

Director General,

President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Bulgaria aligns itself with the EU statement, and would like to share the national response measures taken and progress made during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Republic of Bulgaria considers the preparation and response to health emergencies a key priority to prevent health crises. In 2019, our targeted actions to improve and maintain the country's core capacity under the International Health Regulations (2005) continued with a focus on laboratory supervision.

Due to the rapid international spread of the disease caused by SARS-CoV-2, “Public health emergency of international concern” was declared by WHO on 30 January 2020. Pandemic was declared, as of March 11, 2020.

In coordination with other EU Member States, and after carefully monitoring the development of the epidemic situation, Bulgaria has consistently taken a number of measures aimed at: early detection of the disease, patients isolation and treatment, timely contact tracing, quarantine of healthy contact persons, limiting the spread of the disease among persons in vulnerable situation and at risk, increasing the knowledge of medical specialists for diagnosis and symptomatic treatment due to the lack of etiological treatment, effective risk communication - timely and up-to-date information for the society about the national and global development of the situation, scientific discoveries about the nature and peculiarities of the new virus, etc.

This placed the public health system of Bulgaria in an emergency situation, which requires a rapid and effective response and the introduction of adequate measures flexible enough to adjust and adapt, based on the new available scientific data.

On March 13, 2020, a state of emergency was introduced in the country, which allowed emergency measures to be taken to limit the spread of the disease and protect the healthcare system from collapse, such as: close down of schools and public places, mandatory isolation and quarantine (physical distancing) of infected and contact persons, movement restrictions, “green” corridors for international traffic, etc. Global data available today show that restricting movement during the early phase of a pandemic would allow affected countries to implement sustainable response measures and give unaffected countries time to

implement effective anti-epidemic measures, that need to be reviewed regularly with the development of the situation.

In the current COVID-19 pandemic, improved laboratory capacity as part of the country's core capabilities under the International Health Regulations (2005) has helped to quickly adapt the national SARS-CoV-2 surveillance system to the situation. Adequate laboratory capacity allows the performance of a sufficient number of laboratory tests for rapid detection and isolation of infected persons, and search for contacts.

The WHO's recommendations, technical guidelines and materials on various disease issues (e.g. guidelines to support the capacity of countries at points of entry to mitigate the effects of the spread of new pathogens or vectors in new areas, how to protect the health of international travelers, clinical management, protecting health workers, etc.) have also been of great benefit. We would like to thank the WHO for the valuable assistance in this regard.

Bulgaria will continue to work for a steady reduction in the number of newly detected and hospitalized cases. We also invest significant efforts in implementing measures to address the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. The implementation of the Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures in EU countries, as well as taking into account the policy considerations for the WHO European Region "Strengthening and adjusting public health measures throughout the COVID-19 transition phases", will allow for the gradual and synchronized removal of emergency measures with strict monitoring of the process to prevent further escalation of morbidity in the country.

We believe that one of the important lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is going to be the need to draw up national emergency preparedness action plans with regular adaptation and supplementation to make each country and the world at large more prepared to meet the next global health challenge.

In addition, Bulgaria would like to stress the importance of global unity, cooperation and solidarity in responding effectively to this pandemic.

Finally, we would like to express our support for the World Health Organisation's leading and coordinating role in the global COVID-19 response and assure you in our strong commitment to continue the joint efforts against the outbreak.

Thank you.