



## **TALKING POINTS**

**OF THE RCC SECRETARY GENERAL, MR. HIDO BISCEVIC**

**HEALTH MINISTERIAL FORUM: HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES**

**13 OCTOBER 2011, BANJA LUKA**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

- It is a great pleasure to address the third South East Europe Health Ministerial Forum. We are very delighted to meet here in Banja Luka to discuss together past activities and future opportunities of the SEE Health Network.
- I am convinced that in this crucially important area for our societies, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) can provide you with significant support and assistance, as we work as a major focal point for promoting regional cooperation in the region.
- Our mandate and our aim are to support economic and social development and overall advancement of the region's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.
- RCC plays an important strategic role in promoting regional cooperation in SEE by focusing on results-oriented activities where its value added can be optimized.
- The SEE Health Network, now in its second decade of activities, has been a very important regional cooperation mechanism in the realm of public health, implementing a wide range of successful projects with concrete results on mental health, communicable diseases, food safety and nutrition, blood safety, tobacco control, information systems, maternal and neonatal health, public health services and health systems.
- There is by now in our region a full recognition that public health needs to be addressed as an important segment of social stability and economic development. It is commendable that a strong working partnership have been established

between SEE countries, donors and international organizations. The achievements and activities of the SEE health network have set a very good example for regional cooperation in other areas of social development and beyond.

- During the past decade, all countries in the region have matured to the stage where regionally-led cooperation is now seen as an important instrument for development and progress. Countries now recognize the responsibility and possess the ability to drive regional cooperation by themselves.
- In the area of public health cooperation, the region has taken concrete steps, and I will emphasize two major ones: the establishment of the Network's permanent Secretariat in Skopje, as well as the creation of Regional Health Development Centers in most member countries. The Secretariat provides a key focal point for coordinating and supporting the activities of the Health Network and requires unwavering support from member countries and international partners alike. The agreement to establish Regional Health Development Centers is also contributing to transforming the earlier regional projects into long-term health programs and centers of excellence.
- The SEE Health Network looks at the future from a solid position. The major achievements during the past decade supported by the political backing and strong national and international technical expertise witness to that. Furthermore, the Memorandum of Understanding on the Future of the South-Eastern Europe Health Network and regional cooperation in public health provides a strong basis and commitment for sustaining regional cooperation on health development through reemphasizing the vision, goal, and principles of the SEE Health Network, but also detailing its future membership, organizational structure, and administrative, technical and financial provisions.
- Since its establishment, the RCC Secretariat has considered it as a priority to develop strong working relationships with close to 50 relevant regional initiatives and task forces in SEE. This is a clear indication of the strong demand from the region for regional structures that can contribute to speeding up reforms, exchanging knowledge and good practice, solving common horizontal or transnational problems and reinforcing the regional component of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

- Having a broad regional perspective, RCC provides a platform for coordinating and informing regional initiatives, while establishing itself as an interlocutor with the international community. In this context, but also in light of the theme of this forum, strengthening linkages of health policies with other sector policies is an important challenge and opportunity. We hope the participation of regional initiatives, like electronic South East Europe, Center for eGovernance Development or the Regional Environmental Center at today's forum is a good start to this effect, and will pave the way for stronger cooperation with other relevant regional initiatives as well.
- As our region has strong aspirations for EU accession, it is important to align our regional efforts with the European strategies. In the context of defining a long-term development vision and path, the activities of our regional initiatives have to contribute to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Poverty reduction, occupational health and safety, innovation and digital developments, better use of resources and protecting the environment are key areas with which regional cooperation activities on public health can interlink. The RCC Secretariat has started a regional discussion on Europe 2020 and the Western Balkans and can act as a platform for furthering this agenda and strengthening coordination with other relevant sectors. WHO's new European health policy, Health 2020, should also act as an important reference policy strategy for our region.
- The RCC actively participates in the SEE Health Network meetings and has provided continued political, legal, and promotional support. The Memorandum of Understanding on the cooperation between the RCC Secretariat and the SEE Health Network, concluded in 2009, sets a clear platform for strengthening our relationship.
- The RCC will continue to support the SEE Health Network activities, to play its coordinating and networking role with other relevant initiatives, and actively to advocate for funding of identified regional project needs.

Thank you!