

Dear colleagues and guests,

It is my pleasure that on the occasion of the South East Europe Health Network Presidency, to welcome you at this working breakfast. I hope you had a good rest after the first day of the Regional Council meeting.

As you all know, the South East Europe Health Network has its beginnings as early as 2001, when high political level representatives of the South East Europe region, under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South East Europe Initiative for Social Cohesion, met in Dubrovnik and agreed on working together in the region in areas of public health of common concern: mental health, food and nutrition, blood and its components safety, emergency medical services, tobacco control, health information systems, infectious diseases.

Regional projects developed based on these public health priority areas; and, the South East Europe Health Network was established to oversee the performance of the projects and provide the political support and guidance from the countries in the region. In November last year, we met in Skopje, to reconfirm our political commitment to continue working together in the region in these public health priority areas as well as highlighted the importance of health and economic development of the region.

We also signed the Skopje Pledge and approved the new Statutes of the South East Europe Health Network which specifies the roles and responsibilities of the Network structures and other players. We agreed in Skopje to complete the process of regional ownership, and to that extend the Ministry of Health of Albania is hosting an office of the South East Europe Health Network Secretariat.

Albania took over the presidency of the South East Europe Health Network on July 1st of this year and we will be hosting the 14th South East Europe Health Network meeting on November 23rd – 24th, 2006 in Tirana. It is with great pleasure that I invite you all to that meeting.

During the Albanian presidency, the new project of Improving Neonatal and Maternal Health was initiated, and we are hoping to officially give start to the Occupational Health and Safety project as well.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to all of the donor governments and agencies that give their generous support to the projects and the South East Europe Health Network, as well as to the Council of Europe and WHO EURO for its technical support and guidance, as well as to all the members and partners of the South East Europe Health Network for the great job they have been doing so far and hopefully will be doing in the future, in the region, to face the health challenges in the region,

Thank you very much for you attention,

Dr Maksim Cikuli
Minister of Health of Albania
President of SEE Health Network

Copenhagen, September 12th, 2006