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Short overview of the speech presented in 19th May at the Finland-Estonia webinar

I was surprised to see Estonia as high as in 10th position in the UNs SDG index. Surprised probably because while it is necessary to also acknowledge the things we have been doing well, the areas that still need attention are especially highlighted in every-day life.

One of which has been the wage gap between women and men. We have been lagging behind, being always among the worst within EU countries. I feel that the civil society in Estonia has actually done well to persistently stress the issue and re-open the debate when necessary, but there has been a lack of direct and strategic action to combat the issue – enforcing salary transparency, etc.

Secondly, although much like our neighbours across the gulf, we have prioritised education, with multiple reviews have suggested that we are doing a good job, efforts towards enhancing R&D action and increasing funding have not yet been sufficient. Thankfully, this has been quite high on the agenda of late, since research institutes and civil society representation have raised their voice and expect more action. However, I have to mention that Estonia is currently also in process of renewing the R&D development plan.

Another area of improvement is (non-)inclusive urban environment, especially in the capital city Tallinn. The share of people using public transport, a bicycle or walking to commute is unfortunately decreasing. This is the result of creating a nurturing environment for cars rather than pedestrians, increasing and encouraging car-dependency. This has to be another way round when taking into consideration the inclusiveness, impact of physical and mental health and other important aspects of people's lives. And health indicators in the SDG report for Estonia are often yellow or red – of course these segments are connected and interdependent!

Finally. During the last year, we have seen a large effort across the world to raise awareness and the need to act towards decreasing carbon emissions, which has long been a stain on Estonia's shirt, considering the high dependence on carbon-intensive oil shale. In the last year, the emissions have dropped significantly, but not due to extraordinary efforts of the government, but due to market conditions. The inactivity of the government has been especially highlighted in the current coronacrisis. It is as if we are holding on to two ropes pulling in different directions and we are not willing to let go of the past and actually unfortunately further investing in it, while delaying such actions might lead into a more difficult situation in the future.

My overall critique would be that unfortunately, during the crisis and in the recovery efforts, SDGs haven't been taken seriously enough, or not held in high enough regard, especially considering the parallel agenda of the green deal in EU.