

## **ESDN Conference 2015**

### **Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the EU and national level:**

**Designing effective governance architectures and strategic frameworks**

**8-9 October 2015, Luxembourg**

**Conference Proceedings**



**European Sustainable Development Network**

**Author:**

*Lisa Lange & Umberto Pisano*

**Contact:**

*ESDN Office at the  
Institute for Managing Sustainability  
Vienna University of Economics and Business  
Welthandelsplatz 1, A-1020 Vienna, Austria  
E: [esdn-office@sd-network.eu](mailto:esdn-office@sd-network.eu)  
T: +43-1-31336-4807*

© 2015 European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)

Visit **[www.sd-network.eu](http://www.sd-network.eu)** for

- Basic information on SD
- Country profiles
- Quarterly reports
- Policy briefs
- Case studies
- Conference papers
- Workshop papers
- Getting in touch with us

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.

## Table of contents

Introduction .....	4
Opening and orientation .....	5
Session 1: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its implementation in Europe.....	6
Session 2: The role of different actors in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation process .....	13
Session 3: Governance architecture and strategic frameworks for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation at the European level .....	19
Session 4: Governance architecture and strategic frameworks for the 2030 Agenda implementation at the national level .....	25
Session 5: Challenges and opportunities for actions at the EU, national and trans-national level to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development .....	32
Reflection on the conference and next steps .....	36

## Introduction

The ESDN Conference 2015 was entitled **“Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the EU and national level: Designing effective governance architectures and strategic frameworks”** and took place in Luxembourg on 8-9 October 2015. The Conference was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Luxembourg EU Presidency. The key objective of the conference was to explore ideas and produce recommendations on effective governance frameworks in the EU and national level to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

In total, 82 participants from 21 countries attended the conference.

The objective of the conference was addressed in the following 5 sessions:

- Session 1: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its implementation in Europe**
- Session 2: The role of different actors in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation process**
- Session 3: Governance architecture and strategic frameworks for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation at the European level**
- Session 4: Governance architecture and strategic frameworks for the 2030 Agenda implementation at the national level**
- Session 5: Challenges and opportunities for actions at the EU, national and trans-national level to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

To access the full documentation of the ESDN Conference 2015 please refer to the [ESDN Website](#), on which following documents are available for download: (i) conference programme; (ii) conference discussion paper; (iii) PowerPoint slides of all keynote and other presentations; (v) conference proceedings; and (vi) participant list.



## Opening and orientation

The **opening and orientation** session of the conference included several welcome addresses and provided an overview of the workshop objectives.

*Marguy Kohnen* (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Infrastructure, Luxembourg) welcomed the participants on behalf of the **Luxembourg EU Presidency**. She explained that, in Luxembourg, issues such as social cohesion, mobility, pollution, and the use of natural resources and land are of uttermost importance. She stressed that all these issues are included in and relevant to the SDGs. Ms Kohnen explained that in Luxembourg, the Ministry of Environment is in charge of coordinating the implementation of policies and is currently in the process of setting up a new plan for sustainable development to include and implement the SDGs. Furthermore, she explained that, during its EU Presidency, Luxembourg will continue to work towards the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy, particularly in the context of ‘Greening the European Semester’ and actively participating in the climate change negotiations that will take place in Paris later this year. Ms Kohnen welcomed the conference and its focus very much since there is an urgent need to address the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD in Europe.

The ESDN co-chairs *Elisabeth Freytag-Rigler & Wolfram Tertschnig* (Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management) welcomed the participants and highlighted the objectives of the conference.

*Ms Freytag-Rigler* highlighted the importance of the **SDGs**. She argued that many problems faced today are inherently SD issues – thus constituting a **challenge and an opportunity** for reform at the same time. Furthermore, she stressed that many participants of this conference are policy-makers that have great experience in implementation, particularly through the National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS), that we have to harness to promote this new agenda. Ms Freytag-Rigler closed by reminding the participants that the Europe 2020 Strategy is not enough to address the SDGs in terms of focus and time span.

*Mr Tertsching* stated that this is a very important time and that the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) could make a valuable contribution to this agenda. In particular, the **ESDN could play a key role in fostering peer learning and the sharing of best practices and information**. He argued that the ESDN has to evaluate how to best assist the SDG implementation process on the national and the European level.

## Session 1: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its implementation in Europe

*David Donoghue* (Co-chair of the Post-2015 Development Agenda negotiations, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations) shared his **insights about the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and its **universal and transformative** character with the participants of the conference. Mr Donoghue announced that through the negotiation process, the UN Member States managed to reach an agreement with each other. He recounted his experience with the negotiation process and highlighted four building blocks: (i) the goals and targets, (ii) the declaration, (iii) means of implementation and, (iv) accountability and monitoring.

Firstly, Mr Donoghue focussed on the **goals and targets** of the 2030 Agenda and if they should be amended. He recounted that there was a strong political incentive to refrain from amending the goals and targets agreed upon by a fragile consensus after months of negotiations in the Open Working Group. However, there is a need for technical amendments of targets. Despite the resistance of G77 countries, 12 targets were technically amended during the negotiation process.

Secondly, Mr Donoghue shared his experiences with facilitating the negotiation process of **the 2030 Agenda declaration**. The central issue here was how to ensure that this vast and unprecedented agenda was understandable to the public. The declaration has the aim of making the agenda more communicable, without compressing or summarizing the goals and targets, or reducing the ambition of the SDGs. Mr Donoghue reported that this was achieved through the preamble that presents the vision of the agenda and lists priorities, but does not summarize goals or targets. This process required lengthy and intense negotiations between the UN Member State representatives. In particular, paragraph 16 that refers to the relationship between the 2030 Agenda to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the needs of least developed countries was contested.

Thirdly, Mr Donoghue focussed on **the means of implementation** in term of financial and non-financial resources for the implementation of the SDGs. Here, he explained that the main issue was that the G77 countries (an organized block of developing countries) preferred to put heavy emphasis on ‘financing for development’, discussed in Addis Ababa, and to link these two processes as closely as possible. In contrast, Western and Eastern countries wanted separate processes with only some joint meetings to resolve the transfer of technology. The Addis Ababa negotiations represented a complication for the post-2015 process, since the G77 were unsatisfied with issues concerning international tax cooperation, and this spilled over into the negotiation of the SDGs.

