

**2022 UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development**  
**6-7 April 2022**  
**Geneva, Switzerland & Online**

**Plenary Debate- Statements of High-Level Representatives (6 April)**

**Mr Petros VARELIDIS, Secretary-General for Natural Environment and Water  
Hellenic Ministry of Environment and Energy, GREECE**

Colleagues, distinguished participants,

The Greek government, being fully committed to the implementation of the SDGs, is preparing its 2nd VNR to be presented at the upcoming 2022 HLPF. The process is coordinated by the Presidency of the Government ensuring the effective coordination of all Ministries, as well as the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. Emphasis is given on key interventions included in our National Recovery Plan that are in line and have the potential to also multiply benefits towards the achievement of the SDGs.

As this year, SDGs 14 and 15 are being reviewed, and coming from the environment community, I would like to stress that with regard to **biodiversity**, Greece, a hot-spot for endemism and richness of species and ecosystems, puts special emphasis on nature protection.

Following the overhaul of the governance system of protected areas to increase effectiveness, the mapping and assessment of the country's ecosystems and their services, as well as closing the knowledge gaps for species and habitats are our top remaining priorities.

We aspire for an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework and we commit to the collective goals of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030. For this reason, we have been one of the supporting countries of the High-Ambition Coalition (HAC) for Nature and People as well as of the Leaders' Pledge for Nature (LPN).

With regard to marine biodiversity, we commit to reduce overfishing, by declaring that 10% of our seas will be no-take reserves, by 2030, while we are already achieving SDG 14.5.

We also support the transformation of the Mediterranean into a model sea by 2030.

Moreover, we have set the issue of Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), as a key tool and an enabler for a sustainable **blue economy**.

We implement a massive green transformation of all relevant sectors, ranging from tourism and energy production to shipping and fishing.

Regarding **marine plastic litter**, we have already committed to reduce:

- Single-use plastic beverage and food containers by 30% by 2024, and by 60% by 2026 compared to 2022, and
- Plastic litter at sea by 50% by 2030 and microplastics released into the environment by 30%.

We are looking forward to the implementation of the decisive outcomes at UNEA 5.2 to address plastic pollution at the global level. The UNECE and the UNEP/MAP have an important role to play towards this end, at the regional and sub-regional levels.

Engaging stakeholders and citizens in this process is absolutely crucial. We are glad that the private sector and the civil society in Greece are becoming very active partners in tackling the multi-dimensional challenge of marine plastic pollution. We strongly support initiatives such as “fish for litter” and “adopt a beach”, which are booming in Greece.

Let me close by stressing again the need to give particular attention to policy coherence and addressing trade-offs in SDG policies, including climate action, and COVID recovery measures. In this context, we see our VNR also as a means of promoting policy coherence for sustainable development and multi-level collaboration.

Thank you for your attention.