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**ESDN Conference 2014**

**A renewed policy framework for sustainable  
development**

**The international SD agenda and its impact on Europe**

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**Conference Proceedings**



**ESDN**

**European Sustainable Development Network**

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**The European Sustainable Development Network**

(ESDN) is an informal network of public administrators and other experts who deal with sustainable development strategies and policies. The network covers all 28 EU Member States, plus other European countries. The ESDN is active in promoting sustainable development and facilitating the exchange of good practices in Europe and gives advice to policy-makers at the European and national level.

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## Introduction

The ESDN Conference 2014 was entitled “*A renewed policy framework for sustainable development – The international SD agenda and its impact on Europe*” and mainly reflected on how the UN process impacts the EU and national level with regards to sustainable development. Moreover, the conference considered the role of National SD Strategies in the context of current socio-economic and environmental policy challenges.

The ESDN Conference 2014 took place in **Rome, Italy on 6-7 November 2014**, and was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Italian EU Presidency. In total, **67 participants from 22 countries** (21 European countries and Egypt) attended the conference.

The aim of the annual ESDN conferences was to facilitate the exchange of experiences and knowledge between public administrators responsible for sustainable development strategies and policies at the EU, national and sub-national levels, with experts from National Sustainable Development Councils, members of the SD Observatory of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), NGOs and CSOs representatives, international organizations as well as other experienced SD experts and researchers.

This year’s ESDN Conference is the 13<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the network. Previous ESDN conferences were held in Vienna/Austria (2013), Copenhagen/Denmark (2012), Szentendre/Hungary (2011), Ghent/Belgium (2010), Prague/Czech Republic (2009), Paris/France (2008), Berlin/Germany (2007), Salzburg/Austria (2006), Windsor/UK (2005), Kinsale/Ireland (2004), Vienna/Austria (2003), and The Hague/Netherlands (2002). For a comprehensive documentation of all previous ESDN conferences, please go to the [ESDN homepage](#).

Similar to previous ESDN conferences, the 2014 event dealt with the conference themes in different formats: keynote presentations highlighted general issues and key aspects of the conference theme; panel discussions provided an overview of experiences and standpoints of different actors and institutions; in parallel group work, the participants discussed specific aspects of the conference theme in-depth; summaries of the results of the group work were used for immediate reactions and further discussions during the conference; and interactive formats throughout the conference allowed participants to reflect upon issues raised and to develop recommendations.

The **full documentation of the ESDN Conference 2014** can be found at the [ESDN homepage](#) and includes:

- the Conference Programme,
- the Conference Discussion Paper,
- the Conference Proceedings,
- the PowerPoint slides of the keynote presentations and all other presentations,
- the list of participants, and
- a photo documentation.

The Conference's objectives were explored in the following six sessions:

- Session 1: International sustainable development agenda**
- Session 2: Impacts of the international SD agenda on Europe**
- Session 3: Involving societal stakeholders in addressing international SD issues in Europe**
- Session 4: Governance for SD in Europe**
- Session 5: New challenges for national SD strategies in the context of current socio-economic/environmental challenges and international SD issues**
- Session 6: Making NSDSs 'fit for purpose'**

This Conference Proceedings report summarizes the presentations, discussions and group work results of the ESDN Conference 2014.

## Opening and orientation



**SILVIA VELO** (*Under-Secretary, Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea*) welcomed participants on behalf of the Italian EU Presidency and thanked the ESDN for organising the conference. She argued that the current situation with socio-economic challenges and international sustainable development (SD) activities is a defining moment for SD in general. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), she said, are particularly important as they represented a systemic and integrated way of approaching topics relevant for achieving SD. Furthermore, she mentioned the strong appreciation by the Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea of the recent European Council conclusions on the Greening of the European Semester. Furthermore, she mentioned resource efficiency and green development policy initiatives as very important steps of the EU. Finally, she highlighted the importance for Italy of the post-2015 agenda and, ideally, of an EU SDS review. In conclusion, she mentioned the NSDS experiences as a crucial for achieving SD in Italy.

**ELISABETH FREYTAG-RIGLER & WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** (*ESDN Co-chairs, Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management*) welcomed the participants on behalf of the ESDN Steering Group and introduced the ESDN Conference 2014. Firstly, **ELISABETH FREYTAG-RIGLER** described the ESDN, its activities and



initiatives, the main objectives of the ESDN, its work on SD issues in Europe, and its role in connecting policy-makers and experts from different levels across Europe on exchanging information and knowledge about SD. She then welcomed the European Council Conclusions from October 2014 and briefly reflected on the SDGs. **WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** especially highlighted the concept of governance for SD, while also expressing hopes for a new momentum for sustainable development in general and in Europe in particular. He argued for the chance of a 'new Agenda 21' in the wake of the SDGs with new targets, new mechanisms, and new structures. Finally, he welcomed and encouraged discussions and debates during and after the conference among all participants.



## Session 1: International sustainable development agenda

After the welcome addresses in the opening session, **Session 1** provided a solid overview on the international sustainable development agenda. Therefore, four keynote speakers framed the topic from very different perspectives, and outlined their views on the challenges and opportunities connected to the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

**MICHELE CANDOTTI** (*Chief of the Executive Office, UNEP*), in his keynote firstly introduced the viewpoint of the UNEP and provided the **context of the international SD agenda and the post-2015 agenda**. Firstly, he stressed the importance of the coming months for setting the scene for countries, partners and stakeholders, which would start developing their initiatives, actions and policies. For this reason, he pointed out that, although including already a very interesting level of details, negotiations on the SDGs were developing cautiously, slowly and attentively. Then, he described three main characteristics of the SDG package: (1) universality, (2) integration, and (3) convergence. With regard to *universality*, he mentioned the shift from a ‘development-oriented’ agenda to an SD agenda that would include also the developed countries. This sets a different framework and a different narrative in which all countries were globally united, developed countries together with developing countries. From his perspective, he then described the main features of universality: (i) the means of implementation, (ii) the need for accountability, and (iii) the decision on a new framework. Secondly, he discussed the work done and the effort on the *integration* of the three dimensions of sustainable development. Thirdly, he talked about the process of convergence of the MDGs agenda and the SD agenda. He also mentioned that the concept of ‘planetary boundaries’ was largely absent from the SDGs zero draft proposal. Moreover, although planetary boundaries represented a difficult topic for negotiations, he argued for the necessity of the concept’s inclusion as it refers to universal problems.



