

The PH-SEE Spring Programme in Sarrenda, Albania

## The Scientific Basis of Public Health

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### The Skopje Pledge

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The Second Health Ministers' Forum for Health Development Action in South Eastern Europe, held in Skopje, 25 - 26 November 2005, adopts the **Skopje Pledge as a Link between Health Policy and Economic Development**. Ministers of Health reiterate their commitment to an ambitious programme of long-term regional co-operation.

Regional cooperation in the area of health was launched five years ago with the signing of the **Dubrovnik Pledge**, in August 2001, and the SEE countries committed themselves to co-operate on several public health issues, such as mental health, communicable diseases and blood safety, as well as protection of the vulnerable groups. Ministers took this co-operation to the next level by adopting the **Skopje Pledge** that foresees even deeper and longer-term co-operation among the countries of the region.

Ministers of Health of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro and Macedonia and their colleagues from the Ministries of Finance, who also attended the Forum and took part in this discussion, unanimously agreed that **public expenditure in health should not be seen as a cost, but as investment for the future**.

## Current situation

Ministers acknowledged the importance of the role of the South-eastern Europe (SEE) Health Network - *in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe and the Council of Europe, supported by the Council of Europe Development Bank and politically coordinated by the Social Cohesion Initiative of the Stability Pact* – in meeting the challenges related to the health needs of vulnerable populations in the SEE region.

Ministers recognized that:

- **health**, as an integral determinant of social cohesion, and an investment and a major factor in development, **is essential to lasting peace, stability and economic progress**;
- **regional cooperation in the field of health is a vital part of the European Union (EU) integration process**;
- **health and the health systems in the SEE region are facing important challenges**;
- there is a need to continue to develop, strengthen and support work being carried out in this area in general and, in particular, **to improve the access of vulnerable populations in society to the health services of the region**;
- that there is a **need to promote the exchange of experiences within the area of health systems and health system reform, at international, regional and national levels**;

## Looking forward

Having reviewed the concerted action taken over the last five years in health development as a bridge to reconciliation, peace and development, ministers accepted the **challenge of reforming the health systems in the region** and thus contributing to its economic development in the twenty-first century.

### MINISTERS UNANIMOUSLY AGREED:

- to continue to cooperate beyond 2005 on the initiative: “Health development action for south-eastern Europe: the South-Eastern Europe Health Network” (SEE Health Network);
- to further consolidate the SEE Health Network alliance at regional level, according to its agreed Statutes, which form an integral part of this Pledge

## **THE SKOPJE PLEDGE:**

- to assume **full responsibility for regional cooperation on health and health-related projects;**
- to continue regional **cooperation and concerted efforts to improve the health systems of the countries in the SEE region in order to secure universal access to high-quality public health services for the populations of the region, based on sustainable financing;**
- to confirm the commitment **to implement action in the thematic areas identified in the Dubrovnik Pledge** and, in doing so, **to develop and apply the common criteria and procedures** outlined in the Statutes;
- **to demonstrate the economic potential of health as a means to increase productivity and decrease public expenditure on illness:** a healthy population works better and produces more;
- to strengthen regional collaboration and coordination on **preparedness planning for emerging priorities** and to put this forward as a priority for action within the SEE Health Network;
- to advocate that **national governments should put health higher on the political agenda** and ensure that health is reflected in the policies and strategies of other sectors;
- **to empower health professionals to ensure a sustainable long-term improvement in public health.**

MINISTERS COMMITTED THEMSELVES to transparency and dedication in the implementation and reporting of all project activities and their results.

## **Plea to international stakeholders**

The Second Health Ministers' Forum on Health and Economic Development in South-Eastern Europe recognized the **need for assistance from international stakeholders to achieve the goals of this Pledge.**

MINISTERS LOOK TO **the Council of Europe and the WHO** for strategic guidance in further consolidating regional cooperation through concerted action to improve the health systems in the region and provide its populations with universal access to high quality health services. We also request their support in the further implementation of action related to the thematic areas outlined in the Dubrovnik Pledge and in fulfilling the commitments of this Pledge.

MINISTERS ASK THAT **the international community assist by providing resources to support the implementation of urgent action for health and economic development** in the above-mentioned areas. In doing so, we commit ourselves to transparency and dedication in the implementation and reporting of all project activities and their results, in accordance with the Statutes of the SEE Health Network.

MINISTERS REQUEST THAT the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Council of Europe report to their governing bodies on this Pledge and the progress achieved towards its goals.