Finally, Mr Donoghue focussed on the issue of **accountability and monitoring**, which was termed ‘follow-up and review’ in the 2030 Agenda document to appease G77 countries in the negotiation process. The debate here was split into two camps: On the one hand, developed countries favoured a systematic, rigorous and transparent monitoring process at global, regional and national level to avoid issues encountered in the implementation process of the MDGs. On the other hand, the G77 countries were concerned about mandatory reporting requirements, due to their limited statistical capacity and resulting strict accountability. The compromise achieved is a system of ‘voluntary



reporting' with numerous references to take into account national capacities. In the final version of the 2030 Agenda, the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), although not having the clear 'to do list' preferred by the global north, will have a central role in the global review and monitoring under the auspices of ECOSOC, as well as having a role in political guidance by producing recommendations under the auspices of the UNGA every 4 years. Mr Donoghue described the current Outcome Document as a trade-off between specificity and a deliberate lack of specificity. He argued that there needs to be more clarity about how global monitoring will work in practice. This could possibly be supplied by the Secretary General's recommendations on how the HLPF will work in practice that will be published soon. Concerning the regional dimension, 'regional peer review' had to be softened to 'peer learning' in the final document.



Overall, Mr Donoghue stated that the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York was a great **success**. He argued that world leaders went away with a sense of the **universality** of the new 2030 Agenda. However, the goals and targets are morally and politically, rather than legally binding. Now, he argued, there is a need to think of imaginative ways to **kick start implementation**. In the case of the MDGs, a couple of years were needed until countries bought into the agenda. Mr Donoghue expressed his hope that the continuous involvement of different stakeholders, such as civil society, business and academia, will make the implementation process commence at a faster pace. In the case of the SDGs, other and additional stakeholders were involved in the negotiations and a world-wide consultation took place. Furthermore, Mr Donoghue recounted that, atypically, civil society organisations were allowed to remain in the negotiations room. This included a morning session of direct interaction between civil society and UN Member State representatives to prompt constructive dialogue. After this, multiple civil society organisations reported that this was the most

open process they have had participated in to date. Moreover, the classic negotiations mechanism was changed in the sense that the co-chairs kept the control by presenting different versions of the document rather than openly amending different sections, avoiding confusion and paralysis.

Mr Donoghue stated that the **EU has to play an important role** in sustaining this momentum. In his speech at the SD Summit in New York, Frans Timmerman, the Vice President of the European Commission, has already taken up the responsibility to ensure the coordination of efforts to implement the SDGs in Europe. Mr Donoghue highlighted the debate about the **balance between a coordinated EU response and individual EU Member State response**. He stated that the national level is prioritized in the Outcome Document, but that regional mechanisms are also considered important. He further called upon the European Commission to carry out a gap analysis and possibly put forward best practice examples for the UN HLPF.

#### *Q&A Session*

Alan AtKisson (*AtKisson Group, Sweden*) asked Mr Donoghue about the vision for the review and monitoring process within the EU.

Mr Donoghue responded by stating that there was a strong sense not to dictate how the different UN Member States would report and in which frequency. However, the idea of common reporting guidelines was put forward by counties of the global North and the Secretary General will produce recommendations on this issue. He hopes that the response of the General Assembly to these recommendations will be more specific.

Krista Kampus (*Council of Baltic Sea States*) asked which role the subnational level could play in this monitoring.

Mr Donoghue reported that the negotiations did not address this in detail.

Ulf Bjornholm (*UNEP*) asked what role the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ (CBDR), which has been given special recognition in the Outcome Document, plays for the EU in particular.

Mr Donoghue answered that in the course of the negotiations, the G77 countries proposed that this is a principle that should underpin the SD agenda, while the global North was adamant that this principle only applies to the climate change negotiations. A technical compromise was reached by recognising CBDR in the Outcome Document, but qualifying it under a number of other principles relevant for the SD agenda. The EU and the global North are not in favour of this being the underpinning principle of the new agenda, so he hopes that this compromise will ease its importance.

Peter Woodward, the conference moderator, then asked Mr Donoghue what challenges and opportunities the new 2030 Agenda poses for the ESDN.

Mr Donoghue said that the ESDN is needed since it has a comprehensive understanding of the framework for SD, particularly in terms of overcoming silos in individual governments and exchanging best practices of governments and ministries. As such, the ESDN could play a role in the generation of macro data on how the EU handles SD and facilitate capacity building.



*François Wakenhut* (Head of Unit F.1 Resource Efficiency & Economic Analysis, DG Environment, European Commission) held a keynote presentation on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Europe. He began his presentation by stating that an incredible journey has been completed at the UN level and that this will now continue in the EU. He mentioned that Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, has stated in his recent State of the Union address that critical issues such as the economy, refugee, environmental and climate crises as well as social inclusion and high youth unemployment have to be addressed. These issues are at the core of our debate about sustainability, since sustainable development calls for a **holistic approach**. Mr Wakenhut also mentioned that the European Environmental Agency (EEA) reported that in Europe the progress that is being made in some areas, such as the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution, but that these tend to be offset elsewhere. These challenges and opportunities suggest that 2016 will be a critical year for the future development of Europe.

Mr Wakenhut then focused on **policy settings at EU level and next steps**. He stressed that sustainable development has to be addressed in a way that fosters policy consistency and counteracts silos between traditional policymaking areas. In Europe, the main vehicle to pursue this is the **Europe 2020 Strategy**, which has been, however, heavily criticized for being too narrowly focused on growth. Mr Wakenhut informed the participants that this strategy is **currently reviewed**. This review process will not only focus on the success of the Europe 2020 Strategy, but also look head to the 2030 Agenda. Mr Wakenhut mentioned that Vice President Frans Timmermans made an internal statement suggesting the review of Europe 2020 will reflect the new 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, the fact that Vice President Timmermans is in charge of sustainable development provides opportunities for streamlining from the top and thus enhancing cooperation, inclusiveness and policy consistency.

He further made the point that it is of uttermost importance for the EU to be humble and take the opportunity to learn from other countries and regions how to better promote sustainable development. For this purpose, the Commission is currently undertaking a **gap analysis** that looks into current EU policies and how they relate to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and also investigates which actions can be taken by the EU to promote this agenda. He suggested that in some areas, the implementation of policies and structures that are already in place will be in focus, while in other areas new and innovative approaches are needed. The issue of harmful subsidies, for fossil fuels and agriculture for instance, needs to be addressed. For this purpose, tools as are needed to assess the impact of policies and focus on fostering policy consistency.

