

Návrh prejavu počas všeobecnej rozpravy HLPF

Madam President, Excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor for me to take part at the general debate of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. As Slovakia is presenting its second Voluntary National Review this year, the opportunity to address you and share our observations is even more appreciated.

This year marks the mid-term of our efforts to achieve the SDGs by 2030. In Slovakia, we worked hard to anchor sustainable development as the very core of our long-term development strategy.

Moreover, the 2030 Agenda has been underpinning our official development cooperation in bilateral and multilateral relations alike. We have made progress on several SDGs, most notably in clean energy, decent work and economic growth, and life on land. We have made significant progress on decarbonization. By the end of this year, Slovakia will close all of its coal mines and focus on the just transition of the regions hit by this unprecedented decision of the Slovak government. What is more, we will make great efforts in utilizing clean energy sources, including geothermal energy. I am proud to say that this advancement has been achieved in a whole-of-society effort, involving a range of stakeholders.

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, we have to face the reality.

At the current pace of implementation, reaching the SDGs by 2030 is far beyond our reach.

The recent years were marked by several setbacks and obstacles for sustainable development globally, as well as back home in Slovakia. They are, of course, well known to all of us – Russian aggression against Ukraine, COVID-19 pandemic, the ever accelerating climate crisis - and sadly - growing polarization of our societies galvanized by the phenomenon of misinformation.

We have found ourselves in a permanent state of crisis, which is all but conducive for long-term strategizing and for prioritizing sustainability. VNRs represent a rare opportunity to stop for a moment, consider underlying systemic issues - and not only call for, but also take necessary transformative actions.

I would like to highlight three such actions.

The first is a call for honesty. Over the years, VNRs have tended to paint a rosy picture of the state of sustainable development. SDG reports by the United Nations and by independent experts and scientists have meanwhile done the stark opposite. Openly acknowledging problems is the first step towards being able to solve them. As we prepare for the September SDG summit, we need to brace ourselves with honesty, if we want it to live up to expectations. I represent the Slovak caretaking government striving to take decisions based solely on arguments and data. Therefore, I very much value this key principle.

My second call is for more intergovernmental cooperation on how to actually implement the SDGs. So far, global coordination has largely focused on setting ambitious goals and monitoring them, while largely missing the crucial implementation steps in-between.

The recently announced High Impact Initiatives are a right step to fill this gap. For these initiatives to materialize, however, countries need space for meaningful and informal exchanges at the expert level. In the European Union, we have positive experience from the EU Working Party for the 2030 Agenda, which provides such space for experts from capitals. At the global level, the Regional Commissions of the UN could be well placed to do the same.

I cannot conclude my speech without an **appeal for peace**. War and conflict is incompatible with sustainable development. I want to condemn, in the strongest possible terms, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which causes unspeakable suffering to the Ukrainian people.

As Ukraine's direct neighbor, we have provided immediate assistance to Ukrainian refugees. But we need to think ahead. We are committed to fully support the post-war reconstruction of destroyed towns and infrastructure in Ukraine.

To this end, Slovakia and Ukraine have recently signed a Memorandum on the preparation of joint projects for EU programmes. Bilateral energy infrastructure projects will be among our priorities; nevertheless, the scope of co-operation is much wider and includes all sectors of common interest.

I would like to repeat our call to Russia to immediately stop this senseless war of choice without which there could not be just and lasting peace not only for Ukraine and its people, but also for Europe and the whole globe.

I thank you.