Address of the Minister of Health of Montenegro Dr. Jelena Borovinic Bojovic
at the 74th session of the World Health Assembly (WHA)
‘’Ending this pandemic, preventing the next: building together a healthier, safer and fairer world ‘’
Geneva, 24 May 2021

Dear Director General,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to thank to Director General Dr. Ghebreyesus for his meaningful report and address. We commend Dr. Ghebreyesus for his stewardship of our Organization while facing unprecedented health crisis that spill over into all segments of our lives.

At this juncture, let me reiterate Montenegro’s full commitment to further strengthening cooperation with the WHO and with its Regional Office for Europe. Needless to say, also with the ‘’COVAX Facility’’. One year into the pandemic has thought us that collaboration and solidary are the only way forward. Montenegro is heartfelt grateful to the health professionals who has been showing extraordinary dedication and courage on a daily basis, as well as to all others who work tirelessly in their fields, including those working to ensure equal access to vaccines for all. It remains crucial that no one is left behind.

The evolving COVID-19 crisis has alarmingly demonstrated the importance of multilateral institutions, international cooperation, and solidarity for collective health, security, and welfare. At the same time, contemporary developments have brought to the fore the need to reform, modernize and adjust the multilateral system to the new international challenges and reality. And the WHO is no exception in this regard.

The devastating effects of the acute pandemic on health have alarmingly reminded us of the crucial importance of strengthening WHO preparedness for and response to health emergences. The pandemic has made clear the urgent need to invest in and create resilient health systems. This is why Montenegro has supported the adoption of the Resolution on strengthening WHO preparedness and response to health emergencies tabled by EU.

In terms of national processes, the reforms that Montenegro has been implementing in the EU accession process are complementary to achieving the 2030 SDGs. In our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we relied on the strong primary health care, as our critical, first line of defence to keep people safe and healthy.

As of the very first days of my mandate I focused on capacity building of primary health care teams to manage effectively COVID19 cases at the community level in line with the

updated clinical guidelines. Exploring innovative ways to deliver primary health care and exploiting potential offered by digital technologies and telemedicine is an imperative. The Government of Montenegro implemented a set of epidemiological measures aimed primarily at preserving the health of Montenegrin citizens, but also the economic consolidation of countries. At the moment, Montenegro has the lowest 14-day cumulative incidence rate since September 2020.

Immediately after the outbreak, Montenegro adopted "National Strategy for the introduction, distribution and application of COVID-19 vaccine and Plan of Action for comprehensive response, which was also supported by the WHO. In parallel, Montenegro has ensured enough vaccine to start mass vaccination, through different arrangements, including the COVAX Mechanism, but also bilateral agreements and donations. At the moment, more than 22% of the population has been vaccinated, and the mass vaccination continues at a satisfactory pace.

We will continue our activities to improve the response to the pandemic, including the expansion of capacity in the detection, treatment and monitoring of contacts of persons affected by COVID-19, and exchange of information with foreign expert institutions in the field.

I strongly believe - decisions we make together throughout this process will shape our health and well-being of our citizens in COVID time but also for years to come.

Thank you.