From the perspective of UNEP, he mentioned three main elements for improvement: 1) better integration of the three dimensions of SD; 2) elimination of contradictions between targets, goals and indicators; and 3) the need for coherence on the level of ambition and the definition of what is truly transformative in the new SDG agenda in terms of a new philosophical vision for the present and the future. Subsequently, he described the main three risks that he thought the SDGs process was facing: a) the possibility to lower the universality efforts; b) a polarisation between the absolute priority of the eradicating poverty agenda and the SD agenda; and c) a large dichotomy between common, but differentiated responsibilities in which means of implementation represented a crucial step (i.e. the necessity of restructuring capital and financial markets because resources are not infinite). Finally, he mentioned several conclusions, for instance: the need to set boundaries for negotiations and to broaden the means of implementation; the necessity of a stronger role and presence of Europe in terms of leaderships, united positions, and timing in international negotiations.

**RAPHAËL DANG** (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Development and member of the UN Open Working Group on SDGs) reflected on the **UN post-2015 agenda for sustainable development** and on the considerations raised by Candotti from UNEP. Firstly, he pointed out how his position was very close to UNEP's on many issues, such as on the universality of the post-2015 agenda or on the openness of the process in which not only governments, but also experts and civil society offer their contributions. He stressed the need for a shared and common vision for all countries to agree upon, especially in terms of universality, in order to start acting towards achieving SD. He then talked about 'exemplarity' as a crucial aspect of such a process, particularly to make sure that policies are coherent. In this context, he believes that the EU has a fundamental role, especially in terms of showing how the EU is implementing the SD agenda not only as a whole macro-region, but also within its Member States. Mr. Dang highlighted another innovative point of the post-2015 agenda, which, in his opinion, takes care of integrating the three dimensions of SD in a balanced way. He also welcomed the efforts taken towards those goals on the environment such as, for instance, the goal on SCP or on cities. Thus, he acknowledged the fact that a 'result' had already been achieved in the form of an SDGs zero draft, after a very difficult process of negotiations. Finally, due to the large number of SDGs and targets, he strongly emphasised the necessity for a common vision with a smaller number of main key dynamics (i.e. planetary boundaries), and the need for a clear focus on how to implement development policies and SD policies.



**FAROOQ ULLAH** (Executive Director, Stakeholder Forum) in his presentation on, "**The role of civil society in the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals**", firstly gave a brief introduction on the Stakeholder Forum and its main activities. He then emphasised the role of the new development agenda as an urgent priority for the international community, which, through new global sustainable development goals (SDGs), had the chance to reach the aim of eradicating poverty utilizing sustainable development. He also highlighted the need to further integrate development and environment agendas. In doing so, at the same time, he suggested drawing on learning from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and addressing multiple interlinked global challenges (e.g. climate change, resource scarcity, governance, equity and resilience). He then pointed out three main differences between the MDGs and the SDGs: (1) a shift from economic growth to sustainable development as the answer to the poverty problem; (2) a greater focus on the root causes of poverty (i.e. environmental degradation, resource consumption, inequalities, poor or lack of governance and rule of law); and (3) the global nature of SDGs and their universality in application (both for developing and developed countries). Therefore, he described what he called a twofold challenge in the design of the SDGs – to produce a truly universal framework capable of eradicating poverty whilst delivering sustainability – and in the delivery of the SDGs – because the implementation side was always the most difficult to achieve properly. In the context of delivery, Mr. Ullah emphasised, in particular, the involvement of stakeholders as a crucial necessity for implementing SDGs, but also their role in monitoring and review, and accountability. He then focused on the particular challenging issue of universality that he saw as a product of applicability, implementability, and transformationalism (the so-called 'universality triangle'). As particularly important focus area, he also mentioned the need for multi-





layered multi-dimensional governance (i.e. agencies, formal and informal networks). Finally, he described to the participants the Stakeholder Forum's programme, known as SD2015, which he portrayed as a multi-stakeholder engagement programme run by Stakeholder Forum and CIVICUS, in collaboration with UNDESA, with the intention to provide tools and opportunities for all stakeholders to give an input to the post-2015 process and help shape the SDGs, through five focus areas: raising awareness; increasing engagement; empowering stakeholders; coordinating advocacy; and strengthening governance.

**DIONYSIA-THEODORA AVGERINOPOULOU** (*Member of the Hellenic Parliament & Chair of the Committee of UN Affairs of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Greece*) as Chair of the Committee of UN Affairs of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, she brought some **reflections on the political dimension of the SDGs** to the conference participants, but also suggested an understanding of the SDGs in terms a human rights approach. Accordingly, she pointed out that SD went beyond linking environment and human development, as the advancement of democratic governance was also a central issue (i.e. effective, accountable and transparent institutions, participatory decision making, fighting corruption, rule of law). She also mentioned the topic of inclusiveness, as SD should affect all members of society. Finally, she highlighted that parliaments could play a key role in monitoring implementation of SDGs and in enhancing citizen participation.



After the keynote presentations in this session, an *interactive exchange* followed and participants were asked at each table to reflect on the topics raised in Session 1 and discuss the question '**What new policy issues and opportunities emerge from the international SD agenda for Europe?**'. Several issues were raised and brought to the plenary and the ESDN Office clustered the key issues and presented them to the plenary:

- Firstly, as *general issues* participants suggested to 'look more into research and innovation policies', asked 'how to address financial and capital markets in relation to SDGs', and argued that the crucial topic of 'Planetary Boundaries seemed left out' from the discussion.
- A second cluster was discussed and found that '*governance of SDGs is crucial for EU*', especially in terms of monitoring, accountability and multi-level processes.
- A third cluster was identified with respect to the *implementation* point of view by agreeing on the necessity of clearly focusing on implementation.
- Then, the discussions highlighted *SDGs as strategic goals* in which policy coherence is a fundamental point to concentrate on.
- Also important for whole process was the '*inclusion of all stakeholders, especially civil society and citizens*' with two main messages: (i) the narrative and vision of SDGs should arrive at citizens, and (ii) consider more bottom-up initiatives.
- The last cluster was a message to the European Union in consideration of the *EU's role, its contribution and steering capacity on SDGs within EU and internationally*. In this respect three main points were raised: (i) the EU should increase its credibility and try to be a leader on SD issues; (ii) the EU should find its own SD goals for 2030; and, (iii) the EU should take an active role to renew the currently outdated EU SDS, also considering that the Europe 2020 strategy is too EU-centric.

