MISSION REPORT

following the *ad hoc* EP delegation to the ministerial segment of the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, 17-19 July 2023, New York, USA

Committee on Development
Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

**Members of the mission:**
Tomas TOBÉ, co-Chair of the ad hoc Delegation EPP - DEVE
Petros KOKKALIS, co-Chair of the ad hoc Delegation The Left- ENVI
Jessica POLFJÄRD PPE
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Introduction

Based on requests by the ENVI and the DEVE Committees, on 9 March 2023 the Conference of Presidents authorised a 10-Member ad hoc delegation to the ministerial segment of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) from 17 to 19 July 2023 at the UN Headquarters, New York.

The HLPF is the UN system’s central platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. It seeks to mobilise further support for action to achieve the SDGs in the context of Covid-19 recovery and encourages voluntary commitments by governments and all stakeholders to accelerate action. The 2023 HLPF reviewed in-depth the following goals: Goals 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The aim of the delegation was to look at progress made on implementation of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2023 is a decisive year for the 2030 Agenda, marking the halfway point between the adoption of the SDGs in 2015 and their planned achievement by 2030, and it will also feature an SDG Summit at heads of state and government level in the framework of the UN General Assembly. This year’s HLPF was also very significant for the EU, as it presented its first voluntary review of SDG implementation (EUVR).

The delegation visit was preceded by the adoption in Plenary on 15 June 2023 of a resolution on the implementation and delivery of the SDGs, based on a joint DEVE-ENVI report (co-Rapporteurs Udo Bullmann/DEVE and Petros Kokkalis/ENVI). This resolution formed the mandate for the European Parliament delegation.

Principal points

The need to deliver on concrete commitments and actions at the SDG Summit is an urgent global responsibility, in order to put the SDGs back on track. Throughout bilateral meetings and different events, the delegation called for an urgent political reset at the upcoming SDG Summit. The presentation of the first ever EU Voluntary Review is a concrete reaffirmation of the EU’s commitment to deliver the SDGs at home and globally. UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged leaders to change course, describing the 2030 Agenda as the path “to bridge divides and rebuild trust”. He called for all nations to come to the SDG Summit with clear plans and pledges. The delegation expressed its full support and committed to examining closely the outcome of the SDG Summit in September.

Summary account of meetings

Day 1 - 17 July 2023

- Ministerial opening of the HLPF by the President of ECOSOC, Secretary-General, President of the General Assembly, followed by general debate: “Building momentum
towards the SDG Summit”

The delegation attended the opening of the ministerial segment of the HLPF, which featured speeches by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the President of ECOSOC Ms Lachezara Stoeva, the President of the General Assembly Mr Csaba Körösi, and the Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Mr Hoesung Lee. The segment also included messages on behalf of youth, delivered by the UN Secretary-General Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change and Youth Constituency representatives.

The ministerial segment opened with calls for renewed commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs, and for countries to bring concrete plans and pledges to the SDG Summit in September 2023. These sentiments were echoed frequently in national statements during the general debate that took place throughout the day.

- **Meeting with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)**

The delegation exchanged thoughts and views with the EESC representatives on the upcoming SDG Summit. They also discussed the EU voluntary review, brainstormed about their possible future involvement and contributions, but also inclusion of civil society, and cooperation with the Committee of the Regions. The delegation presented the EP resolution on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals 2023. They also discussed the importance of having the multi-stakeholder platform on the implementation of the SDGs, and working closely with business and NGOs.

- **Meeting with Ambassador Lachezara Stoeva, President of the UN ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council) and Bulgarian Ambassador to the UN**

Ms Stoeva expressed her enthusiasm about the EU’s first voluntary review. She highlighted the importance of the SDG Summit and reflected on the EU’s role in raising awareness of the Summit. She highlighted the need to shape commitments and align national policies with the SDGs, underlining the role parliamentarians can play in this regard. The delegation discussed financing as one of the main challenges, the need to strengthen public-private partnerships, work at regional and local level, and the importance of showing a political will, not only for the Summit but also for the work up to and beyond 2030. Members also raised topics including the Loss and Damage Fund, the need for better governance and to accelerate synergies between climate and biodiversity COPs.

