



**INAUGURATION
OF THE SEAT OF THE SECRETARIAT OF
THE
SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE HEALTH
NETWORK (SEEHN)
SKOPJE, REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
7 MARCH 2013**



Inauguration Speech: Regional Director of WHO Europe, Zsuzsanna Jakab

Dear Minister of Health,
Dear President of the SEEHN,
Dear Chair of the SEEHN Executive Committee,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It's an honour to join you at such a significant event: the inauguration of the South East European Health Network Secretariat.

Before anything else I would like to thank Prime Minister Gruevski for bringing together this stellar group of ever-growing member states and partners today to mark yet another cornerstone of the regional cooperation in public health in the SEE.

Today, we are here to witness the consequences of extraordinarily development of a public health partnership that has gone far beyond historical and political boundaries in which it has been established in.

The SEEHN has an incredibly proud tradition and a proud future, too.

From the 1999 until today remarkable change and development has been made. The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe was the first comprehensive conflict-prevention strategy of the international community, aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, and respect for human rights, economic prosperity and security. We embedded health into this strategy and put it into action through the South-eastern European Health Network.

Over the years, the focus of the Stability Pact has shifted from confidence building among the SEE countries, to a framework for regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe. And so did the SEEHN. The focus of the SEEHN has shifted throughout a decade to respond better the needs of

the population and the region, from health of vulnerable population and Dubrovnik Pledge in 2001, to enhancing economic development through health and Skopje Pledge in 2005, to health in all policies and Banja Luka Pledge from 2011 onwards.

There is no doubt that the region is much more mature today. Therefore, it can take greater ownership of its own affairs. A transformation and streamlining process was launched in 2005. We witness now the results of this process and the transformation of the SEEHN into a regionally-owned, streamlined and effective regional co-operation initiative in public health in the SEE. The main task of such an initiative is to be a facilitator of regional co-operation in public health and support the European and Euro-Atlantic integration, while ensuring continued involvement of the international community and building further alliances in public health based on partnership.

Ultimately, it needs to be underlined that this phased evolution of the SEEHN into a regionally owned initiative in public health should not be interpreted as the international community withdrawing its support. On the contrary, it is in interest of all of us to ensure the sustainability of this co-operation process and safeguard the achievements for South East Europe.

And the achievements are many folded. We might cluster them into 5 domains that collectively constitute areas of engagement and results of the SEEHN in public health and health system strengthening:

1. Policy and dialogue
2. Information exchange
3. Regulation
4. Financing
5. Delivering public health services

1. The *policy and dialogue* domain concerns the policy framework documents and practice, as well as the level of dialogue among the member states and partners within the SEEHN. Policy development and dialogue between those players are the foundations of the SEEHN effective engagement. A functioning dialogue is the first SEEHN achievement that I would like to emphasize. It has resulted both from the global nature of public health as a central theme of the SEEHN engagement and from developed modalities of the SEEHN work: SEEHN plenary and technical meetings, as well as participation of the SEEHN at the regional European and global fora, speaking with one voice through your joint statements on the issues of special interest. Thus, the SEEHN has turned itself into a health diplomacy tool that brings up complex multifaceted political, policy and health gains, influencing policy agenda in the SEE and Europe. Ever-growing number of partners that express the interest to cooperate with the SEEHN clearly shows the importance they give to the SEEHN as a policy and dialogue fora.

2. The second achievement of the SEEHN is the *information exchange*, a domain that concerns information flows among the member states and partners. The scale of this exchange is vast and growing. It is marked with transparency and openness, making information accessible and sharing among member states, with the partners and all other interested parties. This

process has influenced changes at national and sub-national level in the member states and has helped shaping national policies and action.

3. The regulation domain focuses on the ability of the governments to design and implement a regulatory framework for public health. We have witnessed remarkable results as a direct influence of the SEEHN work, in ratifying WHO Tobacco Framework Convention in six months after its adoption from the WHO member states. There are significant achievements in capacity building for implementing International Health Regulations. In addition, national regulation in public health has been influenced by the SEEHN technical work in the areas of communicable diseases, mental health, food safety, tobacco control, blood safety, transplantation and others.
4. The financing domain covers creating the mechanism that allows people to have access to services and at the same time creating synergies to better organize resources available at both national and sub-regional level, from the member states and the partners. The SEEHN clearly proves to be an excellent mechanism for matching funds and making synergies with better effectiveness and efficacy.
5. Finally, the public health services domain focuses on ensuring the availability and quality of public health services. As stewards of the health care system, governments should be seeking ways to leverage available resources, thereby improving quality and access to health. SEEHN was the first to pilot public health operations and functions, learning from this exercise what and how to change and further develop at national level. By influencing H2020 and the European Action Plan on strengthening public health services in the phase of development and endorsement, the SEEHN has shown significant *new strength* to shape public health agenda in Europe according to the needs of the member states and at the same time to use the opportunity to upgrade human capital for implementing those policies and action plans.

We talk about a transition phase which the SEEHN entered in 2008 with endorsement of the SEEHN Memorandum of Understanding, which essentially means that it progresses from a donor driven initiative to self-sustaining mechanism owned by the member states. This period has been marked with the first ever legal agreement among the member states on the arrangements for the Seat of the SEEHN Secretariat signed in 2010 by all the member states. It is a SEEHN result in its own right that within this process SEEHN member states have shown awareness of the need to:

- build from strength to strength,
- building an environment that supports further develop SEEHN as ever-changing partnership
- to stabilize and insure independency,
- provide for opportunity of further expansion,
- use innovative tools and mechanisms in its work,
- more of a strategic thinking and medium and long term planning aligned with relevant European policies and action in public health,
- self-evaluation, estimation of the results hand in hand with estimation of short flows and mitigating risks to further development,
- back health as an investment, and

- further build and use the knowledge base offered by established SEEHN Regional Health Development Centres.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's a remarkable list of achievements of the SEEHN and which you've shared with the Europe.

SEEHN is a champion of the founding principles of the sub-regional cooperation in public health in the SEE. My message to you today is to cherish this tradition and always defend SEEHN principles even as you improve the way it works, so that is it diverse, flexible and tailored to population needs.

This SEEHN has so much to offer the Europe. The benefits can be huge. But to make the most of them we need to constantly change and adapt the way we work together. That means open innovation, more and more collaboration with all the relevant parties and a greater emphasis on sustainability than ever before.

I am determined that this SEEHN has become one of the best places in the SEE to invest and innovate in public health. And we can only rise to meet these challenges by working together and driving forward. If we are to achieve our health goals at the local, national, and regional levels, we must work together in the spirit of solidarity that so characterizes your Region, sharing our knowledge with one another, and using our resources to serve those who need our help the most.

And that's why – among all the amazing things happening in Europe this month – I particularly wanted to speak here today: Because this event is about encouraging innovation partnerships and drawing on the very best, wherever it comes from.

Thank you.