## Session 2: Impacts of the international SD agenda on Europe

**PAOLO SOPRANO** (Director, Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea) in his keynote, **“The Italian EU Presidency’s agenda for addressing international SD issues – SDGs and their impact on European SD policy frameworks”**, briefly introduced the Rio+20 follow-up actions and mentioned several initiatives and reports: (i) Report of the Open-ended Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals; (ii) Report of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts on Sustainable Development Financing; (iii) FoC of the UN Statistical Commission; (iv) Second Session of the High Level Political Forum; and, (v) First Session of the UN Environment Assembly of UNEP. Then, he focused on the path towards the post-2015 agenda. He criticised the quantity of targets, but, at the same time, welcomed the inclusion of the environmental dimension not only across goals, but also through the targets by mentioning some examples from the list of targets. Afterwards, Mr. Soprano pointed to three key missing pieces of a post-2015 agenda: (1) the necessity of a strong narrative; (2) a discourse on monitoring, review and accountability; and (3) an agreement on means of implementation and a global partnership. Finally, he described several initiatives undertaken by the Italian EU Presidency. Firstly, he mentioned an informal Joint Meeting of EU Ministers of Environment and Ministers of Labour held in Milan, in July 2014, to discuss and address the crucial theme of green jobs in the context of a shift towards the green economy. Secondly, he mentioned the European Council Conclusions on Greening the European Semester and the Europe 2020 Strategy of the 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014. Thirdly, although he said this was still to be approved, he greeted the European Council Conclusions on ‘A transformative post-2015 agenda’.



**LOUIS MEULEMAN** (Coordinator European Semester, DG Environment, European Commission) in his keynote, **“The EU’s strategic SD frameworks in response to the international SD agenda – What is the impact on SD governance and Greening the Semester?”**, initially talked about the main dimensions of the Europe 2020 Strategy and emphasized the role of its monitoring and reporting process, known as the ‘European Semester’. Moreover, he noted that the Europe 2020 Strategy has not completely replaced the EU SDS of 2006 and pointed out that opinions on this issue were still differing between stakeholders. He then highlighted several positive developments on SD that happened in 2013 and 2014. In terms of policy guidance from the EU, Mr. Meuleman emphasized the following points: 1) the 7<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme; 2) the ‘Circular Economy’ Communication; 3) the Waste Package; 4) the ‘Green Action Plan for SMEs’ Communication; 5) the ‘Sustainable Buildings’ Communication; 6) the forthcoming Europe 2020 review; and, 7) the forthcoming Communication on the SDGs. He also pointed out two positive developments related to the Italian EU Presidency: the first informal meeting between national Labour and Environment Ministers held in Milan on July 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, and the Environment Council conclusions on *Greening the Semester and the Europe 2020 review* on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2014. Apart from these mentioned positive



developments, he argued that it was very difficult to predict what the new EU Commission would do in respect to SD issues.

Mr. Meuleman then focused on the relation between the EU and the SDGs to be decided in 2015. In this regard, he raised the question on the possibility of a connection to the European Semester and its key steps. He also emphasised the idea of ‘Greening the Semester’ with the objective of supporting the transition to the green economy through tackling resource challenges and dependency of imports, creating green and decent jobs, while working towards a healthier and cleaner environment. He also emphasised the economic and political rationales behind this transition, which in his opinion needed (i) better data, (ii) better alliances, and (iii) policy coherence, through the involvement of all actors involved in SD and through environmental, economic and social governance. From an environment perspective, he outlined three key priority areas: 1) Environmental Tax Reform, the phasing out of Environmental Harmful Subsidies and a shift from taxes on labour to taxes on resources; 2) circular economy, resource efficiency, waste, etc.; and 3) skills and jobs. Finally, Mr. Meuleman suggested two questions for further discussions: a) What are the pros and cons of integrating SDG implementation for EU Member States with the European Semester process of governance? b) What can be used at the global SDG implementation level from EU experiences with the Semester as multi-level/actor/sector/scalar governance process?

**FRITZ GEBHARD** (*Eurostat*) in his presentation on **“Basic elements for a comprehensive SDG monitoring framework”** offered several experiences from assessing the work done by Eurostat in assessing Sustainable Development Indicators (SDIs) in Europe through the two widely known monitoring reports on the EU SDS and on the Europe 2020 Strategy. He focused on the construction of a comprehensive SDG monitoring framework, and outlined several methodological aspects and operational aspects. He argued for a flexible structure of targets and indicators in order to be able to integrate regional/national situations and data availabilities. He then focused on the challenges of the post-2015 agenda monitoring process by highlighting two main points: 1) an expected large number of indicators; and, 2) the enhancement of statistical capacities and exploration of new data sources. Finally, he offered two key messages as concluding remarks. On the one hand, he emphasized that an effective, widely used, comprehensive SDG monitoring framework would provide essential support in order to achieve the SDGs. On the other hand, he argued that the construction of a SDG monitoring framework would consist in an iterative process with the involvement of many different organisations and institutions.



