

Regional Forum on Sustainable Development – 18th March 2021 from 10:00 to 12:00

Speaking notes for Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE), Vice-President of the Congress

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Debate on „Experiences from the region with Voluntary National Reviews” (VNRs) (3min)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organisers for giving me the opportunity to address this Plenary Session on behalf of the Council of Europe and of its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

While the main responsibility for SDG implementation lies with States, international organisations can play a facilitating role. The Council of Europe through its various instruments contributes to national implementation and to reporting by member States. Our approach is that the Council of Europe’s work must always contribute to implementation of Agenda 2030. We have therefore mainstreamed our activities and linked them to the SDGs.

SDG implementation is furthermore a shared responsibility which requires mobilisation of municipalities and regions, civil society, businesses and other local stakeholders. Two thirds of the 169 SDG targets can only be achieved through local and regional action. Localising the SDGs is therefore a crucial factor for the success of Agenda 2030. Today, municipalities and regions across our 47 member States actively contribute to shaping of strategies, take part in coordination mechanisms and deliver on implementation. Many also play a role in reporting on progress.

In Norway, my own country, KS - the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities - is developing a Voluntary Sub-national Review (VSR) which will highlight how Norway’s 356 municipalities and 11 regional authorities have localised the SDGs and what progress on Agenda 2030 they have made. KS’ review team has launched a survey on localisation and will measure progress using publicly available data in indicators established through a taxonomy also developed by the association. Three Voluntary Local Reviews by KS’ members will, furthermore, provide good cases in the Sub-national Review on how municipalities and regional authorities can work to make a sustainable future reality. Norway’s 2021 Voluntary National Review will include findings in the sub-national study and dedicate a full chapter to local government SDG relevance and efforts. KS has been invited to join Norway’s national delegation to the UN’s High-Level Political Forum when presenting Norway’s 2021 Voluntary National Reviews.

Voluntary National Reviews require effective cooperation between all levels of government responsible for putting national policy into practice. They must integrate findings from Voluntary Sub-national and Voluntary Local Reviews alike to make sure that national outcome and learning reflect efforts by local and regional authorities.

In the Council of Europe Congress, we are encouraged by the increasing number of such reviews. Indeed, several of the 9 European countries - including Germany and Sweden - presenting Voluntary National Reviews in 2021 are in the process of developing Voluntary Sub-national Reviews. These will document benefits from national governments' practical modalities for action at municipal and regional level, and identify what works on the ground. They will furthermore capture knowledge and innovative practices on effective local SDG achievement, as well as measure progress made towards targets.

These platforms can help cities and regions to define indicators for monitoring sustainability progress at sub-national level. National governments must support such initiatives and encourage local and regional authorities to use them.

Thank you for your attention.