Mr Wakenhut then focused in the **practical implications of reviewing the Europe 2020 Strategy** in the light of the new 2030 Agenda. The socio-economic dimension and overall use of resources set by the Europe 2020 Strategy is currently not on track, while the energy and climate targets are closer to being reached. Mr Wakenhut made that point that the debate has to be threefold:

- (i) Firstly, the 2030 Agenda is a new reference in **time**, which warrants a discussion on how this can be reconciled with the time horizon of Europe 2020. It will be the aim to capture the more medium-term dimension in the strategic planning of the Commission.
- (ii) Secondly, it has to be assessed if the **targets** of the Europe 2020 Strategy are adequate to capture all SDGs or if more or different targets are needed.
- (iii) Lastly, it has to be discussed if there is need for further instruments to realize this ambitious agenda. There has been a debate on a new **European Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS)** as a possible tool to implement the 2030 Agenda.



Mr Wakenhut also highlighted the importance of the **Falkenberg report on the EU SDS** that will be concluded in June 2016. This will be central to the EU implementation process and aim to lead by example. Mr Wakenhut concluded by saying that the Commission is looking forward to hearing new ideas and approaches from the ESDN.

### **Q&A Session**

Stefan Bauernfeind (*Federal Chancellery, Germany*) asked Mr Wakenhut to explain when the decision to abolish the EU SDS, which has been approved by EU Member States, has been taken.

Mr Wakenhut responded that the EU SDS has not been abolished, but that in the past years, the Europe 2020 Strategy has been the main instrument through which the Commission pursued SD. This is an interpretation that the Commission has made but it is not a permanent decision and could be changed in the future.

Marc-Oliver Pahl (*Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Consumer Protection of North-Rhine Westphalia*) asked if there is a possibility of a new Europe 2030 Strategy.

To this question Mr Wakenhut replied that this debate focusing on timing and alignment is still taking place. This will be done first by a review of Europe 2020 Strategy, but a new Europe 2030 Strategy has not been ruled out. He argued that the EU must show a strong commitment to the 2030 Agenda and that its objectives have to reflect this new time line.

Michel Amand (*Public Service of Wallonia*) inquired what timeframe the implementation of SDGs will have in Europe.

Mr Wakenhut stated that the process has already started, but that time is needed to carry out an effective mapping exercise and formulate a comprehensive strategy. He said that the Falkenberg Report of 2016 will give some indication of which things can be most effectively addressed at national or EU level.

**Carole Dieschbourg** (*Minister for the Environment and Climate Protection, Luxembourg*) focussed particularly on the importance of the 2030 Agenda for EU Member States and the opportunities this presents. She pointed out that 2015 is a year of challenges, but also gives rise to big **opportunities for sustainable development**. The SDGs reflect a paradigm shift towards a universal agenda.

In this context, Ms Dieschbourg stated that these UN negotiations represent a historical change to accelerate the transition towards a better world for everyone, from the eradication of poverty to the transformation of the economy and the protection of the environment. She expressed the hope that political leaders will recognise this historic opportunity. She explained that, although 2030 seems far away, steps towards implementation have to be taken now.

Ms Dieschbourg also stressed the SDGs will also give us a strong foundation to build on in the climate negotiations, **COP 21**, in Paris this year. An important message from the summit in New York is that Europe will take a leading role in these climate negotiations.

Then, Ms Dieschbourg highlighted the **universality of the 2030 Agenda** that she thinks is an important progression from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This means that developed nations have to assess how to transform their economies and societies in alignment with a more sustainable path. Humanitarian and environmental crises put the world under pressure. She argued that an effective way to address this is to make the link between all interrelated dimensions of sustainable development. After highlighting specific SDGs, Ms Dieschbourg stressed that Europe needs to come a long way to reach these goals, as shown by the recent [report by the Bertelsmann Foundation](#). She stressed that the main challenges for OECD countries is fostering a sustainable economic model in terms of consumption and energy.

To **implement the SDGs** it will be important to step out of our silos and mainstream sustainable development to at the highest level. Furthermore, she stressed that the interlinkages between the objectives will require rigorous monitoring and review processes and clear data at the global,

national and regional level. In Europe, she argued, Eurostat's work on SD indicators should be taken up and used to review policies.

Furthermore, Ms Dieschbourg stated that it will be critical to find an adequate **mechanism on the EU level**. She suggested the approach of taking up what has already been done and to identify the appropriate European policies and instruments. In its role as the EU Presidency, Luxembourg will attempt to break out of silos and talk about harmful subsidies in October 2015.

### Q&A Session

Adolf Kloe Lesch (*German Development Institute*) asked Ms Dieschbourg how our work in Europe will play into the global strategy for the EU.

She responded that usually the environment and SD minister focus on the implementation on the national level, while coordination and foreign ministers focus on development outside the EU. In the future, she argued, we need to align these policies.

Joachim Spangenberg (*Sustainable Europe Research Institute (SERI)*) made the point that we have been talking about dismantling unsustainable subsidies for the last 20 years and asked what is different this time.

Ms Dieschbourg replied that this year, all political leaders are active in SD and on the climate issue. She thinks that it is unprecedented that so many political leaders have spoken about the climate crisis and aligning policies for SD since these issues have never been so visible in terms of ecological, societal and economic crisis.

Mr Woodward asked if there is a role for the ESDN to communicate or support the political world at this point in time.

Ms Dieschbourg replied that communication and its facilitation by such a network is very important for the success of the agenda in Europe.



## Session 2: The role of different actors in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation process

Session 2 focussed particularly on the **role of different stakeholders** in the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda. For this purpose, the role of the business sector and civil society organisation was presented by two keynote speakers each, followed by a plenary discussion involving all four speakers.

*Lorena Sorrentino* (Project manager of EU Team, CSR Europe) and *Ulf Bjornholm* (Head of the UNEP Brussels Liaison Office, UNEP) gave two short inputs on the **role of the business sector** in the implementation process, focussing in particular on private-public cooperation.

*Lorena Sorrentino* began her presentation by stating that **businesses can make positive contributions** to the new global agenda. She made the important point that the urgency of global challenges requires all stakeholders to collaborate and act together to implement the 2030 Agenda. Businesses can contribute to the achievement of these goals by addressing challenges such as climate change, unemployment and sustainable and transparent supply chains, among others issues.

