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ESDN Conference 2012 –

Rio+20 and its implications for Sustainable Development Policy at the EU and national level

28-29 June 2012 in Copenhagen, Denmark

Conference Proceedings

European Sustainable Development Network

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The **European Sustainabel 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 27 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 European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) Conference 2012, "Rio+20 and its implications for Sustainable Development Policy at the EU and national level", took place in Copenhagen, Denmark on 28-29 June 2012. The conference was hosted by the Danish EU Presidency.

The aim of the annual ESDN conferences is 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, experts from National Sustainable Development Councils, members of the SD working group of the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC), members of the SD Observatory of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), NGO representatives as well as other experiences SD experts and researchers. In total, 63 participants from 21 countries attended the ESDN Conference 2012 (the list of participants can be found in the ESDN Conferences section at the ESDN website).

This year's ESDN Conference is the 11th annual conference of the network. Previous ESDN conferences were held in Szentendre/Hungary (2011), in 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.

The ESDN Conference 2012 had two main objectives:

- **To provide a platform for reflection regarding the Rio+20 conference results** and to discuss **their implications for SD objectives and SD governance** for the different political levels.
- To develop, together with the conference participants, **recommendations for implementing the Rio+20 results in practice**.

These objectives were explored in the following **five sessions**:

Session 1:	20 years of UNCSD and growing socio-economic challenges is Europe
Session 2:	Rio+20 results and their implications
Session 3:	Working groups – in-depth discussion of Rio+20 results & current crises and their implications for SD
Session 4:	Rio+20 and its implications – future needs and challenges
Session 5:	Recommendations for implementing Rio+20 results

Similar to previous ESDN conferences, the 2012 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; parallel working groups discussed specific aspects of the conference theme in-depth; summaries of the results of the working group discussions 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 2012 can be found at the ESDN homepage and includes:

- the Conference Programme,
- the Conference Discussion Paper,
- the Conference Proceedings,
- the Communique from the ESDN Conference 2012,
- the PowerPoint slides of the keynote presentations and all other presentations,
- the list of participants,
- a photo documentation, and
- video clips from the keynote presentations and panel discussions.

Welcome addresses

In his welcome address, **Claus Torp** *(Deputy Director General, Danish Environmental Protection Agency)* welcomed the conference participants on behalf of the Danish EU Presidency. First, he spoke about the Rio+20 Conference that took place the week before the ESDN Conference 2012. In this regard he stressed that, although the results were not as ambitious as many hoped, some 'stepping stones' for future development were established in Rio, especially regarding a general acceptance of the importance of a transition to a global green economy. Second, by referring to the fact that the Danish EU Presidency was coming to an end shortly after the ESDN Conference, he mentioned a few highlights of the Danish EU Presidency from an environmental perspective. One of the highest priorities during the Danish EU Presidency was the adoption of the Council Conclusions on the 7th Environmental Action Program (EAP). Mr. Torp mentioned that this ambition was met just 3 weeks before the ESDN Conference and briefly talked about the main elements of the Council Conclusions. Therefore, he stressed that, even in a time when the main focus of politicians is the recovery of economic growth, a success can be achieved on the need for and the main building blocks of ambitious environmental policy. Finally, he wished the conference participants an interesting discussion, especially by using the momentum that Rio+20 had created to move forward.

Wolfram Tertschnig *(ESDN Co-chair, Austrian Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management)* welcomed the conference participants on behalf of the ESDN Steering Group. He pointed out that 2012 marks the 10th anniversary of the ESDN. He then stressed that different perceptions were present about the Rio+20 Conference on the days after the event. One of the biggest challenges, he argued, was the need to reinvigorate political commitment at all levels, including the EU, where concrete actions for sustainable development are necessary. Then he delineated a few key points for the European actors: (i) the implementation of concrete actions to

achieve sustainable development; (ii) the importance of the national countries' performances on sustainable development; (iii) the need for concrete objectives, targets, governance structures; and (iv) the need of clear visions to be achieved. In relation to EU processes, he emphasised the option for ESDN to contribute to the upcoming EC Communication on the Rio+20 results. He also mentioned the revision of the Europe 2020 Strategy in 2013 that should aspire towards a better integration of an inclusive green economy and of inter-generational issues. Finally, he said that the conference should also be used to map the role of the ESDN in terms of new approaches to follow, new ideas and innovative contributions to sustainable development in Europe.

Session 1: 20 years of UNCSD and growing socio-economic challenges in Europe

After the welcome addresses and the overview on the conference topic in the introductory session, the **keynotes in Session 1** had the aim to provide a broad framing of, on the one hand, the road to Rio+20 and the challenges of SD governance and, on the other hand, the current socio-economic crises situation in Europe. Session 1 of the ESDN Conference 2011 included (a) two keynote presentations held by *William Lafferty* and *Stephan Schulmeister* and (b) a Q&A session with the keynoters. The PPT slides of the keynote presentations can be found in the ESDN Conferences section of the ESDN homepage.