**FABIOLA RICCARDINI** (*Italian National Institute of Statistics – ISTAT*), in her keynote, **“Sustainability of wellbeing, the case of BES for Italy: between past observations and forward looking models, how official measures can be used”**, touched upon four main topics: 1) the Italian National framework - Equitable and Sustainable Wellbeing; 2) the BES – Sustainability Framework and its indicators; 3) ISTAT actions in the international framework (i.e. UNECE-EUROSTAT-OECD task force – CES; OWG on SDGs); and, 4) next steps towards well-being modelling



framework. First, she gave an overview of the BES, an Italian project to measure equitable and sustainable well-being born of a joint initiative of CNEL (National Council Economy and Labour) and ISTAT (National Institute for statistics). She described the project as part of the international debate on "GDP and beyond", and emphasized BES's main idea that economic parameters alone were inadequate to evaluate the progress of societies and should be complemented by social and environmental information, and by measures of inequality and sustainability. She then reported about the shared approach with social representatives as one of the main characteristics (i.e. top-down and bottom-up in the same process). The BES, she said, was considering 12 dimensions of wellbeing: 1) health; 2) education and training; 3) work and life balance; 4) economic well-being; 5) social relationships; 6) politics and institutions; 7) security; 8) subjective well-being; 9) landscape and cultural heritage; 10) environment; 11) research and innovation; and, 12) quality of services. She explained how the BES project had depicted the Italian reference framework through which the sustainable well-being can be measured and monitored by looking at social, economic and environmental phenomena and taking into consideration governance. Afterwards, she outlined the relationship between the BES and the international framework. With respect to SDGs, she mentioned that the work on the indicator framework and discussion of suitable indicators started within the statisticians group of Friends of the Chair (FOC) in charge of identifying the most suitable SD indicators among the official measures.

A **working group session** followed where participants in table-groups exchanged ideas and perspectives while reflecting on the question **"What could be the role of the EU in steering European and national SDG implementation?"** After the working group discussions on the tables, the debate was opened to the plenary and group results were collected and further discussed. We provide the results collected in the following box 1.1.

**Box 1.1: Group work results: Role of the EU in steering European & national SDG implementation**

|   |
|---|
| 1) Be an <b>"added value" rather than "added bureaucracy"</b> , and be a <b>mediator between global process and Europe</b> and viceversa, to show a <b>future-oriented leadership</b> (i.e. decent jobs, innovation, social inclusion, cohesion among members, etc.) sharing best practices |
| 2) <b>EU semester as a tool for implementing SDGs</b> (+ show-casing)   |
| 3) <b>Positive cherry picking</b> (it's hard to communicate the huge quantity of goals and targets. EU should start key main dynamics)  |
| 4) <b>Governance structures</b> in a multi-level, multi-structural, multi-regional system   |
| 5) More <b>democratic, participatory approaches</b>   |
| 6) <b>Facilitating, coordinating polycentric SD implementation</b>  |
| 7) Integrated approach through <b>policy coherence and efficiency</b> in three levels: Political, in between EU policies, in between existing mechanisms/indicators   |
| 8) <b>Coordination and dialogue among different stakeholders</b>  |
| 9) EU needs to have a <b>guiding role</b> : translate global goals into EU/National ones: Coordination task for European Commission Vice-president Timmermans, and use monitoring process of the European Semester to scrutinise for SDG implementation use                                 |
| 10) EU needs a <b>mechanism to implement SDGs</b> : maybe a <b>Europe 2020+</b>   |

## Session 3: Involving societal stakeholders in addressing international SD issues in Europe

The third session focused particularly on the involvement of societal stakeholders on SD issues in Europe. Four presentations explored this main issue and a moderated discussion among participants reflected on how to best involve societal stakeholders in European SD processes.

**MARIALUISA SAVIANO** (*Vice-President, Italian Association for Sustainability Science (IASS), Italy*) in her keynote, “**The role and involvement assigned to businesses in the post 2015 process**”, firstly presented the Italian Association for Sustainability Science (IASS) as a scientific platform to develop a multi- and trans-disciplinary body of knowledge for sustainability science, and as an interface between policy-makers, academia, businesses and societal stakeholders to develop sustainable solutions. She then described the two major working groups



on education for SD; and on academia-industry collaboration for SD. She also pointed out how the study of models was used to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange between university, industry and government, further emphasizing the role of social intermediaries (i.e. voluntary groups, associations, etc.) to address SD. While addressing the main topic of her presentation, Saviano focused on four key questions from the perspective of businesses: (1) What is the relation between MDGs and SDGs from a business perspective?; (2) How have businesses been involved in the SDG development?; (3) How important are SDGs to give orientation for the business world?; and, (4) What can businesses do to foster SDG implementation?. She then emphasized the role of businesses as a ‘key engine to address SDGs’. Thus, in such a framework, she argued that businesses should accomplish an on-going paradigm change from traditional CSR-based compliance schemes or philanthropic initiatives to ‘inclusive and sustainable business models’. Finally, she touched upon what she defined as the ‘great challenge of a New Global Partnership’ arguing that interaction among different-minded actors across the world would produce the desired outcome only if dominant schemes would find appropriate contexts and conditions for developing synergistic (or at least not conflicting) interaction at local level, and, if all key actors really intend to be involved in the helix vortex of SD by contributing to the achievement of shared goals. In doing so, she said, the ‘top roles’ in the upcoming agenda should find a simple way to shorten the ‘distance’ between plan and action in order to reach the largest part at the ‘bottom’ of the system – *people in everyday life* – where the greatest challenge of SD takes place.

**STAFFAN NILSSON** (*Member European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the EESC’s SD Observatory*) offered his thoughts on **SDGs and the post-2015 agenda in the European Union from a CSO perspective**.

Firstly, he briefly described the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) as a body that represents different civil society organisations and other stakeholders, and the EESC’s SD Observatory. He then argued that climate issues must be a central part of the long term SDGs perspective. He also commented negatively the fact that the EU SDS was not being renewed. Then, he mentioned the necessity of having coherence between





different policy strategies in order to have successful outcomes. Finally, he pointed out how civil society could contribute to the SDGs negotiations and argued that, at the end of the day, SD would be implemented at the citizen level, thus, citizens should push decisions and support implementation. He also put forward the idea to organise a meeting of all civil society organisations in Europe to reflect upon capacities and strategies for SDG implementation.