Ms Sorrentino introduced the **platform CSR Europe**. She reported that the members of CSR Europe are constituted by corporate members, as well as national business networks. It is a platform that enables businesses to exchange best practices and learn how to implement corporate social responsibility (CSR) measures. The platform also collaborates with EU institutions and regional partners, for example in Latin America, China and Russia.

CSR Europe engages its members in three instances: **(i) to commit, (ii) to act and (iii) to measure**.

In terms of **commitment**, CSR Europe launched a manifesto to inspire and engage members. In this, they identified 3 main strategic directions:

- 1.) Enhance employability and education (collaboration between business and education system in private-public partnerships);
- 2.) Introduce sustainable products and consumption patterns; and
- 3.) Ensure transparency and integration of sustainability performance and reporting

In terms of **action**, CSR Europe is organizing business campaigns and policy dialogues at the EU and national level. For instance, it has recently organized two workshops to bring together business, city, and citizens to develop a framework for business/city collaboration.

Finally, in terms of **measurement**, CSR Europe has created a business impact map to track main initiatives as well as targets to be reported on in 2020.

Ms Sorrentino stressed that the **collaboration between businesses and policy-makers** will be central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As such, CSR Europe is attempting to promote a dialogue with EU institutions to develop smart policies, for instance a Circular Economy package action plan or environmental footprint pilots. Participation can also play an important role in addressing the needs and specificities of local partners and the adaption of tools to the local context. She stated that in her organization they have the aim of making companies understand how their performance can be improved through a more transparent process in order to promote their active participation in the 2030 Agenda implementation process. On the other side, she called on policy-makers to take into account local stakeholders and to create an enabling environment for business.

*Ulf Bjornholm* also focussed on the need for a strong **engagement of businesses** to achieve the 2030 Agenda due to their crucial and innovative role. Mr Bjornholm argued that at this point in time, there is a tremendous momentum to work with businesses, especially with respect to the COP21. He suggested that it is the job of policy-makers and the ESDN to make the importance of the SDGs visible for business. The Volkswagen scandal, for instance, shows that the public, policy-makers and thus businesses themselves care about these issues.

He highlighted that the business community is constituted by a **broad variety of actors** from micro enterprises, to state-owned enterprises, and transnational corporations. Mr Bjornholm reasoned that engagement and involvement of these different actors will be crucial. He argued that, at the moment, we are good with small niches, but policy-makers have to become better at targeting big business.

Mr Bjornholm summarized the **role of business** in sustainable development as contributing by being: (i) injectors of the financial capital to sustainable investment projects; (ii) a response to the sustainability mega-forces; (iii) facilitators of development and dissemination of new technologies; (iv) responsible for shifts in business model and strategy; (v) participating in direct engagement and partnership with governments; and (vi) accounting for and reporting on their contribution towards sustainable goals.

Furthermore, Mr Bjornholm talked about making **“the business case”** for business engagement in and contribution to multiple international frameworks such as the SDGs, COP21, the post-2015 Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction and Financing for Development. Moreover, he said that it is in businesses’ interest to be engaged with the SDGs and care for the new agenda, due to the sustainability mega-forces driving business strategies. These forces include factors such as climate change, energy and fuel availability, material resources stocks, water supplies, population growth, food security, concentration in urban areas, deterioration of biodiversity and ecosystems, workers and communities’ health and increased intensity of natural and technological disasters. Mr Bjornholm suggested that it will be important to translate the findings of sustainability and environmental assessments for businesses. Personally, he would focus efforts on working on sustainability reporting, supporting the frontrunners (on issues such as public procurement and



regulation) and to reach out to other communities outside the ESDN, particularly the financial sector.

### *Q&A Session*

David Donoghue (*Co-chair of the Post-2015 Development Agenda negotiations, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations*) commented that businesses are a stakeholder group that could have been engaged more in the UN negotiation process. However, even with limited engagement, there was a push to include 'sustained and sustainable economic growth' in the working of the document.

Sascha Gabizon (*Executive Director, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) International*) asked if there could be done more in terms of reporting in Europe.

Ms Sorrentino answered that in Europe there is already a milestone: the [Directive on the disclosure of non-financial and diversity information](#). This will increase the reporting requirements of multinational companies and pass these down the value chain. Reporting has to be done in a smart way that makes it more strategic for companies to report and enables them to use this information for competitive branding.

Wolfram Tertschnig (*Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management*) asked how current projects, such as GRI Global Compact, can be best aligned with the SDGs.

Mr Bjornholm suggested that the European Commission should take this into account in review and follow up processes.

Guenther Bachmann (*German Council for Sustainable Development*) drew attention to paragraph 47 of the 2030 Agenda Outcome Document on the role of civil society and reported that the German SD Council has already introduced a sustainability code that could play an important role in national reporting.

Noelani Dubeta (*Climate Action Network*) highlighted contradictions within the SDGs in terms of promoting growth in a climate constrained world.

Micheal Ellis (DG DEVCO, European Commission) inquired about the state of the tax debate.

Ms Sorrentino focussed on the discussion of country by country reporting and highlighted the fact that businesses need to be supplied with the tools for meaningful reporting and supported by a capacity building programme.

Mr Bjornholm answered by stating that business does not like uncertainty and disruption. SD is about long-term strategic approaches to provide more certainty and this, he argued, could make it attractive to businesses if policy-makers set a clear trajectory for the future.

Ms Sorrentino replied that there are different perspectives within the same company, yet overall there has been a shift from seeing companies as 'the bad guys' 20 years ago, to an acknowledgement at the international level that they can have a positive role. Furthermore, there is more interaction with stakeholders and an acceptance that we need to foster growth that is both sustained and sustainable.

*Andreas Versmann* (Sustainable Development Observatory, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and *Sascha Gabizon* (Executive Director, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF) International) presented two perspectives on the **role of civil society organizations**, including multi-stakeholder partnerships.

Mr Versmann held a presentation proposing that **civil society is a driving force** for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. He explained that it is the task of the EESC to facilitate civil society input in policymaking, including business as a stakeholder. Within the EESC, the **SD Observatory** is a small body that has the remit of promoting SD in EU policies in Brussels. Initially, it was created to involve stakeholders in the monitoring of EU SDS, but this has now been expanded to promoting SD in general.

