

CZECH REPUBLIC — DEPUTY P.M. RICHARD BRABEC

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

1. I'm honoured and pleased to present the Czech Republic's National Review on the 2030 Agenda implementation here at the **High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development** today. Since the adoption of the Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, we have thrown ourselves into its mainstreaming into national policies. In this respect, the **Voluntary National Review** gave us a unique chance to look carefully at our national priorities towards the global goals while analysing our own strengths and weaknesses.
2. Let me start with the procedural side of our efforts – a boring but very important element. The main coordinating body, the **Government Council for Sustainable Development**, has been chaired by the Prime Minister. This fact alone was instrumental in achieving the full involvement of all ministries, many NGOs, business people, academia and other stakeholders. It has ensured not only factual accuracy but also wider acceptance among stakeholders. Our Voluntary National Report has also been coordinated by the Council in the same cooperative manner.
3. Its main springboard was a solid document with a robust analytical and stakeholder segment, our sustainable development strategy called 'the **Czech Republic 2030**'. The most relevant principles, such as good governance and local, regional and global action for sustainable development have also been embedded there. While covering all three sustainable development pillars, it specifically addresses six key areas. **And so, what results have we arrived at?**

4. Under the **social pillar**, we are very strong. We have the lowest score in the EU of people threatened by poverty and social exclusion. I am proud to say that in the whole of Europe only Norway and Iceland are doing better! Also, we are a healthy and educated nation that cares for family life and loves children. Social bonds are important for us. On the other hand alcohol, cigarettes and dirty toxins from transport and obsolete domestic heating systems are dragging us down. Another obstacle to our development is gender inequality. To speak from my personal experience, out of 17 government members, there are only two women. This, together with a big gender pay gap, is still sad reality in spite of forward looking policies already in place. We need to change this.

5. On our **economic performance**, I am proud to say that we are a **hardworking nation**. Our economy – very open and dependent on foreign trade – is growing steadily. In addition to very low unemployment, the Czech Republic has the lowest income inequalities in the OECD, making us a frontrunner in the implementation of the SDG 10. The downside of the automotive industry playing a big part in our economy – employing a lot of people – is high energy demand and low energy efficiency. It is clear that the shift to a low-carbon economy will be a challenging but inescapable part of what we have to do in order to achieve the SDG 7.

6. As Minister Environment in the government, I am happy to say that the Czech Republic is a beautifully green country in the heart of Europe. Forests are our national treasure, covering one third of the land area. Our four national parks are places where people

find not only unspoilt nature but also many opportunities to relax. My main goal has been to strengthen the protection of the most precious spots but, at the same time, bring nature closer to the people. Therefore, our greatest priority for 2030 is to strengthen the **resilience of our natural ecosystems** so that our kids and grandkids can enjoy the same nature as we do. For this, we will need to make sure that human activities together with invasive species stop being a threat for our native species. Another 'hot' issue, literally, is climate change. We are already facing its impacts such as soil degradation, drought and changes in rainfall distribution. Some of them have been truly shocking as to their intensity.

7. In terms of division of power, next to the central government, our 14 regions and over 6 200 municipalities are very influential. They have a huge impact on the everyday lives of our citizens thus proving that **the subnational dimension** is extremely relevant for the SDGs. Take the water-management system, for example. Without close cooperation between the state and the municipalities, it would not be possible to have 98 % of people connected to the public water supply system. Also, we report good results in treating waste water. However, we are still grappling with the run-off of agricultural fertilizers in rivers and water reservoirs. In the area of participation, it is encouraging to see that people are getting increasingly more involved – the number of Local Action Groups is rising and so is the involvement of towns and cities in the Local Agenda 21. However, we need to move up a gear to tackle regional inequalities in income and quality of the environment, and to get to the SDG 11.

8. Moving from local to **global level**, I can assure you that in spite of being rather a small nation, we actively support global efforts to achieve sustainable development and in this sense have pledged to meet international development commitments and standards. Building on our own transition experience, we are strong advocates of human rights, gender equality and good governance. During the 2030 Agenda negotiations, we have consistently argued for the SDG 16 to promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies. In this spirit we have chosen 'participation' as a priority for our possible ECOSOC presidency. As it is important to lead by example, I am proud to inform that the Czech Republic is one of the countries with the most significant increase in official development assistance in 2016 - a rise of more than 29 %. However, increased efforts are still needed in order to strengthen policy coherence for sustainable development and gradually increase ODA to meet our commitment of 0.33% of Gross National Income.

9. Sustainable development cannot work without **good governance** and institutions that respond well to citizens' needs. The Regulatory Impact Assessment which has been a formal part of the Czech legislative processes since 2007, could serve as an example of good practice in achieving this goal. Our results are, however, still far from the 2030 desirable target levels of efficiency, accountability and transparency of public institutions. For me personally, the fact that the confidence in national institutions index was only 51% in 2014, far behind the best-scoring European countries, is especially worrying.

10. We must not forget that as for every other walk of life, **communication matters also for the 2030 Agenda**. We need to

work hard on spreading the word about the principles of sustainable development among public institutions, business and civil society. Most importantly, we need to bring sustainable development closer to the people and share our best practices in doing so. To give you one example, we appointed Ambassadors for all SDGs that you can see now on screen and in May of this year, the first recipients of the Czech SDGs Awards were announced. The contest – first of its kind in Europe - was organised by a consortium of public institutions and the Association for Social Responsibility to reward projects contributing to the SDGs' implementation. The initial response was huge. In total, 215 projects applied proving that there is great appetite for action towards the global goals in the private sector and beyond.

11. It is clear that the communication role requires cooperation between the public and private sector. **A short video which you will see now features Czech SDGs Ambassadors, including our current NGO representative and Miss World 2006, Ms. Tatana Gregor Brzobohata.** After the video, Tatana will introduce the Czech civil society's vision for the sustainable agenda.
12. Ladies and gentlemen, as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry once said, "we do not inherit the Earth from Our Ancestors; we Borrow it from Our Children." Let us all act in this spirit. Thank you.