

# FIC OVERVIEW

The Foreign Investors Council (FIC) has been working dedicatedly and consistently for more than two decades to improve the business and investment climate in Serbia. The FIC was founded in July 2002, with 14 companies, supported by the OECD, joining forces to enhance the business environment, ethics, and competitiveness of the Serbian economy. Over 21 years, we have remained steadfast in our primary goal, continually advocating for a more favourable business and investment climate that can unlock Serbia's economic potential. We have achieved significant results, surmounting various challenges. Our expertise, experience, and awareness of the need to adapt to changing circumstances and their impact on the economy, society and our members' businesses have been instrumental in our success.

A year after our inception, our members invested a total of 150 million euros and employed 3,160 people. Today the FIC boasts 120 members, who have collectively invested about 44 billion euros in Serbia, directly employing more than 115,000 Serbian citizens. This clear progression demonstrates our members' long-term commitment to Serbia. Our continued dedication naturally goes hand in hand with a commitment to enhancing economic growth and competitiveness, which is a significant driver for the work we do.

The Foreign Investors Council is an association that amplifies the voice of the business community. Our partners and counterparts recognize the value and reliability of our work. We take special pride in our role in promoting Serbia's European integration, convinced that this is the path that Serbia should pursue. We foster special relationships with key partners to achieve our goals. We are the only business association with an institutional framework for cooperation with the Government of Serbia through the joint Working Group for the Implementation of the Recommendations from the White Book. This Working Group is chaired by the Prime Minister and comprises ministers in the Government of Serbia and FIC representatives. The fact that the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) are permanent, institutional members of the Management Board underscores our contribution to improving the business environment. Additionally, the FIC brings together bilateral chambers of commerce.

## GREEN AND DIGITAL TRANSITION

The Foreign Investors Council has primarily focused its activities on digitization, responsible business, the

imperative of a green transition of the economy, and the implementation of a circular economy. These topics are critical to our members not only because of the need to keep abreast of EU and other global trends, but also because they are imperative for further economic growth and development, enabling the utilization of economic potential in the present time. The digital transition has been a priority for us for years. Our members advocate for "paperless work", accelerating the digitization of society and the digital transformation of various business segments as key elements to overcome challenges faced by the Serbian and global economy. The coronavirus pandemic accelerated these processes. Additionally, digitization was a central topic at the first Financial Services Conference that we held in June this year with the aim of becoming a hub for open dialogue of this crucial sector. The National Bank of Serbia (NBS) plays a pivotal role in supporting us, enabling us to continue the work we already started, including solutions in the field of digitization, which will facilitate and enhance business for all market participants. Notably, in the previous period, our members have initiated numerous solutions, such as the digitalization of invoicing, the introduction of video identification, and cloud-based signatures, among others.

Our members recognize that environmental protection, corporate social responsibility and conscientious corporate governance (ESG) have long ago transitioned from the niche interest of a smaller group of socially conscious individuals and organizations to a global requirement. Companies worldwide, especially in developed economies, are subject to clear requirements in these areas. As such, these principles have become an indispensable aspect of doing business, both in the context of cooperation with regional entities that have already established standards and the well-being and preservation of society and the planet. We are particularly proud of our first conference on regenerative agriculture, held in cooperation with the EBRD in September this year. The concept of regenerative agriculture plays a pivotal role in strengthening resilience to climate change, in preserving biodiversity and the environment, and ensuring sustainable food production for future generations. Raising public awareness about this important topic is vital for the functioning of the supply chain system, including local producers, especially in view of the obligation of companies doing business in the EU to align their activities with EU regulations, recommendations, and best practices to protect the environment and reduce harmful gas emissions.

Moreover, during this year, we have channelled our efforts toward knowledge enhancement and the transfer of best practices of our members in areas such as hedging, international ESG regulations and practices, electronic invoicing, as well as occupational safety and health.

## COMMITTEES AS THE BACKBONE OF OUR WORK

The Foreign Investors Council operates with nine working committees, which form the backbone of our work. Experts interested in each field participate in these committees. The committees serve as the FIC's hub for knowledge exchange, policy and regulatory analysis, and provide recommendations for improving regulations and, in turn, also the business and investment climate. These committees are a dynamic system, adapting to changing circumstances and the needs of our members. The Foreign Investors Council comprises nine working committees: the Anti-Illicit Trade and Food Committee, Financial Services Committee, Human Resources Committee, Infrastructure and Real Estate Committee, Legal Committee, Pharmaceutical Industry Committee, Taxation Committee, Telecommunications and Digital Economy Committee and the Tourism and Hospitality Committee.

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES – A GUARANTEE OF STABILITY AND SUCCESS

Since its inception in 2002, the Foreign Investors Council has evolved and adapted to changing circumstances, while retaining its core principles. These principles have stood the test of time, maintaining the stability and continuity of our work. Our fundamental principles are independence, professional competence, best practices, cooperation and European integration.