William M. Lafferty *(ProSus Perspectives, Norway),* in his keynote "From Rio to Rio+20 - The ongoing challenge of integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in Europe", addressed several important issues of the general conference topic. First, he mentioned that to properly understand the Rio+20 Conference one must understand the road taken to Rio because it would set "parameters for assessing progress from Rio": the "doctrinal essence" of sustainable development emerged between 1968 and 1988 through a "dialectical" interchange within and between two parallel sets of opposing values: 1) the exploitation of nature vs the protection and conservation of nature (in virtually all nations); 2) the exploitation of the resources of "less-developed" ("Southern") nations by dominant "highly-developed" ("Northern") nations. The first dialectic has gradually evolved into an ongoing discourse on *ecological sustainability* while the second dialectic has continued to develop as a discourse on *global equity and universal standards of human development*. Then, Mr. Lafferty stressed that the conflicts within and between these two discourses led to the establishment by the United Nations of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1983, which led to the report *Our Common Future* (1987) – also known as Brundtland Report – that became the "single most authoritative source" for both understanding and normatively anchoring the concept of sustainable development. This document, he continued, provided the normative principles and analytic guidelines for both the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and the Rio Global Plan of Action – *Agenda 21*. Most interestingly, he emphasised that none of these documents have been significantly superceded by any subsequent international agreements on sustainable development –

including the "Outcome Document" of Rio+20. Moreover, mentioning the seven 'strategic imperatives' identified in the Brundtland Report, which require specific governing initiatives and goal-directed policy instruments that have not been clearly addressed, Mr. Lafferty stressed that also Rio+20 did not address properly the following crucial questions for both implementing and assessing the SD programme "What works? Where? When? and How?". After an assessment of the positive and negative aspects of the current situation after Rio+20, he proposed two main areas for consideration: (i) to *focus on improving governance for sustainable development,* looking especially to Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) and, (ii) to *reconstitute an ethical basis for SD in Europe*. Finally, Mr. Lafferty talked about 'substantive' implementation suggesting a strong reference to Gothenburg and not to Rio, with the aim of reaffirming the positive process.

Stephan Schulmeister *(Austrian Institute of Economic Research - WIFO)* in his presentation, "Euro crisis, growing imbalances and social ruptures in Europe - A critical perspective in the context of sustainable development", stated that the current crisis could be seen as the "fruit" of neoliberalism and finance capitalism. Following this argument, he then explained the differences between the two regimes of real capitalism and finance capitalism (Figure 1 below), how finance capitalism had prevailed over real capitalism in the recent past and how these two regimes behaved in time.

Figure 1 Differences between real capitalism and finance capitalism

	Real capitalism	**Finance capitalism**
Implicit coalition	*Labor & Real capital*	*Real capital & Finance capital*
Business/unions	*Corporatisms*	*Conflict*
State/market	*Complementary*	*Antagonistic*
Targets of economic policy	*Many: From full employment, high growth to social security and „fair" distribution*	*Price stability, „sound" public finances, regulation of policy, de-regulation of markets*
„Power center" of economic policy	*Government*	*Central bank*
Economic paradigm	*Keynesianism*	*Monetarism/Neoliberalism*
Diagnosis/Therapy	*Systemic*	*Symptom-oriented*
Financial conditions	*Interest rate < growth rate, „calm" stock markets, stable exchange rates and commodities prices*	*Interest rate > growth rate, boom und bust on stock markets, unstable exchange rates and commodities prices*
Striving for profits focuses on	*Real economy (Positive-sum game)*	*Finance economy (Zero-sum game)*
Economic model	*Social and regulated market economy*	*„Pure" market economy*

In order to overcome the crises, he then proposed a so-called "fiscal pact" based on the idea that a regulated financial market is necessary for a healthy *real economy*.

Therefore he put forward the idea of a *New Deal* that should be guided by: (1) a better balance (between competition/cooperation; economy/politics; market/state; technical/social innovations); (2) striving for profits (hence, the real economy); (3) globalization of politics; (4) extension of the European Social Model by environmental components; and finally (5) budget consolidation through stable and green growth. Therefore, this 'New Deal' should be based on the following components:

- *Interest rates below rates of economic growth*
- *General financial transactions tax (FTT)*
- *„Re-education" of banks that will serve the real economy*
- *Stabilization of commodity price paths, esp. for crude oil*
- *Global strategies for the environment*
- *Transnational infrastructure in EU*
- *Social minimum standards in EU* (including minimum wages and subsistence income)
- *Innovative working time models:*
  - Adjustment to business cycle (e. g., German „Kurzarbeitsmodell")
  - Long-term reduction of life time working hours
- *Investment in environment* (from building insolation to new forms of mobility)
- *Recovery of the welfare state* (redistribution, education, public health and pension system, etc.)
- *Support the young generation* (jobs and flats)

After the presentation, session 1 of the conference was concluded by a **Q&A session** where both the keynoters answered question and discussed with the participants.

