



Brussels, 24 June 2021

To:

1. Minister Irena Vujović, Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia
2. Minister Zlatibor Lončar, Ministry of Health of the Republic of Serbia

CC:

1. Sem Fabrizi, Ambassador and Head of Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Serbia,

### **Strengthening ministerial and intersectoral cooperation for clean air for health in Serbia**

Dear Minister Vujović, dear Minister Lončar,

the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is a leading European not-for-profit organisation working for better health through a healthier environment. HEAL has been active in Serbia and the Western Balkans region for almost a decade, to prevent further ill-health through ambitious environmental and climate policies.

HEAL welcomes the initiative to develop the *Programme of Air Protection of the Republic of Serbia with an Action plan* (hereinafter: Programme), supported by the European Union through the IPA 2014 Project “EU for a Better Environment – Developing a Framework for Alignment with EU Legislation on Air, Chemicals and Horizontal Issues”.

Air pollution is the number one environmental threat to health in Serbia. Scientific evidence demonstrates that air pollution leads to multiple diseases and reduced life expectancy, with high health economic costs. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers air pollution one of the main risk factors for the development of chronic diseases, and will soon publish new recommendations for air quality concentrations.

As Serbia's Air Protection Programme is still under development, we take this opportunity to urge both of your ministries to increase intersectoral cooperation, in order to achieve a strong health protective outcome.

Although the Ministry of Environmental Protection has the lead in the Programme's development, we strongly believe that the involvement of the Ministry of Health in this process is of great importance. We call on you to establish a regular exchange and consultation mechanism for the further process, and also involving health non-governmental stakeholders and experts.

By taking such an integrative approach, Serbia could be the leader for the region, when it comes to the management of air pollution and clean air commitments.

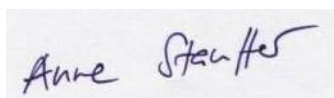
Regarding the measures to be included and the ambition level, HEAL considers that it is necessary to identify and prioritise those measures that will provide for the greatest health benefit. Air pollution is a major public threat and should be addressed through strategic measures aimed at a healthier future. Serbia needs to increase the participation of health experts in decision-making processes to ensure that the timely integration of public health measures into environmental policies are in place.

In addition, scientific evidence should be the backbone of the new Programme, taking into account recent science and upcoming WHO recommendations.

As part of the deliberations on the Programme, HEAL would like to encourage you to conduct a health impact assessment for air pollution from all industrial installations, the energy sector, agriculture, domestic heating. This means that each sector and measures are assessed for potential effects, damages and benefits for the health of a population, both in the country concerned and beyond, and also taking into account major future changes (for example climate mitigation measures or energy sector strategies).

HEAL and our network are ready to work with you and your ministries in the development of the Programme, for the health of the population in Serbia and beyond.

Yours sincerely,



Anne Stauffer

Deputy Director, Strategic Lead

Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

**The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)** is the leading not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects human health in the European Union (EU) and beyond. HEAL works to shape laws and policies that promote planetary and human health and protect those most affected by pollution, and raise awareness on the benefits of environmental action for health.

HEAL's over 70 member organisations include international, European, national and local groups of health professionals, not-for-profit health insurers, patients, citizens, women, youth, and environmental experts representing over 200 million people across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region.

As an alliance, HEAL brings independent and expert evidence from the health community to EU and global decision-making processes to inspire disease prevention and to promote a toxic-free, low-carbon, fair and healthy future.