

Opening statement

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*Excellencies,
Executive Secretary,
distinguished delegates,
ladies and gentlemen,*

I am very pleased to speak to you today from Bucharest as Co-Chair of the Regional Forum. It has been a very challenging year for many of us, and also for the cause of sustainable development to which, as you know, I am very much committed.

One year ago, I talked to our colleagues at ECE about the possibility to chair the last Regional Forum. I was disappointed that I could not do it because, as it turned out, I could not travel. I was hoping that the situation would get back to normal soon. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be a very persistent and difficult challenge.

As my Co-Chair has highlighted, the world and this region in particular has been confronted with devastating consequences in many areas. Peoples' health and lives were directly affected. Vulnerable groups were put at even greater risk of marginalization. We have seen that jobs, transboundary value chains and economic sectors such as tourism have been suffering tremendously – and still are. Social protection, health and food systems have been put under heavy strain. And the question of how to bounce back from this crisis while fully respecting environmental and climate change considerations is now more relevant than ever.

Over the past days, many of you have participated in 12 peer learning sessions on many of these important issues, closely linked to the 9 SDGs under review and organized by a broad coalition of UN entities, and we will have a chance to discuss the key outcomes during the plenary sessions.

In addition, preparatory meetings took place by crucial stakeholders, such as civil society, the business sector, parliamentarians, and local governments. And over 20 side events were held, organized by a range of different organizers on very relevant topics. If you allow me to mention that, a very interesting side event was held just yesterday, organized by Romania and the OECD on policy coherence between COVID recovery and the 2030 Agenda. The main idea that was underlined by all speakers is that yes we have to do more for the SDGs in the region, that we shall use "SDGs as a compass for policies" while aligning the Recovery and resilience Plans to the SDGs. We also took on board the "do not significant harm" principle that could be applied not only for environment, but more important have to take into consideration people, because in the center of implementation of every and each mechanisms, plans or projects there are people that need to be better protected under this difficult times of pandemic.

The breadth of participation reminds us all that a sustainable COVID-19 recovery coupled with a faster pace of SDG implementation is an effort that requires the engagement of many groups and actors. The Regional Forum gives a voice to all of them. I commend UNECE and all UN organizations involved in the organization of this meeting for creating such a rich and inclusive platform.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to say that also in Romania, the pandemic crisis brought up a lot of challenges. Every aspect of our life was affected. All public institutions as well as the other social actors had to change their approach and find the best solution to deal with the pandemic obstacles. The Department which I coordinate tried as well to adapt its activities to the new context. I consider we managed to continue our work for promoting and implementation of the SDGs in Romania. The main ingredient we have is determination. We had many successful online meetings. We established the institutional framework for the implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2030 which is harmonized with the 17th SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. Romania, now, is making from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan a real opportunity for sustainability. We have accomplished so far to embed the SDGs in the construction of this plan. By taking this initiative our goal is to encourage administrative reforms and design and implement projects that contribute to sustainable development transition. The best answer to the pandemic crisis is sustainable development. Solidarity and resilience is the only way to go ahead. That is why we have to cooperate better and strengthen the multilateral cooperation and partnerships within the UNECE region.

Against this background, I hope that we can all benefit from the plenary discussions today and tomorrow, in which the Regional Forum culminates.

My Co-Chair and myself look forward to three plenary sessions. Today, following the opening, we will have a high-level political discussion about sustainable and resilient recovery from COVID-19 and delivery on the 2030 Agenda in the UNECE region. This afternoon, we will consider key actions and accelerators to tackle the socio-economic impact and promote a sustainable recovery. Finally, tomorrow morning, we will review the experiences from the region with the Voluntary National Reviews.