Two statements, respectively by William Lafferty and then Stephan Schulmeister, started the session. Mr. Lafferty argued that if the economy was not real capitalism addressed through sustainable development, then, this was not the real economy and, therefore, one could not expect much; rather, one could only expect the implosion of globalisation. Then he mentioned the fact that, generally, sustainable development policies have been seriously undermined by the economy and capitalism. This was followed by a statement of Mr. Schulmeister who stressed how the practice of capitalism and neoliberal politics went 'hand-in-hand'.

Participants pointed out that, together with the financial layer and the real economy, the layer of natural resources should also be realised because it produces wealth and well-being, and therefore it is necessary for the realisation of sustainable development. In response, Mr. Schulmeister talked about the necessity to influence the real prices (i.e. to influence energy consumption) because real markets do not have this ability. Subsequently, Mr. Lafferty stressed the essential part water will playin the next decade as a resource and, therefore, the need to improve communal influence and protection on resources.

A second question was addressed to Mr. Lafferty in order to clarify the higher importance of Gothenburg compared to Rio. Mr. Lafferty replied that Gothenburg defined the path of sustainable development implementation and that, although there was still a fight between SD strategies and other policy strategies, institutions well remembered the importance of Gothenburg. Also related to the Gothenburg discourse, participants asked about the

relationship between the EU and the developing countries and, especially, the reason why the EU was 'losing ground' in that respect during the Rio+20 negotiations. Mr. Lafferty stressed that the EU has a solid path for the implementation of SD, how the EU SDS was motivating institutional change and how much Gothenburg was maintaining connections of north-south relations. On the contrary, the Rio process represented the manifestation of the true process of globalisation where the now much more powerful southern countries were ruling the agenda: in these terms, the globalisation brought economic actors into the Rio process and had taken over the agenda.

Session 2: Rio+20 results and their implications

The **session 2** followed with 3 presentations that offered different perspectives and an understanding of how different institutions, political levels and stakeholders were interpreting the Rio+20 outcomes.

Chris Vanden Bilcke (*Head of the UNEP Liaison Office to the EU)* in its presentation, "A first overview on results of Rio+20 – UN Conference on Sustainable Development: Green Economy, Institutional Framework and renewing commitment for SD, SG Goals", showed his perception of the Rio+20 Conference. He thoroughly analysed the outcome document of the conference – "The future we want" – outlining the main results while considering: a) the overarching elements; b) the Green Economy in context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; c) the International Framework Sustainable Development; d) the framework for action (including the sustainable development goals, SDGs) and, e) the means of implementation. He valued very positively those processes that were initiated by the Rio+20 agreement such as: (i) the work on SDGs / MDGs; (ii) the creation of a High Level Forum; (iii) the strengthening and upgrading of the UNEP and the increase of its budget; (v) the designation of a UN body for SCP; (vi) the establishment of the group "Friends of paragraph 47" on Corporate Sustainability Reporting; (vii) the demand of a Global Strategy for youth employment; and, (viii) the work of a complemented GDP via the UN Statistical Commission. He, then, also mentioned those processes that were reinforced by Rio+20, such as, for instance, the Green Economy work. In his final address, he particularly stressed three issues: (1) that the Rio+20 results were multilayered and, therefore, much more than the negotiated outcome; (2) that the negotiated outcome reflected the current state of global multilateral relations; and, (3) that a correct judgment of the text was very uneven between pros and cons.

Inge Paulini, (Secretary-General of German Advisory Council on Global Change) followed with a presentation, entitled "Implications of Rio+20 results – perspectives from stakeholder involvement and SD councils". The main point she raised was about the participation and inclusion of civil society in Rio+20. She argued that there was hardly any contact between the civil society and negotiators. She also stressed in the context the fact that, on the one hand, the venues were really far from each other, and, on the hand, many side events were not well attended. She then mentioned the strong disappointment of the Rio+20 outcomes by people attending the main side events, especially the

lack of high-level participants. A brief assessment of the pros and cons followed where Ms. Paulini especially highlighted two negative aspects: (1) how badly multi-level cooperation was regarded in the document, and (2) the fact that the need for urgent action on a global level was not taken into consideration. However, she regarded as positive the fact that paragraph 98 maintained the recommendation for SD strategies. Finally, she referred to the option that the European Commission is planning to issue a communication on Rio+20 results very soon. In this regard, she mentioned the proposal by *Inge Niestroy* (*EEAC Sec Gen)* to all Member States to revisit/renew their existing SD strategies, and that the ESDN should support this.

