



**73th World Health Assembly  
Statement of Dr. Kenan Hrapović, Minister of Health of  
Montenegro**

**on behalf of the South Eastern Europe Health Network  
Podgorica, 18 May 2020**

Honorable participants of the World Health Assembly,

Director General Dr. Tedros,

I would like to thank you personally for the continued support you provide to small countries such as Montenegro, and especially for the support in these difficult times of fighting COVID-19. Montenegro expresses its highest appreciation for your comprehensive report, and for the WHO response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the 9 Member States of the SEE Health Network, who have associated themselves with this statement: the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the State of Israel, the Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania and the Republic of Serbia.

Montenegro is currently holding the Presidency within the South East European Health Network. We are all facing the new reality when, more than ever, the importance of partnership and solidarity is emphasized, and these are the principles that are embedded in the SEE Health Network founding documents and our Memorandums of cooperation. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit hard on the middle-income countries revealing an essential value of health as an investment, not as an expenditure. Now, more than ever the investments in the health systems are crucial to be kept high on the political agenda and strive to the good health and well-being of our populations.

The Ministry of Health has been constantly working to improve our health system, even before the emergence of the new coronavirus in Montenegro. Thus, in cooperation with the World Health Organization and the European Commission, before the occurrence of the new coronavirus, we were working on the improvement of our national health system, and some of the activities included the following:

- In 2019, WHO Mission for evaluation of the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR) in Montenegro, rated the health system with the best marks,
- In January 2020, the improvement of laboratory capacities for self-diagnosis of the new strain of coronavirus was initiated.

In cooperation with the World Health Organization, to which I also wish to thank for this warm help, especially to Dr Kluge, the first mission of the WHO was started with the aim of assessing national capacities for readiness and response to the COVID – 19 pandemic, and the elaboration of crisis communication plans (detection, mitigation, prevention and prevention of disease with risk communication).

In total, three expert visits were conducted by the WHO – the first was dealing with the assessment of the system's readiness to respond in an emergency situation, the second with the assessment of clinical capacities and treatment of potentially infected people, and the third with the laboratory capacities and practices of the Public Health Institute. WHO experts estimated that the Montenegrin health system was ready to respond to the challenge.

Following the recommendations of the Organization, we are one of the few countries to start introducing measures to prevent the import of a new coronavirus before the first case of the infection, resulting in Montenegro being among the last countries to import this virus, of which we are extremely proud-

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, Montenegro confirmed the first two cases of the new coronavirus infection.

Quarantine, temporary hospitals were formed based on the mentioned scenarios by percentage of patients.

We have succeeded in drawing an epidemic curve in order not to put a strain on the health system.

I consider it is very important to stress that our response to COVID-19 was particularly supported by well-prepared and implemented risk communication strategy. Since the beginning of January, the health system has been informing the citizens in a timely manner about the risks, and prepared the public for the upcoming epidemic. All the campaigns we are conducting have showed results, and according to the latest survey on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 95% of Montenegrin citizens believe that they are well informed about the new coronavirus.

The new coronavirus has so far been confirmed in 324 people in Montenegro. In our country, nine deaths of the COVID-19 infection have been reported, with over 7000 people tested, and the number of recovered patients that amounts to 309, with 6 infected at the moment.

There are 1,158 people under medical and sanitary supervision in Montenegro.

Montenegro is at the top when it comes to the number of tested people in the region.

As we can see, there is a curve that will in no case lead to relaxation, but it gives us the right to say that we are doing a good job.

I thank you.