Then, Mr Versmann restated that the **SDGs pose a major challenge for Europe**, as is shown by studies by the Bertelsman Stiftung and the Stakeholder Forum. In particular, Europe faces challenges in reducing the environmental impacts of the economy and increasing social coherence and inclusion. At the same time, the SDGs also represent an opportunity to put sustainable development back on the EU agenda. He quoted Vice President Timmermans who said that Europe has to 'move out of the comfort zone'.

Mr Versmann argued that if civil society should get on board, it is necessary to give them a vision of how this will happen. Thus, there is a need for a **clear signal from the European Commission and Council to commit to the 2030 Agenda**. What is clearly needed, he argued is an **integrated strategy for a sustainable Europe** in a globalized world with a time horizon of at least 2030. The next step to achieve this would be a devising a roadmap for action.

Furthermore, Mr Versmann argued that the **involvement of civil society** in policymaking could be **enhanced** in general. The work of the SD Observatory has given rise to models of and recommendations for civil society involvement. For further information he referred to the report authored together with the Stakeholder Forum and the paper authored by Derek Osborn that was circulated to the participants of the conference. He proposed to look at the whole policy cycle of SD policies and think about where civil society can be involved and in which roles. For instance, civil society organisations could be involved in contributing to and sharing the set goals and targets; co-creating strategies and key sector programmes; co-implementing policies, possibly through multi-stakeholder partnerships; and acting as watchdogs in the monitoring and review process. Furthermore, Mr Versmann explained three mechanisms for effective civil society involvement: (i) an organisational and procedural structure facilitating participation; (ii) a continuous process rather

than ad-hoc consultations; and (iii) the inclusion of all relevant governmental and non-governmental actors.

Last but not least, Mr Versmann introduced the idea of a **European Sustainable Development Forum** to specifically involve stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda implementation process. This Forum would provide a regular, structured framework for civil society organisations (CSO) involvement at EU level, give CSOs the opportunity to play an active role and integrate CSO input into the cycle of the SDG implementation, monitoring and policy review at EU level, possibly part of the Eurostat review process. He further suggested that this Forum would be hosted by the EESC in partnership with the European Commission and CSOs.

*Sascha Gabizon* held the second presentation on the **role of civil society** in the implementation process of the SDGs. Ms Gabizon began her presentation by explaining the **key principles of CSO participation**: (i) self-organisation of civil society; (ii) independent and critical character of civil society inherent in its role as a watchdog; (iii) the full diversity of civil society rather than only participation by wealthier international CSOs; and (iv) that the participation is not only symbolic ‘participation washing’.

Ms Gabizon then provided the conference participants with an overview of the work of the Woman’s Mayor Group in sustainable development. Considering the **relationship between CSOs and the SDGs**, she made the interesting observation that each goal has its own thematic constituency. For instance, Goal 14 on fisheries has seen the creation of the Latin America Union of Fisherfolks from ten national fisherfolks organisations. She stressed that it will be important to foster this diversity. To include these CSOs effectively we have to address the question of what is meant by a meaningful partnership.

Subsequently, Ms Gabizon raised many important questions concerning the disproportionate **power of lobby groups** in the UN and national legislatures as well as the marketing of the SDGs. She argued that **criteria for engaging the private sector** in the implementation are needed. She made the point that we could learn from the WHO framework for ‘engagement with non-state actors’. In this legal and ethical regulation is needed to ensure integrity, independence and public confidence in private sector engagement. According to Ms Gabizon one should distinguish clearly between business actors and civil society actors. A starting point could be the ‘Bali Guiding Principles on Partnerships for Sustainable Development’. She suggested setting up an intergovernmental Framework for partnership accountability. Ms Gabizon recommended the report [‘Fit for whose purpose? Private funding and corporate influence in the United Nations’](#) for further information on the issue. Furthermore, Ms Gabizon made the strong argument that more **financial resources** are required for the implementation of SDGs.

Ms Gabizon highlighted the world’s **unsustainable consumption patterns** and the inequality of the distribution of consumption and wealth between the rich and the poor. This led her to highlight the continued importance of the concept of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ (CBDR). In Europe, these unsustainable consumption patterns are often promoted by harmful subsidies. For

instance, the amount on energy subsidies spends each week is equal in size to the \$ 110 billion climate fund. Furthermore, large companies often do not play such a pivotal role in the change of energy patterns, in Germany for instance, the renewable electricity generation investments of the 'Energiewende' are primarily due to private individuals and farmers.

Finally, Ms Gabizon focussed on the issue of **institutionalizing participation of diverse CSOs** in the implementation of the SDGs. Here, she proposed the creation of own "spaces" for self-organised civil society and highlighted the need to engage CSOs in development of national and local SDG implementation plans. Furthermore, she suggested to financially support CSOs to monitor and carry out 'shadow' reporting. Strong criteria and rules regarding accountability and transparency will be crucial to the entire implementation process.



## Session 3: Governance architecture and strategic frameworks for 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development implementation at the European level

Session 3 concentrated discussing possible **governance architectures and strategic frameworks** for 2030 Agenda implementation at the **European level**. The ESDN Office provided a short overview of the current governance architecture for sustainable development in Europe. Then, a panel of experts gave a short input, which acted as the basis for an interactive group work exercise in which the participants took place. The results of this group work exercise were collected, while the panel of experts could give their immediate reactions.

*Gerald Berger* (ESDN Office at the Institute for Managing Sustainability, Austria) provided the conference participants with an overview of the current governance architecture in Europe and highlighted the key principles of governance for SD to inform the subsequent group work. Mr Berger began his presentation by quoting an upcoming think piece by Derek Osborn (EEAC): “Countries now need to move **from inspirational commitments** undertaken at the UN **to the hard task of implementation** at the national [and EU] level.” This highlights the need to evaluate the status quo of governance for SD at the EU level and assess if this is fit for purpose.

At the **EU level**, the **European Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS)** of 2006 remains an official guiding document, but is no longer an active policy process. In terms of implementation and follow up of the EU SDS, there have only been progress reports in 2007 and 2009, while the comprehensive review planned for 2011 has not materialized. Similarly, the SDS Coordinators Group only met twice (2006 and 2007) and voluntary peer reviews were only implemented in a few countries. Importantly, however, the EU SDS has resulted in the establishment of numerous National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS). These display different levels of activity and are not steered or coordinated at the EU level. It is also important to take note of the Eurostat Monitoring Reports that have been published since 2007, whose SD indicators provide an assessment of SD in Europe as a whole. Lastly, the ESDN, an informal network of policy-makers and the EEAC, a network of SD advisory councils, have been set up. Mr Berger referred to the upcoming report on the EU SDS authored by Karl Falkenberg, which is due to be published in June 2016 and that will give use further insights on the current state of governance for SD in Europe. Notably, the Europe 2020 Strategy also has links to SD through issues such as resource efficiency, while not being and SD strategy. As already explained by Mr Wakenhut, this strategy is currently under review. The result of this review will also have implications for SD governance at the EU level.