Richard Adams *(EESC Member and Vice-President of the Sustainable Development Observatory)* in its talk, "Implications of Rio+20 results: perspectives from the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)", stressed that a judgement on Rio+20 could only come solely on the Outcome Document, which he referred to as "the future we might have had". For instance, he emphasised that Rio+20 had the largest participation ever encountered with more than 10,000 CSO participants and this goes together with the necessity of promoting sustainable development in the community. Second, he talked about lessons learnt and real achievements of Rio+20. In this regard, he mentioned with some satisfaction that an agreement was finally reached. However, he also stressed that, at that moment, the world was in no shape to make real progress in governance processes towards sustainable development. He then mentioned the broad recognition received by civil society and that civil society commitments went much further than the official Rio+20 results. He also made two other points: on the one hand, he noted that, as the process for the SDGs definition is still open, civil society could possibly be able to influence this process; on the other hand, the Green Economy was positively defined as a tool for sustainable development. Finally, he urged institutions to include more stakeholders, especially from civil society.

After these three keynotes, a **plenary discussion** with the kenyoters followed where the implications of the Rio+20 results in times of socio-economic challenges and current crises where explored. From the audience, it was noted that DG Environment is not responsible anymore for sustainable development in cities and asked for an opinion on what steps could be done about this issue. Mr. Vanden Bilcke suggested the option of a coalition between UNEP and DEFCO and then noted that the issue on sustainable development in cities was not well addressed in the process to Rio+20. He mentioned, however, that a global assembly of sub-national representatives was suggested by the Committee of the Regions in Rio.

Another participant asked about the role national governments might have in promoting the SD agenda in a post-Rio+20 phase. Mr. Vanden Bilcke replied that from the national level, there were more signals of environmental concerns than for SD. Mr. Adams argued that, unlike in previous gobal SD conferences, there was no message to reinforce the role for national governments in sustainable development. Mr. Vanden Bilcke added that there was a lack of attention on NSDSs as an indication of a more multi-level approach in SD governance. Wolfram Tertschnig (ESDN co-chair) argued that the NSDS approaches have been complemented through other multi-level approaches and that it would be important for the future to solve the task of integrating green economy into SD policies.

The conference moderator, Peter Woodward, closed the discussion by asking each keynoter for a final **"take home message from Rio+20".** Mr. Vanden Bilcke suggested developing and spreading a strong message on social dimensions, therefore, enhancing societal relevance of SD. Mr. Paulini mentioned the need to rebuild part of the political system, particularly through the involvement of stakeholders (e.g. civil society). Finally, Mr. Adams proposed that grass roots initiatives should be increasingly taken up and their processes should then replicated by governmental processes.

As a last activity in this session, participants were asked to discuss on their tables and develop a list of their own **key observations over Rio+20**. The results of the table discussions are summarised in the next box, which includes the out comes from each of the 8 tables:

Key observations of Rio+20

Table 1

- New ways of constructive negotiations + increase political commitment;
- Green Economy is seen as a vehicle towards SD, not as substitute of it;
- Scientific and political realities are not meeting.

Table 2

- How can we reach the countries against Green Economy? We have to explain advantages for them;
- If the European Union wants to play a central role, it has to prove to be better (DO THINGS!!);
- We (EU) have to use the processes after Rio+20.

Table 3

- What is the role of national government?
- Do people trust government to act?

Table 4

- How to capture and make use of what happened outside of the negotiation rooms in Rio?

Table 5

- Identify constraints + how to overcome;
- Time (e.g. SDG)→ Nominate representative? WPIEI; CONUN; CODEU…
- Priorities: situation in EU (Financial Crisis);
- New and different cooperation in global order.

Table 6

- Stakeholders participation in the text;
- Positive aspects vs. negative perception;
- Green economy is part of/near of sustainable development.

Table 7

- Social dimension;
- Different perspectives on the result;
- Narrow mandate;
- Common Green Economy-Agenda but… open interpretation;
- We are heading in the right direction.

Table 8

- Promising initiatives;
- "Future Earth" 10-years interdisciplinary research program;
- RCE (Regional Center of Excellence);
- New Social Contract (ETHOS INSPIRED);
- IAAI→Transformation of UN system;
- Need to concentrate in actions that can be done (not just policy lines);
- Know your past (what has already been done).

Break-out session on Eurostat's Rio+20 Guidebook, "Figures for the Future"

After the lunch break, **Viktoria Bolla** (*Eurostat, Unit C.4 "Key indicators for European policies"*) and **Markus Hametner** (*Research Institute for Managing Sustainability, WU Vienna*) presented the new publication by Eurostat "**Figures for the future: 20 years of sustainable development in Europe?**" Please find here their presentation.