- **Meeting with Mr António Guterres, UN Secretary-General**

The UN Secretary-General explained the importance of having a strong political declaration at the Summit, at two levels - at the national level and from the financial perspective. He highlighted the need to ensure good governance, fight corruption, and align national policies with the SDGs. On financing, Mr Guterres emphasised the specific difficulties that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are facing. He addressed the impacts of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine, official development assistance, the need to reform the Bretton Woods financing system, and to focus on concrete actions that could be carried out faster, such as increasing the capitalisation of multilateral development banks, as well as redistributing assistance through them. He regretted the absence of an effective debt relief system to help countries in need. The Secretary-General reiterated the important role that the SDG Stimulus plan could play in delivering the SDGs. Members discussed with the Secretary General the question of bridging the financing gap, debt relief, reform of international finance systems, including climate finance and the Loss and Damage Fund, fossil fuel subsidies and the need to reduce emissions of emerging economies. The Delegation also addressed European sovereignty, governance,
cooperation with the G20, UN reform and better cooperation and alignment between UN agencies.

- **Briefing by Mr Olof Skoog, Ambassador, Head of EU Delegation to the UN**

Mr Olof Skoog complemented the opening of the ministerial segment of the HLPF. He informed the delegation about the general geopolitical situation, the upcoming SDG Summit, multilateralism and the state of play of the SDGs. The discussion evolved around peace and security, financing, climate, internalisation of SDGs, and the growing rift between the West and South.

- **Meeting with Dr Sylvia Earle, oceanographer**

Dr Earle, a charismatic oceanographer who has lived underwater ten times, shared her experience and views on the nature of life in the oceans and the progress made on SDG 14. She explained how the development of scuba technology and robots had led to greater knowledge about marine life, and made us aware about dangers of pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss and international trade in marine wildlife. Dr Earle highlighted the importance of using nature-based solutions, scaling-up ocean protection to get to 30% by 2030, protecting the high seas and abandoning fossil fuels. The delegation had an interesting exchange with her about the Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), the dangers of deep-sea mining and the designation of Hope Spots in Europe.

- **Meeting with Ms Ligia Noronha, UN Assistant Secretary General, UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) New York Office and Mr Jamil Ahmad, Director**

In a meeting with UNEP, Ms Noronha presented UNEP’s perspective on a Loss and Damage Fund, focusing on adaptation, preventive measures, nature-based solutions, and resilience. In this context, Members raised the importance of sustainability and biodiversity and access to finance for all stakeholder groups. Ms Noronha then briefly addressed the main challenges and key deliverables for the sixth session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-6) taking place in February 2024, with water, air pollution, the circular economy, and responsible mining as a potential focus. Furthermore, the delegation discussed progress towards an international legally binding agreement on plastic pollution. Members raised the importance of waste collection, extended producer responsibility schemes and the EU’s waste shipment regulation. Ms Noronha emphasised the relevance of the environmental multilateralism agenda and intergenerational equity. The delegation also addressed biodiversity in international and European contexts and Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction, the Critical Raw Materials Act, due diligence, waste and water management and oceans. Ms Noronha addressed UNEP’s focus on science, financing gaps, trade resilience, subsidies and the climate fund. The delegation also raised the issue of having silos at political level, impeding SDG implementation.

**Day 2 - 18 July 2023**

- **Meeting with Bloomberg Philanthropies**

The representatives of Bloomberg Philanthropies gave a presentation of their activities and different projects focusing on the environment and oceans. Bloomberg Philanthropies is working on climate and biodiversity, advocating for increased transparency in climate-related risks and for companies to disclose climate risks publicly. Their project on the oceans, mostly driven by CBD work, aims to protect 30% of oceans by 2030, supports community fisheries
and coral reefs, and builds partnerships with governments and funders. Beyond carbon and petrochemicals, the project focuses on closing coal plants and clean energy transition. They also touched upon their work on sustainable finance, sustainable cities and C40, the clean air programme, public health and ensuring a better life for citizens through policy change, advocacy and lobbying. Members were interested to learn how Bloomberg Philanthropies integrate SDGs in their work. They raised questions on sustainable finance, involvement of local and regional actors, cooperation between cities on questions of climate and sustainability, as well as on their position regarding the promotion of the Great Green Wall initiative in Africa.

