

ECOSOC High Level Political Forum (HLPF)
General Debate

Statement by H.E. Evangelos Sekeris,
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"Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit:
Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs"

Greece welcomes the theme for this year's High Level Political Forum (HLPF) of "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels", noting that there never was a more relevant time to renew our commitments as a global community and assume the collective responsibility to make up for the lost ground, reversing the negative trends.

Halfway through the implementation of the Agenda 2030, the call to deliver on the 17 SDGs couldn't be more urgent. A series of interlinked challenges hasn't only delayed or slowed progress but has also reversed gains, with the impact felt disproportionately by the furthest left behind.

While still experiencing the adverse effects of the COVID 19 pandemic, the impact from the war in Ukraine against the backdrop of the climate crisis, unevenly felt by developing countries with reduced fiscal space and inadequate macroeconomic capacity to respond.

The latest UN SG's Report has set the alarming tone, a tone we don't have the luxury of time to dismiss. Not at a time when only about 12% of the SDGs are on track, when under current trends, 575 million people will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030, while the world is back at hunger levels not seen since 2005.¹ To offset those worrying trends, conventional or incremental progress will no longer do. Transformation is now the key and this should be our guiding principle to the road to the SDG Summit in September and beyond. In 2024, the Summit of the Future provides an opportunity to enhance cooperation on critical challenges.

¹ Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet, Report of the Secretary-General (Special Edition), May 2023, p.2

Building on the SDG Summit, we will consider ways to lay the foundations for more effective global cooperation, in a multilateral setting with the UN at its core, that can deal with today's challenges as well as new threats in the future.

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be measured exclusively in economic terms and is aggravated by ever-growing inequalities, vulnerabilities and gaps in achieving the SDGs. Development is increasingly a process that requires transition; it is a non-linear process that does not rely on economic averages. Even when GDP rises, developing countries face a series of structural and interconnected traps that limit their capacity to reach higher levels of development.

Addressing inequalities within countries should lie at the heart of the transformation process through robust social inclusion pathways. Building strong social welfare services to reach the most vulnerable persons, strengthening health systems to tackle both current and future needs, reforming education to leverage the massive potential of digitalization, should be our roadmaps for the creation of inclusive and equitable societies. To that end, mainstreaming gender equality across policies to harness the still untapped potential of women and girls, remains crucial for transformative change. Gender equality may be enshrined in legal and constitutional texts, but should gain weight as an important value and ultimately become a reality.

We also believe that the promotion of peaceful coexistence, of religious tolerance and of respect for cultural diversity can and will promote stability, security and coherence within our societies. Respect for cultural diversity is a sign of strength rather than weakness, as is respect to national and global cultural heritage.

Importantly enough, sustainable development cannot grow unless peace and security reign, and, on that front, the world doesn't have good news to report. Promoting peace should be the guiding feature to inform global community's actions, always in full respect to international law, including UN Security Council Resolutions, and in line with the principles enshrined in the Charter of the UN.

Addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and environment degradation should be top priority in the list of effective multilateralism. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports show that unless we scale ambition to an unprecedented level we won't be able to reverse the adverse impacts of the triple planetary crisis. It is for this reason that the urgent reform of the international financial architecture to include the challenges of the moment is needed. We cannot tackle present and future challenges with yesterday mandates.

Greece is strongly committed to the implementation of the SDGs, having placed the overall responsibility for monitoring and coordinating the national implementation of SDG-related public policies at the highest political level while the 17 Goals are embedded in the major binding political strategies, both as targets and overarching principles. So far, it has presented two Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), in 2018 and 2022 respectively, while having been actively engaged in the EU's first VR.

Especially concerning affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), one of the SDGs reviewed in depth in this HLPF, Greece is happy to report that we have more than doubled the share of Renewable Energy Sources in energy consumption in the period between 2010-2020² while progress is still being reported at a rate above EU average³. This is our share to the "renewables revolution" for which the Secretary General urges in his Special Report. Overall, according to the latest data, Greece is progressing towards 16 out of the 17 SDGs⁴ while institutional reforms currently underway will bring forward a more enabling environment for their acceleration.

Bringing the Sustainable Development Goals back on track is the only possible path forward. There is still time, if there is renewed will. And on that front, we must prove ourselves more focused and committed than ever. The SDG Stimulus, while ambitious, is achievable. Investing in the SDGs is both sensible and feasible. The 2030 Agenda made the central, transformative promise to 'Leave No One Behind'. The concept is both a promise to reach the poorest of the poor and to combat discrimination and inequalities within and amongst countries.

² GREEK VNR, 2022, p. 9

³ Eurostat, Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, 2023 edition, p. 322

⁴ Eurostat, Sustainable development in the European Union: Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context, 2023 edition, p. 322