At the **national level**, Mr Berger explained, SD has mainly been addressed through the aforementioned NSDS processes. In total, 26 out of 28 EU Member States have an NSDS. However, these NSDS processes vary greatly. The most recent activities have been the new French NSDS (2015), the Finnish Societal Commitments (2013) and the new NSDS in Switzerland scheduled for 2016. Although there have been activities to promote sustainable development at the national level,

European countries are a long way from implementing all SDGs. Mr Berger mentioned the Bertelsmann study ['SDGs: Are the rich countries ready?'](#) (2015), which concluded that from the OECD countries "Not all countries are fit for the goals, and indeed no one country performs outstandingly in every goal".

Then, Mr Berger focussed on the **Outcome Document of the 2030 Agenda**, which incorporates governance provisions for the implementation process of the SDGs. The 2030 Agenda put special emphasis on the importance of NSDS by stating that: "Cohesive nationally owned SD strategies, supported by national financial frameworks, will be at the heart of our efforts" and "(...) each country has primary responsibility for its own Economic and social development (...)". Furthermore, it gives an important role to cooperation between different stakeholders such as national governments and parliaments, private sector, civil society organizations, etc. Finally, the SDG 17 on systemic issues incorporates: (i) policy and institutional coherence; (ii) multi-stakeholder partnerships; and (iv) data, monitoring and accountability. The Outcome Document also provides some indication concerning the follow-up and review processes of the 2030 Agenda implementation. It will be "voluntary and country-led", taking into account "different national realities", will build on "existing platforms and processes" and will be "open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people". More specifically, the national level is encouraged to develop "practicable ambitious national responses" and "build on existing planning instruments, e.g. NSDSs", as well as conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress. The regional level, for which the EU is an example, is envisioned to provide "useful opportunities for peer learning" and facilitate the "sharing of best practices and discussion on shared targets".

Mr Berger then briefly explained the EU Council Conclusions on the "New Global Partnership for Poverty Eradication and Sustainable Development after 2015" from May 2015. Specifically the sections on 'An enabling and conducive policy environment at all levels'; 'Developing capacity to deliver'; and 'Mobilization and effective use of domestic public finance' refer to possible characteristics of a governance architecture for the SDGs.

Mr Berger then raised the critical question which governance architecture we envision for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Finally, he introduced the **key principles of governance for SD** as a basis for the following group work:

- (1) **Long-term vision and short-term actions;**
- (2) **Vertical coordination processes;**
- (3) **Horizontal integration mechanisms;**
- (4) **Stakeholder participation and partnerships;**
- (5) **Follow-up, review and learning.**

Following this, a **panel** of experts gave a short input on the governance architecture and strategic frameworks for the 2030 Agenda at the European level to inspire discussions in the interactive group work.



**Karl Falkenberg** (Senior Adviser for Sustainable Development, European Political Strategy Centre) informed the participants of the conference that he has **started working on his report** on how policymaking at the European level can be made more sustainable about four weeks ago. The report will be finalized in June 2016. Mr Falkenberg echoed the sentiment that we are living in particularly interesting, challenging and changing times. Events such as the refugee crisis and farmers protests in Brussels illustrate the **need to effectively address sustainable development and relate it to current socio-economic challenges**. He argued that all three pillars of sustainable development are under serious threat: from the loss of biodiversity, loss of soil, stress on fresh water systems, greenhouse gas emissions and chemicals, to refugees, income disparity, financial systems and demographic changes. Mr Falkenberg

stated that to implement the SDGs in Europe, we need to do a gap analysis and survey what is happening in each Member State. This will be the basis of our actions.



**Stefan Bauernfeind** (Federal Chancellery, Germany) commended the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He reminded the participants that now is the time to focus on the task of implementation. He stated that the Commission's interest in SD issues and the mapping exercise that is currently carried out as a very promising starting point. Mr Bauernfeind then shared some key insights with the participants of the conference: He said that he is convinced we **need to integrate SD in the working structure of the Commission**. In order to address SD in a systematic way, he argued, we need a smart set of institutions, with a high level of commitment to SD and cross reaching structure between departments. Policy formulation should be based on smart and continuous systematic procedures, taking into account impact assessments. Mr Bauernfeind furthermore stated that it is of uttermost importance to **include all actors** – for instance, parliaments, civil society, and business. He also put forward the idea of **creating a Council for SD at the European level**. Mr Bauernfeind closed his statement by quoting Ms Merkel and stating that the German government strongly advocates a EU SDS as an overarching, ambitious strategy that acts as a link between the UN and national level.

**Farooq Ullah** (Executive Director, Stakeholder Forum) highlighted the universality of the 2030 Agenda by stating that he believes this symbolized an important **pact between developing and developed countries**. Only if the developed countries do their share, the developing countries will follow suit. However, the 2030 Agenda Outcome Document is **no clear blueprint for implementation**. Due to the lack of a clear definition of what the 2030 Agenda means in practice and what implications this has for policy-makers, it is dangerous to slip back into old-fashioned

development language. At this point, the 2030 Agenda is somewhat incomplete as there are goals but no **indicators**. The UN Statistical Commission is in the process of devising indicators to fit the goals and targets, their report will be available in March 2016, but the final indicator set will only be adopted in September 2016. Mr Ullah stressed that adopting an **effective governance architecture for implementation** will be central to the achievement of the SDGs. In this sense, effective and good governance for SD is both an enabler and a desired outcome of the 2030 Agenda. To achieve this there is an urgent need for a sophisticated mechanism of coordination and an understanding of the different roles and responsibilities for SDG implementation. In the current Outcome Document the UN 'fit for purpose' chapter has been dropped but **UN reform** remains an issue still to be resolved. The 2030 Agenda is not a legally binding document, therefore, Mr Ullah stressed **political commitment at the highest level** is of utmost importance for the success of the Agenda.