Session 3: Working groups – in-depth discussion of Rio+20 results & current crises and their implications for SD

Session 3 consisted of three **parallel working groups**, which allowed an in-depth discussion in smaller groups about different dimensions of the Rio+20 results and socio-economic challenges in Europe. Working group 1 explored the "Rio+20 results on Green Economy". Working group 2 worked on "Institutional reforms and SD governance after Rio+20". Working group 3 discussed the theme "Euro/debt crises and their implications for SD in Europe". The working group topics and their specific focus questions are shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2 Working groups topics

Working Group 1	Working Group 2	Working Group 3
Rio+20 results on Green Economy	***Institutional reforms and SD governance after Rio+20***	***Euro, debt crises and their implications for SD in Europe***
Flashlight presentation:	***Flashlight presentation:***	***Flashlight presentation:***
Chris Vanden Bilcke (UNEP)	***William M. Lafferty (ProSus)***	***Stephan Schulmeister (WIFO)***
• Links between the concepts of Green Economy and SD (similarities, differences,	• Implications for SD governance in general (political commitment, policy coherence,	• Current crises and what they imply for SD • Social and economic imbalances, social

etc.) • Role of different stakeholders in Green Economy (UN, EU, Member States, businesses, academia, NGO, etc.) • Relationship between SD strategies and Green Economy strategies	participation, etc.) • Cooperation between the EU and its Member States on SD strategy processes (EU SDS/NSDSs) • SD Goals: elaboration process, specification of objectives, indicators/monitoring	challenges – what solutions can SD offer? • How to best address the relationship between financial markets and SD?

As can be seen in Figure 2, each working group was kicked-off by a flashlight presentation that highlighted the most important issues and presented some critical remarks. After a general discussion on the working group's theme, the participants in each working group were invited to develop recommendations for their respective topic.

The results of all working groups were then presented in the plenary and followed by a panel discussion to reflect on the different implications of the Rio+20 results. After the results of the 3 working groups were presented, two rounds of voting were undertaken: the first round allowed every participant to vote on the 3 most important issues in each working group theme (the results are shown by the **blue numbers** in brackets in the tables below). After this, participants were asked to vote in a second round: this time participants had to decide on the three most important from the complete set of issues in all three themes (shown by the **red number** in brackets you see in the tables below).

Table 1 "WG 1 - Rio+20 results on Green Economy"

1.	For ESDN – to give an input to "beyond GDP" (14) (9).
2.	Better clarification of the "Green Economy" concept – pragmatic implementation and its relation with sustainable development. (12) (5).
3.	For ESDN – to influence review of EU 2020 (11) (2).
4.	GE as a concept is easier to handle as we go from global to local levels; showcase local GE best practices (10).
5.	Much higher emphasis of the Green Economy on social aspects (8).
6.	In order to be effective, GE should be more than a tool box; it should lead to structural changes in the economy (6) (3).
7.	For ESDN – provide good practices on SD; GE; GG (3).
8.	For ESDN – paper on differences: Sustainable Development (SD); Green Economy (GE); GG. (2).

Table 2 "WG 2 - Institutional reforms and SD governance after Rio+20"

1.	"Greening" the European Semester →Presidency; FOP+European Council (23) (9).
2.	ESDN should focus on contributing to the definition + monitoring of the SDGs (18) (10).
3.	To MS: Ministers + Heads of State: act locally! Refresh NSDS with regard to include GE link in NRPs (17).
4.	Strengthen the ESDN (formal tasks, opinions, recommendations, communication)→ Comission+Council after Rio+20 (15) (8).
5.	Revive EU-SDS review/renewal and the same for EU 2020 to EU Commission, WALK THE

EU TALK (14) (9)
6. Council for SD on the EU level to strengthen public participation in Europe (mechanisms)→ European Council (13) (7).
7. Policy preparation: activate existing instruments for SD-coordination and auditing → and EU Commission and member states (11).
8. ESDN contribution to a "Global network for SD Councils" which is under consideration (10.5).
9. Need for both horizontal and vertical policy integration (7) (2).
10. ESDN must advise governments to be very attentive to not copy pasting the CSD in the new HIGH LEVEL FORUM (5)
11. EU has to assess whether strategic landscape is sufficient to implement SDS Rio+20, road maps…→ some MEP's like Jo Leinen (4).
12. EU policy is for SD too, e.g. from EMAS to SMAS (4).

Table 3 "WG 3 - Euro, debt crises and their implications for SD in Europe"

1. ESDN: fight for a new paragraph in the EU 2020 strategy about taxation of natural resources, thereby less debt, no taxes on work and more innovation and competition. Pensions fed by resources taxes. Create new subsidies for those who can't afford it (14) (16).
2. EU + member states should phase out subsidies on fossil energies urgently (14) (4).
3. Research: understanding the links between debt crisis and SD, (…) interests rates in a sustainable economy and relation between public and private ownership for SD (12) (4).
4. EU governments (as owner of banks): make banking system more sustainable (11) (8).
5. EU governments: get prices right natural (by taxes on resources) (6) (1).
6. ESDN could bring out good examples/best practices on green economy from cities (5)

At the end of the final round of voting, these six issues were considered as most important by the conference participants:

1. ESDN should 'fight' for a new paragraph in the EU 2020 strategy about taxation of natural resources, thereby less debt, no taxes on work and more innovation and competition. Pensions fed by resources taxes. Create new subsidies for those who can't afford it;
2. ESDN should focus on contributing to the definition + monitoring of the SDG's;
3. Revive EU-SDS review/renewal and the same for EU 2020 to EU Commission, WALK THE EU TALK;
4. ESDN should give an input into "beyond GDP";
5. "Greening" the European Semester →Presidency; FOP+European Council;
6. Strengthen ESDN (formal tasks, opinions, recommendations, communication)→ Comission+Council after Rio+20.