- **Meeting with Ms Cristina Duarte, Under-Secretary-General, Special Advisor on Africa, and former Finance Minister from Cape Verde**

In her usual energetic way, Ms Duarte focused her intervention on the African perspective. There is a narrative in Africa that blames external factors for the lack of SDG implementation, but it is a combination of external and internal factors. She stressed in particular the need to invest in resilience building to resist shocks and to make progress on the SDGs and explained that Africa had the capacity to mobilise economic and financial flows, but that it was hard to finance its development because of customs issues, weak country systems and domestic resource mobilisation, and illicit financial flows. In this sense, she highlighted the role of multilateral development banks and the lack of ODA effectiveness. Ms Duarte also addressed innovation, information and the communications technology global market, as well as energy and access to electricity, which is a huge problem in Africa. Among other things, Members raised questions on digitalisation, access to energy as well energy transition, and the Great Green Wall.

- **Parliamentary Forum at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: The mid-point toward the SDGs: taking stock of parliamentary action, organised by Inter-Parliamentary Union**

The Parliamentary Forum at the HLPF took stock of the role of parliaments in the implementation of the SDGs over the past few years and in accelerating action in the years ahead. In three short segments, the meeting highlighted the critical need for parliaments to invest considerably more in their own institutional processes, to present practical illustrations of parliamentary action, and to propose innovative solutions to unlock sustainable development. Mr Kokkalis was a speaker on the panel “Beyond GDP: measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet”.

- **Meeting with co-facilitator of the HLPF political declaration, H.E. Mr Fergal Mythen, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Ireland to the United Nations**

Ambassador Mythen briefed the delegation on the latest draft political declaration, which according to him is ambitious, balanced and action oriented. The co-facilitators conducted eight rounds of informal consultations with Member States and heard the views of major groups and other stakeholders. The final draft document, presented on 19 July 2023 and placed under the silent procedure, “constitutes the best basis on which to achieve consensus”. However, on 21 July, the co-facilitators informed Member States that silence had been broken on the draft political declaration by a number of delegations. Having exhausted “all possible efforts within [their] mandate,” the co-facilitators submitted the text to the UNGA President as their “best effort to reach a consensus document.”
Adoption of the political declaration should take place during the opening segment of the SDG Summit, followed by announcements of national and global commitments to drive transformative SDG progress.

- **Uzbekistan-EP side event: “Role of Parliaments in accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals”**

  This side event looked at innovative approaches and common challenges for national and supranational parliamentary structures to put the SDGs back on track, despite the many recent and current challenges that have slowed down their implementation. Discussions produced recommendations on innovative ways of mobilising the strong support and active engagement of parliaments in accelerating the achievement of all 17 SDGs by 2030. Mr Tobé delivered opening remarks, Mr Bullmann was a speaker during the main panel discussion, and Ms Chabaud presented closing remarks.

- **Meeting with NGOs/Civil Society – SDG Watch, Concord and Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP)**

  The main messages from the NGOs included the need for greater involvement of civil society representatives in the implementation of the SDGs, including during preparations of the voluntary reviews. They regretted their lack of involvement in the EU Voluntary Review. They also stressed the need for more policy coherence for development, and to overcome the ‘working in silos’ approach. The issues of post-COVID recovery, tax evasion, debt crises and the digital gender gap were also raised. Members were informed about the preparations for a People’s Summit involving people from marginalised backgrounds, which should take place in the margins of the SDG Summit. Members were interested to hear from the NGO representatives about civic engagement to support the SDGs, the role of parliamentarians, the questions of access to EU institutions by lobbyists, the European Green Deal, cooperation with the private sector, communication challenges, reform of the global financial architecture and the Global Gateway initiative.

- **Meeting with Ms Maria Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)**

  Ms Spatolisano briefed the Delegation about DESA’s work and its main functions, which include intergovernmental support, capacity building, providing research and secretariat support. She presented a rather bleak picture of overall SDG implementation and the lack of progress. In addition, Ms Spatolisano referred to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition prepared by DESA, which presents a candid assessment of the SDGs based on the latest data and estimates. Members engaged in a discussion with Ms Spatolisano on questions of capacity building, the Global Gateway initiative and more generally on availability of reliable data to measure progress on the SDGs.