### INDEPENDENCE

The Foreign Investors Council represents the common interests of the business community. Independence and self-sustainability are vital for fulfilling our mission, ensuring that we consistently stand by our views. Our two-tier decision-making process guarantees equal participation among members. Decisions are first reached within the working committees, with an emphasis on consensus rather than simple majority voting. In the second instance,

the FIC Board of Directors reviews and decides on the proposals of the working committees.

### COMPETENCE

The White Book you hold reflects the extensive professional expertise, practical experience and commitment of our members. The White Book is our primary platform for dialogue on improving regulations and the business climate. It is gratifying to note that the European Commission uses the White Book as an essential source of information for its Annual Report on Serbia's progress toward EU accession. On the basis of our experience, over the years we have developed a unique methodology, the White Book Index, to assess the fulfilment of White Book recommendations. The White Book Index enables us to compare and rank progress in all of the White Book's focus areas, based on the fulfilment of recommendations from previous years. An additional criterion is the time elapsed between when the recommendation was first published in the White Book and when the recommendation was implemented. In this way, we are also able to measure the speed at which the business climate is improving, which can have a significant impact on investment decisions.

### BEST PRACTICES

Foreign investors, besides bringing investments and jobs, also introduce high ethical and business standards, business ethics, sustainability, and new technologies. In 2023, the FIC has been dedicated to improving digitization, environmental protection, social corporate responsibility and ethical corporate governance. We are proud to say that our members are responsible employers who take care of their employees and the local community through various socially responsible projects. When it comes to the green agenda and waste management, our members are carbon neutral, following the policies of their parent companies, most of which are based in the EU.

### COOPERATION

Collaboration is a fundamental pillar of our activities and accomplishments. The Government of Serbia and regulatory bodies are our natural partners because they are responsible for creating regulations and enforcing them. We would like to highlight our existing institutional framework for cooperation with the Government of Serbia, the Working Group for the Improvement and Implementation

of White Book Recommendations, which facilitates the efficient and effective implementation of the White Book recommendations. We are honoured to be regular partners with the European Union, as well as other key stakeholders, including diplomatic circles, international financial institutions, development agencies, the academic community, and other business and public-private associations.

## EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The Foreign Investors Council has been committed to European integration ever since its inception, believing that the EU has never had any alternative in the previous two decades. For the FIC there is no dilemma that Serbia should continue its EU accession path, especially in view of its strong ties to the European economy and Serbia's geographical location. We are aware that moments of crisis and challenges can put to the test the country's determination to persevere in the complex process of European integration, however, we are deeply convinced that European integration remains Serbia's only viable option in terms of bringing greater economic and social prosperity and opening up new opportunities.

We believe that we are one of the organizations that has the most to offer to the European integration process,

and therefore we very actively advocate the harmonization of Serbian legislation with European Union regulations. Namely, about 75% of the FIC members come from the European Union, and most of the remaining members operate on the European market. Our strong European context of action is also reflected in our partnership with the EU Commission, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). In this context, this year we were pleased to participate in the EU Week of Opportunities, with the aim of promoting awareness of the opportunities offered by EU funds to the economy and individuals.

## EXECUTIVE OFFICE

The FIC Executive Office plays a crucial role behind the scenes in all our activities, initiatives, and public appearances. This small but efficient team ensures the seamless functioning of our association, fostering communication with FIC members, associates, and partners, and implementing decisions made by the FIC's bodies. The Executive Office is responsible for implementing the decisions of the FIC's bodies, as well as improving cooperation between members through communication on a daily basis. As such, the Executive Office plays an indispensable role in our sophisticated yet manifestly efficient system.

Key characteristics and values of FIC

Independence	Regulatory expertise	Consistency
Best Practices	EU promotion	Cooperation

Key FIC figures

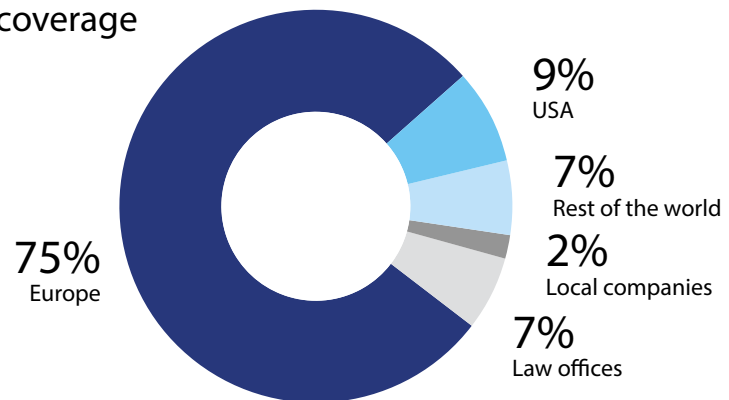


**21**  
years since  
establishment



**122** members  
from **23** sectors

Geo coverage



**> €44 bil.**  
of investments  
by FIC members  
in Serbia



**> 115,000**  
directly employed  
by FIC members  
in Serbia

White Book 2023  
in numbers

