

HLPF Voluntary national review of SLOVENIA

Statement by H.E. Minister Alenka Smerkolj, Minister for Development, Strategic Projects and Cohesion

New York, 19 July 2017

Distinguished Chair/President,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to present the first Voluntary National Review of Slovenia regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We are proud to have undertaken the VNR just two years after the Agenda came into force.

During these first few moments of our presentation, we wanted to show you Slovenia as it is, a green oasis connecting the Alps and the Mediterranean, diverse but small, invigorating but challenging — progressing towards SDGs while still having several gaps to close.

Slovenia has a strong tradition of promoting sustainable development. In previous decades, many of our policies resulted in strong SDG performance, notably in the aspects of the environment, equality, education, and sustainable tourism.

To implement the comprehensive, far-reaching, and people-centred set of goals and targets, the implementation of the Agenda cannot be considered a mere project. It rather needs to become a mind-set, a new *modus operandi* so to say. And while we are embedding the Agenda into our national development strategy, policies and actions, a follow-up and review process is essential to continually evaluate our progress and question the status quo.

The need to develop more flexible and adaptable policies that consider unpredictable, fast-paced, and more fundamental shifts in the world as well as a need to address the challenges in Slovene society called upon the Government to develop a new approach towards planning for the future. This includes designing and, even more importantly, implementing coherent policies for sustainable development.

A clear commitment has been set by the Slovenian Government to prepare a new long-term national development strategy to continue on our path towards sustainable, inclusive, and responsible development.

Slovenia has started its nation-wide process of preparing the new national development framework that will be forward-looking, for the people and by the people with a clear vision of what Slovenia as a country and a nation wants to become.

A year and a half ago, this process began by drafting a long-term vision. Countless events were held throughout the country with hundreds of participants who devoted more than 100 hours of discussion on the future they want – the future we ALL want. The results of these activities reaffirmed that Slovenians are firmly committed to anchor our future in sustainable development.

The Vision with its five main concepts: quality of life, trust, identity, innovative society, and learning for and through life was the foundation of Slovenia's new national development strategy, which is currently being prepared.

Furthermore, Slovenia's government decided to embed SDGs into its new development strategy, rather than designing a separate, parallel process.

In that manner, we are avoiding duplication of work and responding to our national circumstances, capacities, needs, and priorities within a global framework.

Slovenia's principal goal is to ensure a high quality of life for all. This can be achieved through a balanced economic, social, and environmental development that creates the conditions and opportunities for the current and future generations. At the level of the individual, a high quality of life is reflected in: good opportunities for work, education, and creativity, a decent, safe, and active life in a healthy and clean environment, and inclusion in democratic decision-making and in the co-management of society.

Based on expert analyses, strategic foresight tools and several rounds of coordination, the draft strategy with five strategic orientations and twelve goals and national priority indicators, is planned to enter public consultation this summer.

With the aim of maximally linking existing capacities in sustainable development in one place: inclusive, horizontally integrated, and interdepartmental cooperation will continue through enhanced activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For Slovenia, this year's VNR process was an important first step in developing the monitoring system of the SDG implementation as well as the first comprehensive overview of our country's proximity to the SDG targets.

While there are several gaps that need to be addressed, we believe Slovenia is on a good track towards achieving the SDGs.

The 2017 SDG Index – published just a few days ago – puts Slovenia among the top 10 countries in the world regarding their performance in achieving the SDGs.

In our review we went also prepared a deeper gap analysis that showed what we are doing well. The exercise helped us engage all governmental departments and bring 2030 Agenda closer to policy makers on all levels.

Most importantly, this enabled us to consider inter-linkages between economic, social, and environmental policy areas, and to ensure the alignment with our international commitments. The review process also reaffirmed our conviction that Agenda can only be successfully achieved through an integrated approach.

Furthermore, through review of our activities and policies to create a collection of the examples of best practices, all of the government agencies were able to show ownership of the SDGs. As a result, the Slovenian VNR includes 43 stories of policies, projects, and measures through which Slovenia is already implementing the Agenda.

