

UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

“Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit: Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs”

I am truly honored to address here today on behalf of the Government of Albania. As we look forward to the Sustainable Goals Summit in a few months, the debate will naturally feed on the state of play in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level.

We meet at a very critical juncture. We are halfway through the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, with worrying lack of progress, including sliding backwards in several SDGs. The bitter legacy of COVID-19 pandemic and breaches of peace have made it increasingly challenging to remain on track with our commitments and achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The unprovoked and unjustified military aggression of Russia against Ukraine blatantly violates international law and human rights, as well as the UN Charter.

The shockwaves of this war were felt worldwide and engulfed Europe in a severe energy crisis last winter.

With no end in sight, its devastating consequences threaten not only the economy and well-being in Ukraine but also the achievement of the SDG's, as well as the global trade and economy, including seriously affecting food security worldwide. Development and war never go together. This is why this war must stop and give way to peace and recovery.

Colleagues,

In its accelerated development path, Albania champions holistic and transformational approaches, focusing on economic, social, and environmental development, as well as building a peaceful society based on democratic institutions and human rights. Putting the SDG agenda in action is not only a merely government priority. It is an inclusive national undertaking across all State institutions, including the civil society.

The parliament has recently adopted a resolution which details commitments to promoting, financing, and monitoring the implementation of SDGs as part of our EU integration journey.

In order to accelerate action in all areas where more intense efforts are needed, last month, the Inter-ministerial Committee for the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals, which I have the honor to chair, established a working group for the preparation of the SDG roadmap, as well as the Integrated National Financing Framework.

Although, financing for SDGs in Albania has been mainly driven by public spending, in this major undertaking, we have been supported by our partners.

With the new UNSDCF 2022-2026, phase II of the Albania SDG Acceleration Fund is established, including a substantial contribution by the Government. Several important projects with partner countries of Switzerland and Sweden are included in this phase as well.

The Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework that we have established with the UN is anchored by our core priorities: accession to the European Union (EU) and the 2030 agenda, with a focus on the quality of health and education, good governance and rule of law, public service provision, and effective response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Albania's real economic growth rebounded better than foreseen following the pandemic, led by our most prominent sector: tourism, which is now processing 2027 number forecasts. The construction sector also recovered swiftly, despite the increase in prices for raw materials due to the energy crisis. Good progress was also made to refocus health services at the primary level, *introduce digital health services* and improve *transparency and accountability*.

The 2022 Sustainable Development Report index score of 71.63 indicates that the country is more than two-thirds of the way towards achieving the SDGs, with a position of 61 out of 163 countries.

While well positioned to face the many development challenges, the Government has included the key areas of agriculture, energy, digitalization, tourism and fight against corruption among its priorities, with European integration as the guiding and leading one.

While we have started to collect the dividends of a transformative justice reform, Albania is the only country in the region that has signed cooperation agreements with all justice and home affairs agencies of the EU.

But I would like to highlight an area where Albania leads by example: **affordable and clean energy**.

Albania leads the Balkans in an ecological-footprint ranking by Global Footprint Network.

Last year, 42% of the total energy consumed in Albania came from renewable sources, which is close to the EU 2030 target of 45%. This is why, we have reviewed and set our national 2030 target to 54.4%.

All our domestically produced energy comes from renewable sources, predominantly hydropower. We are currently implementing an ambitious and aggressive diversification strategy, to achieve energy security and independence, as well as reduce production costs through competitive and transparent auctions for new generation sources. In the last three years, we have run several renewable energy auctions, that have resulted in record energy prices for Europe and have turned into *best practice* examples for the region.

Colleagues,

With only seven years until our committed deadline, we need to speed up our efforts and make rapid progress on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The Sustainable Development Goals remain our universal, indivisible and integrated roadmap, our vision and perspective for the coming years.

It is upon us to bring change, to design and implement policies to fast-track this shared vision and secure a future worth living for all, everywhere.

Be assured, Albania remains fully committed to do its part in this respect.

Thank you!