Project update and results: Sustainable consumption in Europe - RESPONDER and CORPUS & their link to the ESDN

The first conference day was completed by an **interlude session**, in which two projects funded by the European Commission under FP7, both with close connections to the ESDN, were presented: RESPONDER was presented by its coordinator **André Martinuzzi** (*Director of the Research Institute for Managing Sustainability, WU Vienna*) and CORPUS was presented by **Gerald Berger** (*Research Institute for Managing Sustainability, WU Vienna*) on behalf of the coordinator Gerd Scholl (*IOEW, Germany*). More information these projects can be found on the RESPONDER and CORPUS project websites.

Session 4: Rio+20 and its implications: Future needs and challenges

The second conference day was kicked off in **Session 4 with two keynotes**, both reflecting on future need and challenges of sustainable development after Rio+20.

Alan AtKisson (*International Policy Advisor, AtKisson Group Stockholm*) in his keynote, "Facing the Crisis in SD. After Rio+20: Future needs and remaining challenges – Perspectives on SD for the next generations", presented his reflections on Rio+20 and on the role of sustainable development in general. He touched upon a number of key messages, divided into different themes and actions. With regards to themes, he stressed the role of sustainable development towards science, systems and growth:

- Science: SD is where science meets decision-making;
- Systems: SD brings systems thinking into policy;
- Growth: SD facilitates the dialogue on reinvention.

With regards to actions, he suggested particularly three:

- Look up: Promote and sustain the SD vision;
- Look down: Enable greater sub-national action on SD;
- Look around: Broaden and strengthen SD networking.

Then, Mr. AtKisson questioned whether sustainable development was in a crisis by pointing out five main points. First, Rio+20 was branded as a "disappointment" or "failure" even before it began. Second, there was a generalised loss of trust in national government as lead actors to realize SD. Third, ministerial-level actors were battling for the control of key concepts, terminology, policy initiatives, budgets. Fourth, he mentioned the presence of an increased polarization between sectors and, especially, a severe disillusionment among civil society

leaders. Finally, he showed how science was marginalized and how economics trumped everything.

Afterwards, Mr. AtKisson discussed a number positive aspects of Rio+20: (1) full reaffirmation of sustainable development, and of the broad array of relevant international commitments; (2) commitment to increase the speed of action on sustainable development; (3) first global consensus acknowledgement that food, energy, climate are in crisis; (4) call for new, broader measures of progress to complement GDP and to be used in policy making; (5) endorsement of corporate responsibility / CSR programs and sustainability reporting, including support for relevant policy and regulatory frameworks; (6) general adoption of the concept of "green economy" and establishment of a set of detailed policy guidelines for working with the concept in a policy context; (7) endorsement of life-cycle assessment, sustainable design, and other core methodologies for greening economies; (8) adoption of the new 10-Year Framework Program on sustainable consumption and production; (9) dismantlement of the CSD and commitment to create a higher-level body; (10) a mandate and process for developing a set of global Sustainable Development Goals.

He also described missing issues of Rio+20 that he regarded as very important. First, what was missing was the acknowledgement of "planetary boundaries" and ecosystem limits. Second, no convincing, government-led mechanisms for financing and implementation of a broad-based sustainability transformation were described in Rio+20. Finally, he stressed the need for "a strategy for dealing with the issue of growth" that was neglected. Therefore, Mr. AtKisson addressed the crucial issue of growth in some depth, which he stressed as the key issue for sustainable development. In fact, in his perception, growth was able to link three themes the lie at the heart of sustainable development today: first, growth creates 'trouble' at the so-called "science-policy interface"; second, the understanding of growth requires the development of a systemic perspective, which remains a challenge in highly differentiated and specialized governance systems; and third, growth represents the focus of a clash of worldviews that is played out in institutional and political decision-making. Therefore, he then described the concept of growth with a series of examples, graphs and facts. Finally, he argued for a new role of the national states as 'SD facilitators', quoting a passage from paragraph 13 of "The future we want":

> *13. We recognize that people's opportunities to influence their lives and future, participate in decision making and voice their concerns are fundamental for sustainable development. … **[SD] can only be achieved with a broad alliance of people, governments, civil society and private sector, all working together** to secure the future we want for present and future generations.*