**MASSIMO PALLOTTINO** (*Concorde Italy/GCAP*) also reflected on **SDGs and the post-2015 agenda in the European Union from a CSO perspective** and

tried to suggest answers to three main questions: 1) What is needed in Europe to implement SDGs?; 2) What can the CSO community contribute to finalizing and implementing SDGs?; and 3) How important is CSO/stakeholder participation in SD policy in Europe in general?. Firstly, he presented his organization as a coordination platform for Italian Civil Society networks that has a cooperation with CONCORD Europe (i.e. the European



Task Force/Beyond 2015 Europe) and with the Global Beyond 2015 Campaign. Then, he touched upon the main concerns towards the topic of SD implementation and mentioned, for instance, that it was difficult to follow such a fragmented process. He criticised the ‘defensive’ debate, which was generating many difficulties in reaching a ‘courageous’ consensus. He also expressed concerns with regard to policy coherence and to the ‘silo effect’. Thus, he argued for a transformative agenda in which SDGs represented an opening towards new opportunities and to ensure public opinion support. Finally, he emphasised the necessity of ensuring real participation through a simpler policy process.

**SAULI ROUHINEN** (*Ministry of Environment, Finland*) reflected on the

theme ‘**Involving societal stakeholders in a national SD strategy process**’ and offered his experience with the Finnish ‘Society’s Commitment for SD’ to the conference participants. Firstly, he explained how Finland changed the approach from an SD strategy to a social contract: a societal commitment in the form of a long-term visionary framework with a common understanding and shared vision. He also described that this new approach then resulted in a short document of only seven pages that is



meant to clarify the idea of SD as a political idea and a common understanding with the ability of fostering policy coherence. He also explained the eight shared objectives of this approach, which was more oriented to social objectives and, at the same time, able to take into account all three dimensions of sustainability: 1) Equal prospects for well-being; 2) A participatory society for citizens; 3) Sustainable work; 4) Sustainable local communities; 5) A carbon-neutral society; 6) An economy that is resource-wise; 7) Lifestyles that respect the carrying capacity of nature; and, 8) Decision-making that respects nature. Finally, he touched upon the so-called ‘indicator’ and the sustainable development indicators developed in Finland.

The presentations in this session were followed by a *moderated discussion* on the questions '**How can we best involve societal stakeholders in European SD processes (e.g. SDGs)?**' and '**What is required to create effective stakeholder involvement?**' Several key issues were raised during this discussion:

- Firstly, there was a general appreciation of the Finnish approach and its society's commitments that showed how to give society a clear long-term policy perspective.
- Then, participants discussed the Aarhus Convention and argued for more efforts on the implementation side of SD policy.
- The stakeholder dialogue in Switzerland was mentioned that involved more than 200 stakeholders and organised several events. It shows how it remains key to include all the relevant stakeholders, also involving them in the implementation phase, but at the same time to decide and to clearly set the limits of participation ('open and honest participation').
- Another example was raised on the experiences in Wales (UK) where a new Commission for Future Generations was created with a large involvement of stakeholders.
- Finally, two considerations were put forward in the debate: on the one hand, participants raised questions over the necessity a new EU SDS; on the other hand, it was argued that the SD community was finding itself in some kind of bubble as the SDGs were being considered a minor issue for governments in this time of crises.

## Session 4: Governance for SD in Europe

Session 4 included a panel discussion to exchange views on the theme ‘**Governance for SD in Europe**’. Each speaker had a 5-minute opening statement, followed by a discussion among panellists, and a discussion with the audience.



**ELISABETH FREYTAG-RIGLER** (*ESDN Steering Group, Austria*) reflected on SD governance in general and expressed the need for ‘more Europe’, not only in term of funds, but more in terms of leadership. She then strongly emphasized the role and the need of focusing on SD implementation. Also, she questioned the view of the Europe 2020 Strategy being an SD strategy as, she argued, an SD strategy could not have economic growth as its final goal, due to natural and physical limits. On the contrary, environmental and social aspects needed to be included more prominently. Then, she pointed out that she could not see the political will of European politicians to implement SDGs through the Europe 2020 Strategy. Despite these considerations, she questioned the chance of having a new EU SDS as a viable alternative, because she considered the greening of the Europe 2020 Strategy as a more effective way forward. She then reflected on the role of the new European Commission, of national governments and of stronger stakeholder participation. Finally, she challenged the necessity of a large quantity of SDGs and targets, as this increased the challenge of communicating clear messages to a larger audience.

**SILVIA DONATO** (*Policy Analyst Climate Action and Resource Efficiency, DG Research & Innovation, European Commission*) reflected, in particular, on the role of science, technology and innovation in the context of SD that she considered as usually overlooked. Thus, she argued that technology was not just a tool, but also needed to be seen as part of a system, hence the necessity to bring out technologies from academia to the market. Then, she focused on the need for a transformative agenda and emphasized the role of research and innovation as crucial for a new SD agenda. Finally, she mentioned the EU’s Research Programme ‘Horizon 2020’, that funds research and innovation projects, as an important tool in this direction: thus, she pointed out how 60% of the Horizon 2020 budget should go in support of SD issues.

**STAFFAN NILSSON** (*Member European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the EESC’s SD Observatory*) mostly emphasized the role of participation of civil society in the process of the post-2015 agenda. In this regard, and also responding to Donato, he argued that civil society did not



always base everything on knowledge. Finally, he suggested that something like a ‘Local Agenda 2020’ could be an innovative way to engage local stakeholders and civil society for more SD.

**MIRANDA SCHREURS** (Professor at the Free University of Berlin and Chair of the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC)) reflected on the whole SDGs process and argued for the need to create something more than only establishing new indicators at the European level. Thus, she emphasized how important it was to keep the dialogue alive by reaffirming the vision of sustainability as she was seeing an on-going weakening of the interest in SD, especially after the economic and financial crisis. Despite this, she also gave credit to the EU Commission for focusing on SD issues and for keeping up the EU leadership in this context. Then, she also pointed out that local activities were key and that multi-level reinforcement was crucial. Therefore, she reflected on how to facilitate that multi-level reinforcement and suggested that a top-down strategy needed to be complemented by bottom-up initiatives. Finally, she concentrated on the monitoring processes involved with sustainability governance.

