

**Welcome and Opening Remarks by**

**Ms. Olga Algayerova,**

**Executive Secretary of UNECE,**

**At the Regional Workshop for the 2022 VNR countries from the UNECE region**

**4 April 2022, 14:00-17:00 GVA time**

Distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to this Regional Workshop for the 2022 VNR countries from the UNECE region. It has become a good tradition to hold this event, which is organised by DESA, just before the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region.

Thanks to the great collaboration with our New York colleagues, we have been able to generate good synergies between the two activities, which have a common goal: sharing experiences and learning from each other. This is the fourth time that this successful arrangement has taken place.

UNECE countries have been active participants in the Voluntary National Reviews. Almost all countries in the region have presented VNRs, quite a number of them several times. In 2022, of the 10 countries presenting a VNR, nine are second-timers, and one even a third-timer. There is already significant experience that allows us to assess progress with SDG implementation and the role that VNRs can play in accelerating progress.

This year we are meeting in a particularly difficult situation for our region and beyond. The unthinkable has happened, war is raging again in Europe. The horrendous human suffering and destruction in Ukraine must stop. There cannot be sustainable development without peace.

While the COVID crisis has already led to setbacks in many areas of the sustainable development agenda, we are now confronted with even greater challenges. Millions of people have fled their homeland or are internally displaced, food security is threatened, and the

economic consequences of the war cannot yet be fully assessed, but will be considerable- in the region and beyond.

But we must not give up. We must redouble our efforts to 'rescue' the 2030 Agenda, and the voluntary national reviews are an important instrument to support these efforts.

Discussions at past editions of the Regional Forum have considered different aspects of VNRs.

This year we will give particular attention to policy coherence and addressing trade-offs in SDG policies and COVID-19 recovery measures. Going forward, the war in Ukraine is creating new demands and constraints on policy action, thus stressing the relevance of this topic. The need to exploit synergies and address trade-offs across the multiple areas covered by the 2030 Agenda requires robust coordination for effective policies.

But the efforts of national governments, while essential, are not sufficient. VNRs can serve to engage other critical actors, both in the assessment of the problems and in taking effective action. A whole-of-government needs to be complemented by a whole-of-society approach that builds strong partnerships for implementation.

Lessons from the regional, subregional and local levels will therefore also be considered in a multi-stakeholder plenary discussion of the Regional Forum on 7 April.

ECE is ready to continue to assist its member States in providing tools, instruments and policy discussion spaces that facilitate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

More than ever, the common problems we are facing require regional platforms for considering policy options and concerted action.

We need all efforts.

I wish you a successful meeting today and look forward to your participation at the plenary sessions of the Forum on 6 and 7 April. Thank you.