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COMMISSIONER FOR
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Brussels,
Ares(2020) 2031994

Your Excellencies/Dear Ministers,

Thank you for your letter of 7 April 2020 in which you raised the issue of the availability of personal protective equipment necessary to fight the current COVID-19 pandemic.

These are truly challenging times. The pandemic has led to a situation in which many countries around the world, including the European Union, have introduced measures to prevent shortages of protective and medical equipment for the treatment of the sick and the prevention of further spread of the disease.

We fully agree with you that the pandemic requires collective action. As you have seen in the Communication on the global EU response to COVID-19 adopted on 8 April (JOIN(2020)11), the European Union is fully committed to international cooperation and to continued assistance to the most vulnerable countries around the world and notably to you as our closest partners.

In this respect, we very much hope that you will appreciate the particular attention the European Union has paid to supporting the Western Balkans in confronting COVID-19. As you rightly mentioned, in addition to the financial assistance mobilised in response to the crisis, the European Union has already taken steps to assist you in increasing your own production of protective and medical equipment.

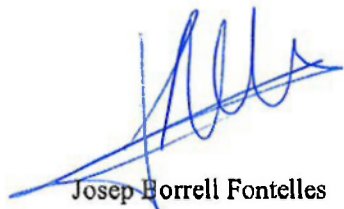
Regarding export authorisation for certain products, the Commission services have carefully monitored the implementation of the current measures and analysed the obstacles created by the authorisation scheme that disrupted the trade flows. We are glad to inform you that the Commission has just made a proposal to amend the export authorisation scheme which meets your concerns, as it reduces the scope of the scheme in terms of product coverage, while at the same time exempting the Western Balkans. Naturally, we expect that any national restrictions on exporting personal protective equipment from the Western Balkans to the European Union will be lifted and that you will ensure the exemption is not misused for circumvention of the export authorisation scheme by the means of re-export.

We would also like to take this opportunity to reiterate the importance of undisturbed trade flows of other regional initiatives, such as the implementation of green lanes. We commend all your governments for having initiated its implementation, and encourage your further efforts to strengthen inclusive regional cooperation.

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The European Commission is taking unprecedented steps to associate you with the European Union initiatives in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Let us assure you of the European Union's unwavering commitment to our Western Balkans partners in dealing with this crisis and in your path towards the European Union.

Yours sincerely,



Josep Borrell Fontelles



Phil Hogan



Olivér Várhegyi