Transport Community Secretariat, as well.
- Strong coordination should be especially exercised when it comes to the health protocols of each party with respect to the sanitary checks of passengers and vehicles at the BCPs/CCPs, and other health issues concerning the transport workers, border employees and passengers in vehicles for collective transport. All measures by the Parties shall be proportionate and in non-discriminatory fashion and should remain limited in their scope and duration, to what is necessary to protect public health.
- In respect to the collective transport options for cross-border transport (busses, vans), additional coordination is needed to ensure clear and unified (or at least closely aligned) rules apply for transport operators and service providers along a cross-border route.
- Finally, the Parties must jointly agree on the minimum list of (sanitary) requirements and (health) documents for allowing passengers to enter or transit on the territory of each Party. This especially in the view of avoiding repetitive measures or duplication- for ex. if the passengers would have to undertake Covid19 testing in advance for being allowed to pass the border, no supplementary health screening at BCP should be imposed, and the Covid-19 test results should be recognized in the recipient country. The 15-minutes recommendation for health screenings by the recent EC Communication, should gradually be reduced and move from systematic health controls to sampling.

Short term measures (post COVID-19, summer 2020)

The purpose of short-term measures will be to facilitate people's movement while still keeping in place the effective sanitary measures to protect the health of passengers. As a general rule, border crossing points proceedings should not exceed 3 minutes for individual cars and 12 minutes for buses/coaches⁵. While Covid-19 is impacting all the industries, the tourism sector has experienced the most impact to date due to travel restrictions. Economies in the region highly rely on the tourism sector like Albania, Montenegro⁶ and this is also the case for Croatia, Greece and Bulgaria⁷.

Short term measures should consist of:

- Defining of tourist transit corridors and identification of the key BCPs/CCPs on such routes (based on past traffic volumes and trends) for further rationalization of resources and indicative prioritization of transit and tourist routes, as well as on expected traffic during the upcoming summer period;
- Nevertheless, the authorities of two neighbouring parties may decide to have other BCPs/CCPs treated as “priority” passenger-only BCPs/CCPs where possible (especially where the separation of goods and passengers’ flows is not physically possible);
- Ensuring maximum operational capacity for the selected BCPs to ensure 24h functioning and full functioning during day time (all lanes/booths open);
- Dedicated buses green lanes, separately from passenger cars and trucks traffic (where physically possible);
- Highest priority should be given in terms of human resources (police / sanitary/custom staff) and equipment for efficient border management (handheld passport and ID scanners for example, if available) to be able to respond appropriately and to adjust to the current situations. All sanitary facilities should be put in place without any delays on all open BCPs/CCPs and not only to the “priority” ones;
- Continuous monitoring and displaying on all possible means (including radio broadcasting) of the real-time waiting times at the selected BCPs/CCPs to allow drivers to re-route if necessary in order to prevent the formation of long queues (also hardly incompatible with the sanitary situation, as a large number of people may be gathering in areas where no facilities exist). To this effect, common monitoring and reporting tools⁸ and proceedings should be developed at the regional level and with EU MS.

⁵ This represent the time spent during the control which was the target in the pre-COVID situation but often not the norm. It does not relate to the time spent waiting the control, but it clearly influence the waiting time. For a car it is calculated that passport checks should not exceed more than 45s for each passenger (on the basis of 4 persons per car).

⁶ Tourism in Montenegro represents roughly 1/3 of the GDP.

⁷ These two countries also rely on the Western Balkans network to be connected with the core of the EU.

⁸ The possibility to extend the Galileo app. Option to private car users should be explored in this context.

- Finalize One Stop Shop agreements in those BCPs/CCPs, where the consensus in political level was already reached before the sanitary crises/ and explore the possibility for temporary joint controls in the busiest BCPs/CCPs

Medium-term measures (economic recovery > 2020)

In a mid and long term, additional measures could be considered (in line with the existing proposal):

- One stop shop and joint controls which could effectively shorten the procedural time
- Deployment of ITS system, such as traffic counters, variable message signs (VMS), info boards, etc
- Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) system
- Systems for calling and reservation (eQMS) and establishing modern facilities at waiting areas
- Investments to upgrade of the BCPs/CCPs infrastructure and accesses (construction of new lanes, design of new lay-outs).