*Arnau Queralt Bassa* (Chair of the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC)) explained his role as chair of the EEAC, a network of 13 bodies in 9 countries, whose aim it is to provide **advice on SD to national governments**. He stated that it will be the next challenge to **translate the SDGs to concrete policies** and actions at the national level. For him, 2030 represents the medium, rather than the long-term. Mr Queralt Bassa explained that, from his extensive experience, it is crucial to put SD within the portfolio of the prime minister's office, or an equivalent institution at the top level of government to ensure that it is taken up in policymaking processes across all departments. He also cautioned that not all participatory processes have fruitful outcomes. Finally, Mr Queralt Bassa proposed that we select relevant SDGs and quantitative targets for Europe to act as clear incentives.

After these inputs by the expert panel, the conference participants split into **eight working groups**, focussing on the question: 'What do we need for an effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the European level?' and to work on recommendations more in-depth for one of the governance for SD themes previously introduced by Mr Berger. They were asked to produce three recommendations each for the European and the theme of their group. These recommendations were then reported back on moderation cards and clustered in a session with the moderator. The expert panel was asked to voice their reactions to the recommendations. Please see below the results of this interactive group work, synthesized by the ESDN Office.

### **Interactive group work on European governance architecture and strategic framework: What do we need for an effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the European level?**

#### **1) Recommendations for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the European level**

1. Political commitment for the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is crucial: to effectively implement SDGs, the 2030 Agenda needs to be seen as a 'shared priority' for the future development of Europe and its Member States. A new strategic EU approach on SD should be endorsed by all institutions, also as a signal to the rest of the world.

2. A above strategic 2030 Agenda implementation could be achieved by announcing SDGs implementation as the '11<sup>th</sup> priority of the new European Commission' and by integrating SDGs in the revised/new 'Europe 2020+ strategy', to make sure that SDGs are also at the centre of national development planning and yearly budgets.
3. As resources and capacities remain limited, the EU and its Member States should make use of existing successful processes, and thus not establish excessive administrative burdens, with a particular focus on policy coherence. Mapping and gap analyses to understand if current SD objectives are in line with the SDGs are important both at EU and at MS level.
4. The EU needs an overarching SD framework strategy that serves both internally as a lighthouse strategy for EU and Member States policies, and internationally to reinforce and establish Europe's position as an ambitious frontrunner on SD. Such a framework strategy should be complemented by new engaging SD narratives and, at the same time, regulatory actions.

**2) Recommendations related to the different theme areas, 8 working groups: (1) & (2) Long-term vision and short-term actions; (3) Vertical coordination processes; (4) Horizontal integration mechanisms; (5) & (6) Stakeholder participation and partnerships; (7) & (8) Follow-up, review and learning**

1. A **long-term vision** to 2050 for the EU is necessary, complemented by short-term actions (2020) in line with this vision: as an example, the UN reporting obligations could be used to show progress and to define future commitments. It seems urgent and crucial to create EU narratives to secure coherent short-term solutions.
2. **Vertical coordination** processes are important: they will ensure shared responsibility for the implementation of SDGs, through, e.g. a common reporting/accounting framework and a strong bottom-up dimension.
3. **Horizontal integration** mechanisms should make use of an overarching framework that integrates civil society, governments and parliaments on SDG implementation and monitoring. One suggestion is to create incentives for horizontal cooperation through combined budgets: such budgets would be devoted to SD policies, but would require that different ministries join their forces collaborating more and overcoming silo-thinking. Another proposal is to establish a system of 'sustainability checks' or tick-boxes to which all policies would need to pass.
4. **Stakeholder participation and partnerships** are essential. It is important (i) to encourage and enable grass-root initiatives and experimentation; (ii) to create platforms that not only comprise institutionalized stakeholders, but also other actors for specific issues; and (iii) to use NGOs for raising awareness for the importance of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs and to keep pressuring for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
5. In terms of **follow-up, review and learning**, the EU should adapt and complement the global SDG indicator set and showcase an improved package for its own use. The EU should also (i)

agree on headline indicators and link them to a communication strategy; (ii) establish peer learning processes between countries within EU and outside, also considering multi-stakeholder peer reviews; (iii) develop common EU guidance and support on reporting; and (iv) establish a commitment on the EU level and in the Member States for reporting on achievements every two years.



## Session 4: Governance architecture and strategic frameworks for the 2030 Agenda implementation at the national level

Session 4 concentrated on the **national level for the implementation** of the 2030 Agenda. The Session commenced with short inputs from six different national perspectives on activities and plans for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level, particularly in the context of national sustainable development strategies (NSDS). The national representatives were specifically asked to focus on plans for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in their country, key challenges of this implementation phase and what they would find helpful from the EU level.

*Cédric van de Walle* (Federal Institute for Sustainable Development, Belgium) reported that he is in charge of the **federal strategy for SD in Belgium**. He stated that the 2030 Agenda represents an impetus for more cooperation between the different federal levels and subnational authorities, through a translation of SDGs into a common long-term vision for SD. Mr van de Walle explained that there are four main tracks of **implementing the 2030 Agenda**: (i) communication of the SDGs to the public, stakeholders and authorities to attract their attention and ensure their involvement in the translation of 2030 Agenda into concrete measures; (ii) renewal or adaptation of strategies or plans including SD strategies to ensure the coherence of core and transversal policies with the SDGs; (iii) integration of SDGs in sectoral policies by including them in objectives and targets in strategic approaches in management plans and ministries' action plans; and (iv) fostering partnerships with civil society and the private sector.

Furthermore, Mr van de Walle focussed in the **key challenges** in the implementation in his presentation. An important issue is the integration of the 2030 Agenda into mainstream politics, without foregoing the ambitious nature of this new agenda. Furthermore, it will be critical to involve all ministries in the implementation process, not only those traditionally associated with SD such as the ministries of the Environment and International Cooperation. He suggested that the actual administrative structures at the federal and regional level are fit for purpose, but full political support for this transformative and universal agenda is required to ensure commitments. Moreover, he suggested that an effective framework for follow up and review and corresponding indicator sets are urgently needed. He also made the important point that we need a way to secure participation by all stakeholders to guarantee a balanced approach on the multiple dimensions of SD. Finally, Mr van de Walle stressed that it will also be a challenge to maintain the dynamic of the 2030 Agenda in the long term. This will require pressure on governments from national parliaments and stakeholders alike.