During the **plenary discussion**, several issues were raised and agreement was found on a number of issues such as, for instance, the *need for better multi-level governance* where all levels get considered, from the global level, through the EU level and the national, to the local level where the implementation really happens. Some issues were also debated, such as, for instance, *trust on technological fixes to SD problems*. One participant commented on the role of the *European Union that should not only take a leadership role but also set SDGs at the EU level and set up a sort of ‘2030 SD strategy’ (or longer) for the EU*. Also mentioned was the need of understanding a *fast-changing society in contrast with slower-paced governments*; in this sense, it was noted that citizens represented key players, together with the media and social media in particular. Finally, it was suggested for the EU to cooperate more with African countries with regard to sustainable development.

Following the panel and the Q&A, **PAOLO SOPRANO** (Director, Italian Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea) offered a **resume of the first conference day**. Among the main issues explored during the first day, particular emphasis was given to issues like universality; participation at all levels; policy coherence; integration and transformation; importance of concepts like planetary boundaries and ‘beyond GDP’ debates; means of implementation, particularly in terms of financial means and markets; accountability and responsibility at all levels; monitoring and review processes; equity, equality and well-being; governance for SD; the role for the Europe 2020 Strategy, the EU SDS and the European semester governance cycle in the post-2015 agenda; and the need for science policy interface and bottom-up approaches.

Finally, **STEFAN BAUERNFEIND** (German Federal Chancellery), **STÉPHANE BERNAUDON** (French Ministry of Sustainable Development), and **WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** (Austrian Ministry of Environment) announced the official launch of the **European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW)** by the ESDN to the conference participants and encouraged all of them to take part of it. They explained that the ESDW will encourage initiatives, events and activities that foster SD during one particular week in 2015: 30 May-6 June. The ESDW aims to show how people engage with SD in an innovative way with the intention to learn from this engagement and to provide additional momentum and visibility for SD. It builds on three existing national SD Weeks in Austria, France and

Germany, and invites all other European countries to promote SD activities during this week. More information will be available soon and distributed to all ESDN member and partner networks.

## Session 5: New challenges for national SD strategies in the context of current socio-economic/environmental challenges and international SD issues

Day two had a slight different aim and tried to focus on the national level and to connect the discussion to the experiences of Member States with their National Sustainable Development Strategies. Moreover, the attention was devoted to current socio-economic and environmental challenges and their relation with SD policies.

**UMBERTO PISANO and KATRIN LEPUSCHITZ** (ESDN Office @ Institute for Managing Sustainability, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria) opened the second day of the ESDN Conference 2014 with the keynote '**National SD strategy process in Southern and Eastern Europe in the context of current socio-economic and environmental challenges**'. Firstly, Umberto Pisano gave a brief overview on two studies undertaken and published by the ESDN Office in October 2014 ([ESDN Quarterly Report No. 34](#) and the [ESDN Case Study No. 19](#)) with the intention to offer participants



information on recent developments in SD policies in Southern and Central Eastern EU Member States. Then, he pointed out the slightly different focus of the two studies: while the case study on Southern EU Member States focused on socio-economic and environmental challenges after the crises, the study on CEE countries looked more into NSDSs developments in light of their 10-year anniversary of the EU accession. Afterwards, he presented an overview on socio-economic challenges and environmental challenges prepared with the help of important Eurostat SD indicators: real GDP per capita, unemployment rate, inequality of income distribution, GHGs emissions, and share of renewable energy. Finally, among several recent developments included in the studies, he emphasised that, despite of the fact that no review of the EU SDS is currently foreseen at EU level, several EU Member States – especially in CEE countries – are still very active and prepare renewed versions of their NSDSs. Katrin Lepuschitz mainly focused on the results of the interviews undertaken with SD coordinators for the preparation of the mentioned ESDN studies. First, she highlighted that the EU SD policy framework has an influence on NSDS processes in terms of policy guidance, definition of objectives, and SD awareness raising. She then pointed out that, although the EU SDS was not seen as a major steering document anymore, it often served as justification for NSDS processes. Secondly, she provided several examples of the challenges addressed by national SD policies in the EU Member States (i.e. public debt, high unemployment, biodiversity loss) and presented the experiences of countries in addressing them. Thirdly, she focused on the role of NSDSs in steering different policies and pointed out how NSDSs work as (i) 'umbrella' strategies or long-term guiding tools for national sectoral strategies and programmes, (ii) consensual frameworks and coordinating and advisory tools for the preparation of sectoral policies, (iii) awareness raising tools for society and politics, or as (iv) tools to take care of the EU and international commitments. Finally, four reflection questions were offered to participants for further debate: a) Should we link the EU SD framework with EU cohesion funds and NSDSs objectives?; b) How to give national challenges an 'SD approach and solution'?; c) How to develop a

systemic approach to guarantee coherence of NSDS?; and d) Consider checking national policy initiatives against SD objectives.

Five presentations followed and explored the theme '**NSDSs as tools for addressing current socio-economic/environmental challenges and international SD issues**' with the main intention of offering different perspectives and practical experiences from Southern and Eastern European EU Member States. Each speaker addressed and showed some general NSDS experiences and learning points, presented how they addressed current socio-economic and environmental challenges, reflected on how the SDGs impact on SD policy their country/region, and how SDGs would also shape their future NSDS work.

**FERNANDO DÍE ORTEGA** (*Cabinet of the State Secretary for Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment, Spain*) described the **Spanish experience with the NSDS** and recent developments with SD policies. Firstly, he mentioned that, recently, the main responsibility in the NSDS process passed from the Ministry of Environment to the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs due to Rio+20 process. Then, he gave an overview on the Spanish economic situation by mentioning its important growth until 2008, followed by a big decline. He also added that Spain was trying to consolidate its fiscal position and stimulate economic growth, although with slower results than expected. With regard to environmental challenges, he mentioned the recent decrease in GHGs emissions and an increase in renewables. Then, he described the Spanish situation in the context of the green economy, emphasizing a higher awareness in the Spanish population and a higher participation of big companies to protect the environment (for instance, through the creation of a business green growth group). He also reflected on the SDGs process and content, and showed briefly how Spain was performing on those areas. Finally, he pointed out that the EU SDS was a very important input for Spanish SD policy-making in the past, but that recently, the EU 2020 Strategy took its place.



