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## JOINT STATEMENT

DELIVERED BY THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SEE HEALTH NETWORK PRESIDENCY

*ON BEHALF OF THE SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN HEALTH NETWORK  
AT THE 71<sup>ST</sup> SESSION OF WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE*

*WITHIN THE PLENARY SESSION:*

Discussion on the addresses by the Director-General and the Regional Director  
*Copenhagen, 13 September 2021*  
**11:30–13:00**

*Your Excellences, Director-General,  
Regional Director,  
Honourable ministers,  
Ladies and gentlemen,*

I have the honour to address you on behalf of the **Member States of the South Eastern Europe Health Network**, who have associated themselves with this statement: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the State of Israel, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania and the Republic of Serbia.

The pandemic hit hard the middle-income countries with a particular disastrous toll with an associated burden of health and financial consequences. Moreover, the reality urges us for reconfiguration, adjustment and adaptation of our health systems to build up resilience and responsiveness towards the needs of our people. It is of outmost importance to act today for a sustainable future and enhance preparedness for various emergencies at regional and sub-regional levels.

Just recently, we celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Network and we honoured the significant achievements along with acknowledging the challenges that lie ahead.

The Network welcomes the strategic guidance and technical advice from WHO/Europe. We particularly highly value the wide coordination process and inclusiveness while designing the **Roadmap for Health in the Western Balkans**: by establishing the priority areas and initiatives for closing the health gap of the Western Balkans with EU, this strategic document will serve as an important instrument for policy coherence for health and a pathway for investment in the Western Balkans' health. The Roadmap will for sure guide the development of the next SEEHN



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Pledge to the benefit of all our Member States, that we plan to endorse in our Ministerial Forum in 2022. Thus, we will continue contributing to the implementing the European Programme of Work, 2020–2025 – “United Action for Better Health in Europe”, and its flagships.

I would like to express, on behalf of the Member States of the Network, our commitment to further enhance more specifically the immunisation agenda and provide better mental healthcare services. The other core priorities of achieving universal health coverage, health emergencies preparedness and control, revamping the primary health care, digital agenda, shall also benefit from enhanced political and investment commitments of our Member States, as well as from the WHO/ Europe technical support in all our Member States.

Recently, South Eastern Europe Health Network has put an emphasis on the Non-Communicable Diseases through fostering capacities for implementing colorectal cancer screening programmes, reducing childhood malnutrition and obesity, enabling healthy lifestyles choice from the early age, improving health literacy, reducing health impacts of polluted air, to name a few. The pandemic reoriented our efforts towards multisectoral response in SEE Countries and, more recently, to the approaches on stress and burnout among healthcare workers during the COVID-19 pandemic by building critical skills and knowledge necessary for health workers to respond rapidly and efficiently to COVID-19. Amid current efforts to improve health emergencies preparedness, the Network is also focusing on gathering research data on the current mental health status and to channel targeted efforts towards the most in need population.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Member States of the SEEHN are determined to implement an ambitious strategic agenda, and highly value WHO Regional Office for Europe support to this end. We express deep gratitude to **Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director** for his continuous, longstanding leadership, commitment and hard work for health and well-being in the South Eastern Europe.

We will continue adapting our cooperation base and sharpen focus to addressing the new challenges. Both the EPW and the Roadmap for Health in Western Balkans present the key determinators of our direction of travel. The Network offers an excellent platform for joining our forces in the SEE with all partners to maintain health high on our political agendas, invest more and target the investments right for better impact.

**Therefore,** we urge the WHO Regional Office and other partners to join efforts and support SEEHN for longstanding results and sustainable health gains.

I thank you for your attention.