- **Meeting with Mr Paul Skoczylas, Deputy Director, World Food Programme (WFP), and Lucas Tavares, Senior Liaison officer, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)**

  The delegation discussed with WFP and FAO representatives progress made on SDG 2: Zero hunger, the impact of war in Ukraine on food security/the Black Sea Initiative and climate change and biodiversity loss as drivers of food insecurity. The WFP representative addressed the global food security issue, driven by conflict, climate and the economic situation. WFP expressed appreciation for EU support related to development and humanitarian funding and...
appealed to the EU to put food security at the top of the political agenda. The FAO representative gave an overview on food security and nutrition and praised the EU as their main partner, spearheading joint solutions and global actions on food security. FAO highlighted the need to respect planetary boundaries by reducing food loss and waste and by applying circular economy solutions. Members raised the issues of prioritisation, food loss and food waste, agro-ecological practices, fisheries agreements, new genomic techniques and land rights.

Day 3 - 19 July 2023

- Meeting with Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen, Spanish Presidency and Civil Society Organisations

Commissioner Urpilainen emphasised the Union’s renewed commitment to the 2030 Agenda. She stressed the importance of the financing gap and the need to accelerate so that it translates into concrete actions. She also underlined that public action alone would not suffice and that partnerships were needed. Mr Tobé stated that the EU’s political commitment was the biggest message and that the September Summit needed to be a political reset. There are many partners looking at the EU to take on that role. On the Voluntary Review, the EP is proud of the presentation of the first VR by the EU. Ambassador Skoog stressed the need for a united EU, showing it leads by example at home, able to build sustainable partnerships, supporting multilateralism. On the internal aspects, Petros Kokkalis stressed that the EU still needed an SDG compass in the EU and national legislation, and needed to strengthen the European semester reporting in the SDGs.

- Presentation of the EU Voluntary Review

The co-rapporteurs of the EP Resolution, Mr Kokkalis and Mr Bullmann were on the podium with Commissioners Urpilainen and Gentiloni. Each had the possibility to answer a question from a country representative. One question focused on measuring progress and well-being and the “beyond GDP” concept, addressed by Commissioner Gentiloni and Petros Kokkalis. Another question focused on ensuring that cooperation between the EU and other countries on the Global Gateway contributes to the SDGs, as well as the issue of tackling inequalities, addressed by Commissioner Urpilainen and Udo Bullmann.

- EU Side event “Delivering the SDGs: revitalised partnerships with the EU”

To complement the EU’s formal presentation of its voluntary review, the Commission organised, together with the European Economic and Social Committee, a side event focused on “Delivering the SDGs: revitalised partnerships with the EU”. The event focused on the progress made in the implementation of the SDGs within Europe and globally, looking ahead at challenges and opportunities. Mr Tobé represented the European Parliament in the panel discussion.

- Meeting with H.E. Ms Fahtimah Miuma, Deputy Minister of National Planning, Housing and Infrastructure and H.E. Ms Thilmeeza Hussain, Ambassador of the Maldives to the United States and the Permanent Representative of the Maldives to the United Nations

The delegation discussed with Ms Miuma and Ms Hussain the EU and Maldives VNRs respectively, cooperation for COP28, the Loss and Damage fund, and specific issues that SIDS are facing in terms of climate change. The Maldives were obliged to adapt quickly to climate change, but rapid adaptation requires easy and timely access to funding, hindered by the high cost of capital. They discussed desalination of water and the issue of desalination plants, the
unregulated and unsustainable fisheries practices in the world that are affecting sustainable fisheries in the Maldives, sustainable tourism, the need for decarbonisation of energy and the transport sector and phasing out of the fossil fuel industry worldwide. The delegation also discussed waste collection, bottom trawling, biodiversity, the blue economy initiative project (mapping out the ocean around the Maldives) and their support for BBNJ.

- **EU Youth side event “Leveraging skills and investment in achieving SDGs”**

Ms Jessica Polfjärd was a panellist during the Quick Take Session. The event aimed to enable a meaningful intergenerational dialogue between youth representatives and decision-makers at the HLPF on the issues of skills and investment needs to foster youth economic empowerment and SDG progress.

- **Meeting with Mr Achim Steiner, Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**

Mr Steiner emphasised the role of the EU as global leader in promoting SDGs and the importance of development cooperation. He spoke of global tensions and the need for more collective action rather than finger pointing. Mr Steiner expressed optimism about the state of play of the SDGs. He insisted on the need to be realistic and accept that it was normal for progress to stagnate during crises. He used COVID-19 as an example of how quickly countries can adapt and come up with innovative solutions. Regarding the SDG Summit, he thanked the EP for its ambitious resolution and proposals made. Members raised questions on the EU Green Deal and its strategic directions, climate, the Loss and Damage fund, the importance of narratives and communication with citizens.