**ATILA URAS** (*Programme Officer, United Nations Environment Programme*) described the **experience made within the review of the Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development (MSSD)**. Firstly, he described the Mediterranean Strategy on Sustainable Development that, prepared by the advisory body MCSD, was adopted in 2005 by all contracting parties to the Barcelona Convention. He pointed out that the MSSD provided an integrative policy framework for achieving the vision of a sustainable Mediterranean region as well as for the deployment of sustainable development policies of riparian countries. He also explained that the MSSD was a regional response to the global agenda about SD and outlined the MSSD's framework and the monitoring process, which, based on 34 priority indicators, allowed for periodic regional assessments. Then, he highlighted several results from the "Assessment on the implementation of the Mediterranean strategy for sustainable development (MSSD) for the period 2005 – 2010" undertaken in 2011. For instance, he argued that some targets of the MSSD were not relevant anymore, and that the MSSD should put more emphasis in emerging areas such as the green economy, climate change adaptation and mitigation which were not enough treated in the initial version. Then, he outlined the roadmap for the new MSSD that should be submitted for formal approval by the Contracting



Parties to the Barcelona Convention at their 19<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (Greece, 2015). He then emphasized the vision behind the new MSSD where the Mediterranean was seen as a prosperous and peaceful region in which people enjoy a high quality of life and where sustainable development takes place within the carrying capacity of healthy ecosystems". Finally, he suggested a comparison among the recommended themes in the new MSSD with the proposed SDGs. For instance, among others, he noted that the second theme in the MSSD 'Natural resources rural development, and food' was mirrored in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> SDGs.

**EILI LEPIK** (*Strategy Office, State Chancellery of Estonia*) described the **experience with the NSDS in Estonia**. Firstly, she briefly described the Estonian NSDS and its four goals: 1) viability of the Estonian Cultural Space; 2) growth of Welfare; 3) coherent society; and, 4) ecological balance. Then, she described the lessons learned with the NSDS processes, such as, for instance, raising awareness, the need for clear implementation mechanism (i.e. strategic development plans), using horizontal coordination mechanism, and the ability of NSDS as long-term future vision. She also emphasized the SD indicators for monitoring and the definition of the content of the Estonian NSDS (renewed indicator set, next report in 2015). Then, she focused on new challenges and highlighted: (i) a changed economic, environmental and demographic situation; (ii) new themes for NSDS (i.e. energy security, climate change, resource efficiency); (iii) Sustainable Development Goals and NSDS; and, (iv) the review of Estonian NSDS, for which discussions already started.



**FRANTIŠEK KOLOČÁNY** (*Cross-Cutting Priorities Department, Slovak Republic Government Office*) reported about the **NSDS experience in Slovakia**. He briefly presented the Slovak NSDS (approved by the Government in 2001 and by the Parliament in 2002) and its main objectives. Then, he presented the 'Action Plan for Sustainable Development 2005-2010', which focused on: 1) implementation of SD principles in sectoral policies; 2) use of environmentally friendly technologies; 3) use of financial instruments to promote SD principles; 4) urban renewal; 5) reduction of waste generation and reduction of energy intensity of the Slovak economy; 6) development of information society; 7) protection and rational use of natural resources; 8) education for SD; and 9) sustainable mobility. He then described the so-called 'Horizontal priority SD in the 2007-2013 programming period', which had four main specific objectives: (i) increasing economic prosperity (e.g. reducing energy and material intensity of the economy and increasing use of renewable energy sources); (ii) increasing quality of the environment (e.g. rational use of natural resources, mitigation of climate change consequences); (iii) social solidarity and inclusion (e.g. reduction of unemployment rate); and (iv) balanced regional development (e.g. strengthening the overall economic, social and cultural potential of regions). Finally, he concluded by outlining several current initiatives: First, he spoke about macro-regional strategies (i.e. Danube Strategy) as opportunities for sustainable development in a regional context, not only within national boundaries. Secondly, he touched upon a new national SD document under preparation as a result of a new Partnership Agreement. Lastly, he argued that the above mentioned horizontal principle Sustainable Development should be included in all operational programmes.



**KRISTA KAMPUS** (Senior Adviser & Head Baltic 21 Unit, Council of the Baltic Sea States Secretariat (CBSS)) described the ‘**CBSS-Baltic 21 Strategy on Sustainable Development 2010-2015**’. She described the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) as an overall political forum for regional inter-governmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region (11 states of the Baltic Sea Region including Russia, Norway and Iceland as well as the European Commission), steered by representatives of the BSR Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Then, she mentioned that the CBSS SD Strategy was endorsed at the 16<sup>th</sup> CBSS Ministerial Session in Oslo in June 2011, but that it was currently under the revision. She pointed out that the strategy aimed at supporting the transition of the Baltic Sea Region into a sustainable and green region, at communicating best practices and at assisting in the development of innovative practices. She also presented several projects that were developed within the strategy that she referred to as BALTIC 21 Lighthouse Projects. These projects, she said, had several results in terms of policy reviews, analyses and strategies (i.e. BSR Climate Change Adaptation Strategy) and in terms of new cooperation platforms and networks (i.e. BSR Climate Change Dialogue Platform). Finally, she described the new CBSS Long-term priorities for the future and outlined three major tasks for the CBSS Baltic 21: 1) the development of actions towards green and low carbon economy in accordance with the new SDG goals; 2) mainstreaming climate change adaptation across sector policies; and 3) the development of a new sustainable development agenda for the BSR with specific goals post 2015.



After the keynotes, the participants in a **Working Group session** discussed the questions: ‘**Are the NSDSs effective tools for addressing current socio-economic/ environmental challenges as well as SDGs?**’ and ‘**What is their added-value, what is still needed?**’. Each group was asked to discuss on both topics and write down on moderation cards one key issue for the first theme and two key issues for the second theme that were then collected by the ESDN Office and displayed on flipcharts for all participants. After that, a **moderated discussion** in the plenary followed on the key results of the table discussions. We show the results in the following **Box 2.1** and **Box 2.2**.