Ida Auken (*Danish minister for the environment*) talked about "Future challenges after the Rio+20 Conference". As a first message, she stressed that, although many expectations built up and remained unfulfilled, Rio+20 still could make a difference. Therefore, she mentioned several positive aspects. First, a new vision was put forward in Rio+20, thanks to the inclusion of the green economy

both for sustainable development and poverty eradication and the strong accent put on the integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. Second, she stressed that even though it was not possible to reach agreement on clear goals, targets and timeframes, there was agreement on starting several processes, which were in many ways expert-driven and research-led. Third, Ms. Auken mentioned the progresses made on the institutional framework: the upgrade of UNEP and the creation of the High Level Forum. With regard to the High Level Forum, she specifically emphasized the words "high level" that she views as fundamental, because this could especially help to mainstream the concept of sustainable development. She posed a question mark on the issue of the MEAs as something that needed more reflection. Fourth, she noted that new actors were depicted on the global scene. In this sense, she stressed that Rio+20 gave an honest picture of the new geopolitical world order that was not anymore just described by the challenges between the North and South. Finally, she stressed two important positive points: on the one hand, for the first time, cities were acknowledged as important players in the path toward sustainable development and not only national states; on the other hand, not only the civil society was very present, but also businesses were advocating for the first time towards sustainable development.

A **Q&A session** followed and from the discussions held, we summarize the main issues raided. First, Ms. Auken argued that it would be important to focus on the positive issues that came out from Rio+20 and the very positive fact that many actors acknowledged in Rio the importance of the green economy. She then mentioned the crucial passage of the outcome document on the process of a new accounting system with new measures to complement GDP. In this context, one participant asked about her opinion regarding the total disappointment of the Rio+20 outcomes of all the major NGOs. Ms. Auken replied that NGOs should not only and continuously relate to the negative sides of Rio+20. They should still be critical, but also inspire and create new platforms for defining a positive vision to move forward. Another participant asked about the roles of Asian and African countries at Rio+20. Ms. Auken acknowledged their plans and aspirations by referring to the fact that other country blocks were also present while she also critically viewed the behaviours of some countries that were not constructive enough during the Rio+20 process. Again another participant asked for advice on Europe 2020 to make it more in line with sustainable development. In response, Ms. Auken noted that civil servants were very committed at Rio+20 and added that they, however, needed to wait for the mandate of respective politicians. She then mentioned two positive points of Rio+20 with regard to Europe 2020: on the one hand, there was hope for getting support for an update on eco-design as a tool for sustainable development; on the other hand, she stressed that resource efficiency is now part of the growth survey, a fact that she views as a success.

The keynote presentations and the Q&A session were followed by an **interactive format** during which the conference participants worked in five different working groups on the five most important topics regarding the Rio+20 results and their impacts on sustainable development policy and governance (based on the working group results and voting on day one):

The first group worked on the topic **"Strengthening ESDN"** and discussed several issues. First, they considered the ESDN status and its deliverables as towards more formal terms, especially in coordination with other EU mechanisms but also in the form of a consultation role with

governments. They then argued for a more formal mandate for the ESDN. Two formats were put forward for ESDN: (a) Formal mandate to develop policy recommendations; and, (b) continue informal interactions and its facilitation role. They also suggested strengthening the ESDN's value through a peer review process for more evidence-based policy-making. Finally they came up with their message to the plenary that is summed in the box below.

WG 1 "Strengthen ESDN"
• *Strengthening the ESDN will require to achieve some form of formal mandate.*

The second group worked on the topic **"Input to beyond GDP work"** and recommended that ESDN suggests to the European Commission to develop further activities in this field, based on its communication "GDP beyond" in 2009. In this context, the ESDN could also seek the partnership with actors who deal with GDP and beyond issues to increase knowledge and awareness in order to gain momentum. They had a two messages to the plenary:

WG 2 "Input to beyond GDP work"
• *Promote GDP and beyond activities by emphasizing social indicators.* • *ESDN shall seek the partnership with actors dealing with GDP and beyond to increase know-how and awareness in order to gain momentum.*

The third group reflected on the "**definition/monitoring of SDGs"** and proposed that ESDN contributes to the upcoming SDG process as an SD expertise platform, especially in order to balance the political inter-governmental approach. ESDN could then bring in themes and goals that needed to be tackled in an integrative and comprehensive way, and not pillar by pillar. In addition, ESDN should provide background documents for the negotiators and build on the existing work of the network. The group also put forward two messages in the plenary:

WG 3 "Definition/monitoring of SDGs"
• *ESDN workshop on SDGs, building on the ESDN work and reflecting the international process.* • *ESDN should support and provide expertise for the EU members of the UN "open working group" on SDGs.*