- **Meeting with the PGA Youth Fellows**

The President of the General Assembly Fellowship Programme aims to promote youth engagement in multilateralism and support the next generation of diplomats. The Fellowship brings to New York a small group of young diplomats and civil servants from developing countries, particularly from Least Developed Countries (LDCs), Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), while also ensuring geographical representation and gender balance. The delegation met with five PGA Youth Fellows, discussed their experience of the programme and answered their interesting questions.

**Conclusions**

Members conveyed a clear message in all meetings of European Parliament commitment to the SDGs. Overall, Members were very satisfied with the programme, its diversity and the quality of meetings. Thanks to the very good cooperation between the co-Chairs, the meetings ran smoothly, with lively debates and rapport building with the collocutors. The presentation of the first voluntary review by the EU was an opportunity to show case the Union’s commitment to the SDGs as “Team Europe”, as demonstrated by the numerous cooperation efforts among the European institutions, as well the participation of all institutions in the presentation of the VR, the EU side-event, meetings with stakeholders and communication efforts. The presence and very active participation of the ENVI and DEVE co-Rapporteurs of the EP resolution on SDG implementation, which the co-Chairs mentioned in all discussions, underlined the credibility and political interest of the European Parliament with regard to the Agenda 2030. A joint press release by the DEVE and ENVI co-Chairs was issued at the end of the delegation visit.
# Annex: Final programme

## Monday, 17 July 2023

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.00-11.30</td>
<td><strong>Ministerial opening of the HLPF</strong> by the President of ECOSOC, Secretary-General, President of the General Assembly, followed by <strong>general debate</strong>: “Building momentum towards the SDG Summit”</td>
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<td><strong>Meeting with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>13.25-13.55</td>
<td><strong>Meeting with Mr António Guterres, UN Secretary General</strong></td>
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<td>14.15-15.00</td>
<td><strong>Briefing by Mr Olof Skoog, Ambassador, Head of EU Delegation to the UN</strong></td>
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<td>16.15-17.10</td>
<td><strong>Meeting with Dr Sylvia Earle, oceanographer and National Geographic Explorer at Large</strong></td>
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<td>17.20-18.00</td>
<td><strong>Meeting with Ms Ligia Noronha, UN Assistant Secretary General, UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) New York Office and Mr. Jamil Ahmad, Director; Ms. Mara Murillo, Senior Programme Officer; Ms. Isabella Marras, Senior Programme Officer; Ms. Carla Calistri, ASG Head of Office</strong></td>
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## Tuesday, 18 July 2023

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<tr>
<td>08.45-09.45</td>
<td><strong>Meeting with Bloomberg Philanthropies</strong></td>
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<td>11.00-11.45</td>
<td><strong>Meeting with Ms Cristina Duarte, USG for Africa and former finance minister from Cap Verde</strong></td>
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| 11.50-12.55 | **Optional**  
Parliamentary Forum at the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: The mid-point toward the SDGs: taking stock of parliamentary action, organised by Inter-Parliamentary Union  
Panel “Beyond GDP: measuring and valuing what matters to people and the planet”, **Petros KOKKALIS**, MEP, speaker for the EP |
| 12.15-12.45 | **Meeting with co-facilitator of the HLPF political declaration, H.E. Mr Fergal Mythen, Ambassador & Permanent Representative of the Republic of Ireland to the United Nations** |
Speaking MEPs: Tomas Tobé, Udo Bullmann, Catherine Chabaud |
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<td>Meeting with Mr Paul Skoczylas, Deputy Director, World Food Programme (WFP), accompanied by Ms. Selly Muzammil, Ms. Marina Garia Real and Mr. Moise Ballo, WFP Partnership Officers; and Lucas Tavares, Senior Liaison officer, UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)</td>
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**Wednesday, 19 July 2023**

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<td>Meeting with Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen, Spanish Presidency and Civil Society Organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.45-11.22</td>
<td>Presentation of the EU Voluntary Review</td>
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<td>11.15-12.00</td>
<td>Optional: Voluntary national reviews <em>(other countries)</em></td>
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<td>13.00-14.30</td>
<td>EU Side event “Delivering the SDGs: revitalised partnerships with the EU” Tomas Tobé, EP speaker</td>
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<td>Meeting with the PGA Youth Fellows</td>
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<tr>
<td>17.00-18.00</td>
<td>Closing Session of the HPLF</td>
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