



ALBANIA



SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE  
HEALTH NETWORK

**JOINT STATEMENT OF MINISTERS OF HEALTH OF SEEHN MEMBER STATES AT THE WHO EUROPEAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE LIFE-COURSE APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF HEALTH 2020**

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**Joint Statement on behalf of SEEHN at the WHO European Ministerial Conference on the Life-course Approach in the Context of Health 2020  
Minsk, Belarus, 21–22 October 2015**

Dear President, Dear Regional Director,  
Delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the countries of the nine States members of the South-Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN) (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, Bulgaria, the State of Israel, Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Republic of Serbia), the member countries of SEEHN congratulate the WHO Regional Office for Europe on the continuous efforts and support to the member States in addressing noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), which represent one of the greatest challenges of today not only for developed but also increasingly for developing countries. Although the wide range of issues and factors, from genetics to lifestyles and from health illiteracy to medical overtreatment, make the scale and scope very ambitious and challenging to address, as the key theme of the conference “act together” suggests, with joint efforts, progress has been made and the results achieved and lessons learned can serve as a good role model and motivation for continuing the efforts.

Through the political commitment of member States, SEEHN has been taking steps to adopt and apply whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches at the subregional and national levels. This is showcased in its work on the South East Europe 2020 strategy: jobs and prosperity in a European perspective, which acknowledges health as an essential element and contributor for inclusive growth and has paved the way for national action plans, bisectoral flagship initiatives and a Health 2020 policy framework in the countries of south and east Europe. Further, in the past year, the ministers of health of the SEEHN member States have gathered on two occasions to exchange views, experience and lessons learned on the top common priorities of the SEEHN Member states related to the ongoing health systems and public health services reforms in times of budgetary pressures and to agreeing on joint regional and national<sup>2</sup> actions towards ensuring universal health

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, Minister of Civil Affairs, on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s health authorities, shall be understood as Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federal Ministry of Health of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republika Srpska and Department of Health and Other Services of Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina

<sup>2</sup> For Bosnia and Herzegovina, the term “national” in health sector encompasses all constituencies of Bosnia and Herzegovina with their legally defined competences/jurisdictions, represented by the health authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which include the Ministry of Civil Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Health of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare of the Republika Srpska and Department of Health and Other Services of Brcko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina

coverage; tackling NCDs; strengthening human resources in health; and coordinating cross-border support in public health emergencies, all of which require, including as a precondition, the whole-of-government approach, as well as to strengthen the existing partnerships for health and invest in new such partnerships, based on mutually agreed and compatible programmes of work for the benefit of our populations. The thereon adopted Skopje and Belgrade statements show our full commitment to addressing challenges of contemporary societies, of which one major part are NCDs.

With the support of the WHO Regional Office for Europe and other international organizations, in particular the Regional Cooperation Council and the European Commission Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument, the Network fosters subregional cooperation, through collaboration and best practices in sustaining and improving access to public health and health-care services for each and every citizen, throughout the life of every individual. Through its Regional Health Development Centres (RHDCs), SEEHN embeds and utilizes the subregional expertise at the national and inter-country levels, as these Centres have become key institutions as centres for excellence in South East Europe on areas such as NCD prevention and control, communicable diseases surveillance, mental health and human resources for health. As a result, we already see substantial advances in cooperation in the above areas, and it is precisely through these Centres that the SEEHN member States and their populations benefit in the promotion and protection of health, response to health hazards, and prevention of diseases; some examples are the organ transplantation exchange-of-knowledge programme, the mental health community centres, and so forth.

Our efforts in 2015 are closely related to several outstanding issues with regard to NCD prevention and control, such as reducing the excessive consumption of salt, harmonizing indicators and monitoring health information systems to best serve the policies and services related to NCD prevention and control, including the issues of inequalities and social determinants of health. This is an important but ambitious task, and we rely very much on the extended support of the Regional Office to that end.

The main focus of this Ministerial Conference is the life-course approach to NCD prevention and control in line with one of the main directions of the Health 2020 policy framework, including the intersectoral actions for better health and well-being. The Network recognizes the need for this approach and commits its member countries to taking it forward at the national and subregional levels. One such example are the intersectoral actions within the South East Europe 2020 growth strategy, in which our Network, as leader for the health dimension, actively promotes collaboration with other sectors, such as agriculture or environment, which indeed concerns addressing health throughout the life cycle. We would kindly ask the WHO Regional Office for Europe to provide us with its technical leadership and assistance in that respect, taking into consideration that we have implemented joint activities and projects on some of the sub-topics with the support of Norway. The RHDC on NCDs in Podgorica, Montenegro, will be the main coordinator. By the end of the year, we expect to have another RHDC in Romania on women's and children's health, which will be supported by WHO and the United Nations Population Fund and can play an important role in implementing the Minsk Declaration that we are to adopt.

Through our Network as a recognized public health partnership, we would like to convey our sincerest congratulations to this Conference and our deepest commitment and support to the policies and work of the WHO Regional Director for Europe and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, in the context of contemporary global, regional, subregional and national developments and challenges for bringing health and other sectors into an interplay in continuing the efforts to fight the modern epidemics of NCDs and for better health gains for all.

Thank you very much.

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