**Box 2.1: Group work results on NSDSs as tools for addressing challenges and SDGs**

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|---|
| 1) Mutual <b>commitment of different stakeholders</b> and sectors to the SD transformation; also increased <b>ownership of strategy by stakeholders</b> |
| 2) <b>Networking &amp; coordination</b> to ensure <b>horizontal and vertical coherence</b> among sectors  |
| 3) NSDSs can <b>raise awareness</b> (e.g. Estonia); <b>partnership government-civil society</b>   |
| 4) <b>Long-term political guidance</b> and awareness  |
| 5) Policy coherence, <b>vision and process orientation</b>  |
| 6) <b>Integration</b> , participation and <b>holistic umbrella</b>  |

### Box 2.2: Group work results on added-value of NSDSs

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|--|
| 1) <b>Dialogue multi-stakeholders/levels</b>   |
| 2) <b>Linking international and national SD agendas</b>  |
| 3) <b>Stronger cross-sectoral integration</b> and <b>political ownership</b>                           |
| 4) Channelled <b>participation of 'ordinary' people</b>  |
| 5) Implementation of the <b>post-2015 agenda domestically</b>  |
| 6) Continuous <b>collaboration, coordination and cooperation (3c model)</b>                            |
| 7) Mechanisms of <b>mutual accountability and review</b>   |
| 8) <b>Concrete action plans</b> (transectoral)   |
| 9) <b>Clear monitoring system</b> ensuring coherence of other policies with the vision/goals of NSDS   |
| 10) <b>Clear implementation system</b> : (i) who is doing what, (ii) involvement of local stakeholders |



## Session 6: Making NSDs 'fit for purpose'

A panel discussion followed and opened Session 6. Five panellists reflected and discussed on **how to make NSDs 'fit for purpose' in the context of current socio economic/environmental challenges and international SD issues.**



**WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** (*ESDN Steering Group, Austria*) briefly touched upon the current governance machinery in place that was showing conflicting targets. He suggested a focus on how to manage a society in transition towards a more sustainable pathway, especially in a time of conflicting interests, in which the machinery in place did not seem 'fit' for such a purpose. In this regard, he described different levels of maturity in developing governance machineries to implement the SD agenda in various countries. He criticised that current forms of stakeholder integration are often done in a top-down manner, whereas he emphasised the need for a better environment for bottom-up approaches with the intention of engaging stakeholders and civil society in an appropriate framework to provide more opportunities for participation. Right after, he highlighted the necessity to revive societal and political commitment, also through the use of indicators for political decision-making and by promoting political success stories. Finally, he focused on the appropriateness and the revision of the governance machinery, especially in terms of good governance tools.

**PAOLO SOPRANO** (*Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea, Italy*) argued for a strong commitment by politicians and pointed to the need for a renewed Italian NSDS that needed to be aligned with those changes coming from international processes and the post-2015 agenda's new framework: in this respect, he said, SDGs will play a crucial role to align the national SD strategy to the developments in the international setting and will represent an important push on the governments and the society. He argued for a strong bottom-up process to be created on the demand side and on the public opinion in order to make the governments responsible and accountable for the SD strategies. In terms of implementation, he emphasised monitoring and review as crucial mechanisms. He also stressed the need to involve and engage the media with the intention of reaching public opinion. In this context, he also highlighted the involvement of the private sector and mentioned issues, such as poverty reduction and equity, which were felt also in



European countries. Finally, he stressed the need for policy coherence and policy integration with a Europe 'beyond-2020' strategy.

**FRANTIŠEK KOLOČÁNY** (*Cross-Cutting Priorities Department, Slovak Republic Government Office*) firstly reflected on the fact that NSDSs did not exist in isolation, but that they had to reflect national and local situations and, at the same time, had to be linked to the global level. He mentioned several crucial issues to be taken into consideration while preparing a new NSDS: Firstly, he considered the Europe 2020 Strategy, the position over an economic development seen more in terms of 'greening the economy and eco-innovation', and the position of the new European Commission towards an ideal revision of the EU SDS. Secondly, he mentioned the relation between NSDSs and SDGs, as SDGs should provide a new kind of vision but should also be realistic as we should implement them with ambition. Thirdly, he argued that in the development of new SD strategies and a potentially new EU SDS, one should reflect on the challenges that emerged with the economic crisis in 2009 and the political crisis in Ukraine: both crisis, he said, showed how important it is to look at alternative energy sources and try to make renewable energies cheaper.

**SAULI ROUHINEN** (*Ministry of the Environment, Finland*) highlighted the role of broad ownership of a NSDS by the whole society, business circles, church, policies and other stakeholders. He mentioned the need to find partners, and mentioned the Finnish example of the innovation fund SITRA as a future-oriented organisation that promoted Finland's competitiveness and the well-being of the Finnish people. Afterwards, he emphasised the necessity of policy coherence not only in government activities but also in the society at large. In this respect, he emphasised the need of a long process with all stakeholders to engage them in a vision and then in a societal commitment.

**STEFAN BAUERNEFIND** (*Federal Chancellery, Germany*) emphasised the urgency to find an overarching approach covering all three dimensions of SD, and argued for the post-2015 agenda as an enormous opportunity in that sense. He mentioned the work done in Germany as an example of continuity and management for SD policies, both in time and despite the change of several governments. He then suggested to look at international experiences and invite international experts to create evaluation circles to be used in peer reviews and to help finding new solutions. He also pointed out the necessity to have more vertical and horizontal integration mechanisms in place and reflected on how to combine them with the international, EU and local level. Finally, he argued for large stakeholders involvement and participation, also in regard to implementation.

From the plenary, several issues were raised during the discussion. For instance, several participants referred to the need for policy coherence and for better understanding the governance structures, also at the UN level, but also in terms of implementation and its relation with the non-binding nature of the SDGs.

**ELISABETH FREYTAG-RIGLER** and **WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** (*ESDN Co-chairs, Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management*) concluded the conference, thanked the Italian hosts and the ESDN Office for the organisations. They invited all participants to the next ESDN events, especially the ESDN Conference 2015.



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