For example:

Tapping into SDG target 3.4, Slovenia has established a set of very successful screening programmes for early detection of cancer. Since they were put into place, we've recorded a reduction of severe cancer progression by more than half.

Supporting the implementation of the SDG 2, our attentiveness to the most pertinent global challenges is reflected in our decision to launch an initiative to propose the observance of 20 May as World Bee Day.

Excellencies,

Our VNR also reflects Slovenian contribution to the poverty eradication and sustainable development, soon to be enhanced by a new legal and strategic framework on international development cooperation and humanitarian assistance.

The examples covered in the VNR are a revealing glimpse of our activities in the Western Balkans, the European neighbourhood and Africa, where we strive for empowerment of women and children, strengthening good governance and the rule of law, protecting the environment and guaranteeing human security.

Furthermore, our VNR also includes a special chapter, resulting from our government's commitment and collaboration with our youth. A special report prepared by the National Youth Council and the UN Youth Delegate of Slovenia provides young peoples' perspective on Slovenia's progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda as well as highlights their important role in our society.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our review also pointed out some of the remaining challenges. We have not yet achieved all the goals and, despite some good examples, there are still significant gaps to overcome in order to reach all the targets by 2030.

So far, important fundamentals have been set with the coordination mechanism. To guide whole-of-government action and translate the commitment to SDGs into concrete and coherent measures at the local, national, and international levels,

a clear political commitment will also be necessary in the future. This is an essential also for enhancing policy coherence in terms of SDG implementation.

Despite the recognition of the critical need for collaboration, there are still many silos to break on every level. The 2030 Agenda cannot be achieved without partners, which is why we actively promote innovative, diverse and inclusive partnerships with the civil society and the private sector.

Implementing the SDGs can only be successful if it is seen and acted upon as a win-win opportunity.

To conclude,

Bringing the 2030 Agenda to life, which for Slovenia also means bringing to life our own Vision 2050 and the National Development Strategy 2030, is an endeavour on which the Government cannot act alone. The localisation of the SDGs requires strong inter-departmental coordination as well as robust dialogue with all stakeholders. The first step towards establishing strong partnerships and cooperation have been taken in the past year, and I will now give the floor to representative of the Slovenian Parliament Mr Kamal Izidor Shaker and Mr Albin Keuc, the representative of the Slovenian NGO platform Sloga.

Mr Shaker: 1 min

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

The 2030 Agenda concerns everyone. This also includes the legislative branch of the governing. The National assembly of Slovenia has therefore been looking into different ways to embed it into its work.

Slovenia is rich with natural resources. Due to the climate change and environmental degradation the planet already experience the shortage of water. Consequently, we face various pressures for water privatisation.

In 2016, Slovenia declared the right to water as a fundamental human right by including it in the constitution.

What started as an initiative from the civil society got a wider support from the parliamentary political parties. After two years of working TOGETHER in a society-wide process, the new addition to the constitution introduced an article, which stipulates that everyone has the right to drinking water, that water resources are a public good managed by the state, and that they are not tradable goods.

In line with this example, Slovenia's parliament will remain fully committed to the 2030 Agenda also in the future.

Mr Keuc: 1 min

□ Although Slovenia's path towards sustainable development seems remarkable, Slovenia can and shall do better. Government willingness has to be supported by robust monitoring, evaluation and public scrutiny. There are three important elements, necessary for efficient implementation of the SDGs in our country and strengthen our role in global solidarity. □ First element is a policy coherence on sustainable development, that needs to be supported by transforming existing silo-based administrative culture. □ Second

element is empowerment of the civil society. Effective achievement of SDGs is even more about vision and leadership co-created and supported by empowered active citizens.□□Third element is territorial approach to local development. We shall promote a “new form of active citizenship”, which includes civil society and local stakeholders, to effectively address rapidly growing inequalities by more effective localization of SDGs.□□[It is the unlimited resource of human reason we have to exploit for global cooperation we need.]□□

Minister SMERKOLJ (Conclusion)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For us Voluntary National Review is just the beginning of this unprecedented collective global, yet localized journey composed of bold and transformative steps to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path.

Thank you for your attention.