The fourth group discussed over the options on **"Review/renew Europe2020 and/or EU SDS".** First, they reflected upon the issue that not all national governments have as yet taken a clear position on whether to renew the EU SDS. In fact, the added value of the EU SDS in relation to Europe 2020 still remains unclear. In the view of this group, the ESDN should lobby the European Parliament or directly ask the European Commission to map out the pros and cons of including sustainable development more clearly and comprehensively in Europe 2020 compared to having a renewed EU SDS as a follow-up to Rio+20. This should also inform debates in the Member States. The ESDN should also request the incoming Cyprus EU Presidency to open a debate among the Member States about which approach the Member States consider the best to follow-up on the Rio+20 results. The main question was therefore: "Is it better to mainstream SD in a renewed Europe 2020 strategy or

to have a strengthened separate EU SDS?" It would, furthermore, be important to foster more ambitious sustainable development goals in the EU for 2050 and to focus on political implementation. Their final messages brought in front of the plenary was:

WG 4 "Review/renew Europe2020 and/or EU SDS"
• *Cooperate with the European Parliament to present the options for renewing the EU SDS and/or to include SD more comprehensively in Europe 2020.* • *Request Cyprus presidency to open the debate on Europe2020 or EU-SDS*

The fifth group debated on the topic **"Greening the EU semester".** They argued that the Green Economy was important for both, implementing Europe 2020 and for the new 7th Environmental Action Program (EAP). They then suggested including sustainable development into Europe 2020 and into the 7th EAP. Finally, they stressed the need to find a link between National Reform Programmes (NRPs) and National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS). The box below includes their messages to the plenary:

WG 5 "Greening the EU semester"
• *Inclusive Green Economy as a mean to overcome the crisis in Europe* • *Friends of the Presidency +/or ECOFIN + European Council to "Green Semester"*

Session 5: Recommendations for implementing Rio+20 results

The final **Session 5** started with an input from the incoming Cyprus EU Presidency on the future of Rio+20 results and was continued by developing key insights that emerged from the discussions at the conference.

Evelina Stamouli & Angeliki Boura *(representatives of the incoming Cyprus EU Presidency)* shared their experiences from Rio+20, their initial views on results, and wanted to exchange ideas regarding the actual implementation of the Rio+20 outcomes and their implications for sustainable development policy at the EU level. They stressed that the Rio+20 Conference and its Outcome Document, which was the product of long and difficult negotiations, was a satisfactory compromise balancing out several different and contradictory interests and views. In their opinion, it is particularly important for the processes that it launched. They then stressed the importance of the role of effective implementation at the EU and Member States level. The incoming Cyprus EU presidency intends to build on the successful work that was already carried out by the Danish EU Presidency and, at the same time, needs to be committed to common EU positions and to the community acquis, strategies and policies. To this end, at the first meeting of the WPIEI/Global (Working Party on International Environment Issues) on 9 July 2012, the Cyprus EU Presidency intends to facilitate an open and interactive discussion on the Rio+20 outcomes and to share views

between Member States on their assessment of these outcomes in terms of what the EU wanted and what the EU finally got, as well as on the organisation of the next steps for the follow up from the EU side. The intention would also comprise, on the one hand, to prepare Council Conclusions to be adopted by Environment Ministers at their Council in late October 2012 and, on the other hand, to prepare our position for the UN General Assembly deliberations in New York, in close collaboration with the EU Delegation. In this respect, Cyprus intends to further promote a close cooperation, linkages and coordination with the UN in New York in order to ensure the EU's meaningful and active involvement in the various processes to be launched after Rio+20, at UNGA level, and particularly the ones related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD). Furthermore, the Cyprus Presidency considers the coordination between the WPIEI/Global, CODEV and CONUN very important for an effective follow up to Rio+20.

After this presentation, the participants considered various **key emerging insights for the ESDN community on Rio+20.** First, they argued that the SD community in general should dialogue more with the economic and financial community. Also, the understanding between sustainable development and financial/debt crisis should be deepened, especially in order to contribute to the finding of solutions for the current crisis. It was then stressed that, due to the economic crisis, the focus of day-to-day politics and policy-making is purely on economic issues, leaving little room for sustainable development debates. Another need felt by the participants was to find a well-known person (like a younger Brundtland) to strongly represent the SD community, especially because leadership is still extremely important. It would, furthermore, be important to revisit the debate on the inter-relations between global, national, regional and local governance for sustainable development. In this context, it was suggested for the ESDN to broaden its community to also include politicians, economists and business representatives.

Finally, participants developed an **ESDN 2012 Conference Communiqué** that describes the main messages from the participants of the ESDN Conference 2012. It is summarized in the box below:

ESDN 2012 Conference Communiqué

- SD is happening right now, and it is vital and crucial for the future
- There is no crisis of SD – instead, SD is the best answer to the current crises
- It is important to develop mechanisms / frameworks for bringing home the outcomes of Rio+20 → efficient implementation is key (revisit/revive EU and national SD strategies and other policy strategies, e.g. Europe 2020)

Rio+20 is the start of a process:

- UN level: follow up on Rio+20 outcomes (SDG's, 10 YFP, …)
- EU level: "Walk the (SD/Rio+20) talk" → review / renew all policy strategies with SD perspective
- National level: New alliances for concrete actions involving the national, sub-national level and other stakeholders in a "multi-actor" approach

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