



**SPEECH BY SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL
COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC) MAJLINDA BREGU**

at the

72nd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

12 September 2022

Dear Director General Adhanom,

Dear Ministers,

Dear participants,

I would like to thank World Health Organisation for inviting us to participate in 72th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe.

Two years ago, in the middle of the pandemic outbreak, while countries were raising borders, us as regional organisations tried to build bridges among us.

That is what happened between Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and WHO and we take pride in the successful cooperation we have had so far.

I would shortly reflect on 3 issues:

1. We, as RCC are a modest organisation that represents 13 economies of South East Europe (SEE), with a total population of 150 mil. and **the accumulative GDP that would make us the 8th largest economy in the world. Nevertheless, the global challenges have not gone unnoticed by us.**

We are living in challenging times. In 2020, we saw ourselves fighting a pandemic while environmental challenges were at its peak, and on top of them, now we are experiencing a war that is impacting severely energy and food security. The risk of stepping back on health and environment protection and increasing poverty is a menace.

On average, the SEE households allocate some 40-45% of their income to energy and food consumption. In case **a new wave of Covid-19** comes up in the upcoming winter and pushes up the average household level of **out-of-pocket health expenditures** higher, new layers of population groups are to be pushed down to the poverty level.

2. **What pandemic taught us was that** solidarity, togetherness and pragmatism are key to face global challenge. That's what we are trying to do. In the middle of the pandemic, we prepared a regional response to tackle pandemic and post-pandemic challenges in line with UN Sustainable Development Goals - **South East Europe 2030 Strategy**. **I am sure the Strategy will be successful only when it will have its walk.** That walk has to be made of thousands steps to ensure that we **leave no one behind, with adequate health care and social protection**, and high environmental and sanitation standards of living. **SEE 2030 is unique regional framework aiming to implement UN 2030 Agenda and SDGs in the world. RCC looks for collaborating with WHO on it.**

3. Thirdly, I would like to stop and reflect on the driving engine of Western Balkans – our **young people** that compose more than **21% of our society**.
The insecurity, unemployment and pandemic decrease their level of satisfaction with situation and increase the percentage of youngsters having mental health issues. In some of our economies **35% of young people admit they feel they need services of a psychologist/psychotherapist**.
We have started to prepare policies and strategic frameworks in WB to tackle Mental Health and the cooperation with WHO has been crucial.

In this constant race of time and demands, the challenges grow persistently as well. Let me conclude by quoting Harari “**There is no limit to how much health you can provide people. You don't just try to reach a standard, you always try to go beyond it.**”