Then, Mr van de Walle tackled the question which initiatives would be helpful from the **EU level**. He stressed that the EU level should provide an inspiration and common dynamic for Member States. The Belgian institutional framework currently in place will only remain effective if there is widespread political support for SD. This could be facilitated by a new EU SDS and structured

initiatives at the federal and regional levels. He made the proposition that the integration of the SDGs in EU level policies could act as an inspiration for immediate actions required at the Member State level. Moreover, EU guidelines for follow-up and review processes and frameworks could support governments to establish national reporting mechanisms. Lastly, Mr van de Walle also suggested that a focus on a selection of priorities from the SDGs could structure the debate at EU and national level, without sacrificing the transversal approach inherent to sustainable development.

*Daniel Dubas* (Federal Office for Spatial Development, Switzerland) shared his experiences with the formulation of plans for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in **Switzerland**. He introduced the timeline for implementation of the SDGs through the NSDS. Due to the timing of the review of the NSDS (SNE 2016-19) before the official adoption of the 2030 Agenda, the **alignment of the NSDS with the SDGs will require a transition phase** (2016/17) until the planned SNR 2020-24 is formulated. This process of alignment will require inter-ministerial cooperation, a gap analysis of what can be implemented in the next 15 years and an incorporation of the UN indicators.

Then, Mr Dubas focussed in the **renewed Sustainable Development Strategy** adopted in January 2016 that will act as a common roof for the coordination of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This will include National Action Plans in 9 policy fields addressing the SDGs, consisting of long-term visions, challenges, goals to be achieved by 2040 and specific actions within the legislative period. Furthermore, the NSDS also includes an international chapter detailing major foreign policy contributions for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The NSDS is structured around a vision that defines a long-term perspective, goals that defined the priorities for the next generation (2030 falls within this) and actions that defined priorities for the next legislative period (2016-2019). Mr Dubas also informed the participants of objectives for the transition phase (2016-2017) including: a baseline assessment and gap analysis in sectoral policies; defining monitoring and review mechanisms; a clarification on stakeholder involvement with a national and international focus; the building of a stable policy cycle for the next 15 years; and a government decision on the concrete implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2018.

Last but not least, Mr Dubas addressed the question which **key challenges** are faced in the implementation phase in Switzerland. This is comprised of: improving the coordination between domestic and foreign policy; addressing cross-sectoral aspects; convincing ministries of the importance of the new agenda; working on partnerships for the implementation; ensuring effective stakeholder participation and exchange with academia; implementation at the sub-national level; how to best build on existing institutions and instruments; and how to utilize synergies between national and international monitoring.

*Annika Lindblom* (Ministry of the Environment, Finland) shared her experience with sustainable development strategies in **Finland** and current efforts of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSO) to translate the global goals to the national level with the conference participants. She explained that Finland has a long tradition of SD policies and strategies, having adopted its first NSDS in 1990. Ms Lindblom made the point that conventional strategies for



SD did not generate the impact and action needed. She suggested that this might not be an adequate tool to concretize SD and attract stakeholders to actively join in the efforts.

Ms Lindblom then presented some **preliminary thoughts** on how to implement the 2030 Agenda. She reported that the discussion on the National Action Plan to implement the 2030 Agenda only started in autumn, but is supported by a recently adopted decision by the government. It is currently planned that the proposal of this Action Plan will be adopted by the parliament in December 2016. Considering the implementation phase, Ms Lindblom suggested that many elements and mechanisms are already in place in Finland, but that there is also a need for new approaches. Key elements should include: a gap analysis to discern if Finland is ready for the 2030 Agenda; an 'administration's check' if the existing policies and process are on track; the development of a Cooperation Policy Programme, to be adopted by 2015; a review of policy programmes in all sectors; effective engagement of civil society and all stakeholders; a clear communication plan; and an adaption of the national SD indicator set (Findicator.fi).

Then, she focussed specifically the new approach of a **Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development**<sup>1</sup> with the vision of 'a prosperous Finland within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature' for 2050. This approach focusses specifically on voluntary commitments made by societal stakeholders. The idea is that the government invites different actors, such as companies, schools and individuals citizens to join and commit to a concrete action, then to measure it and to share this information on an online platform. She suggested that actors could form clusters to improve quality and volume of commitments. So far, there have been over 160 commitments, formulated as concrete measures. Ms Lindblom argued that this is a clear and functional tool to engage civil society and business stakeholders. According to a survey, 94% of the participants would recommend making a commitment. She ended her presentation by saying that the principle to 'leave no one behind' should be complemented by the principle to 'leave something behind' and 'leave no waste behind'.

*Sophie Stützel* (Federal Chancellery, Germany) gave a short presentation on the national implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda within the framework of the **German National Sustainable Development Strategy**. She reported that in Germany there is broad political consensus at the highest political level to commit to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The already established NSDS will be the 'essential framework' for national implementation. Furthermore, Ms Stützel informed the participants of the conference that a broad interdepartmental collaboration and dialogues with relevant stakeholders is planned in the leading up to the NSDS's Progress Report 2016. She stated that the current focus of the German government is to determine how national targets and instruments can contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information on Finland's Society's Commitment refer to [ESDN Case Study N°18 'Sustainability transition in Finland: Society's commitment to sustainable development'](#) available on the ESDN website.

Then, Ms Stützel focussed on the **key challenges** faced in this process. She argued that there is a need to reflect the universality of the SDGs in the national targets and indicators. This, however, will require changes since at the moment only two German indicators cover the international dimension of the SDGs. On the other side, many SDGs are already partially covered by national indicator sets in Germany, only poverty, water and oceans are not covered. This suggests that new proposals for targets and indicators could be included in the Progress Report of the NSDS to better align it with the SDGs. Ms Stützel made the strong point that in future the 17 SDGs will act as a structure for national indicators. Furthermore, Ms Stützel raised the point that we need to address if the current sustainability governance architecture is fit for the multi-stakeholder involvement, international reporting and effective steering that is required for a successful implementation of this new agenda. She argued that in Germany the Federal Chancellery has a clear steering commitment and an SD council also plays an important advisory role. However, improving stakeholder involvement remains a key challenge.

Finally, Ms Stützel addressed the question which kind of **support from the EU** could facilitate the implementation of the SDGs in European countries. This could include, she argued, a new strategic and ambitious approach for a European Sustainable Development Strategy that could act as an impulse for Member States. In addition, she said that facilitating the exchange of best practices and ways to approach challenges in implementation between Member States and other relevant stakeholders would be beneficial. Moreover, Ms Stützel made the point that the EU should position itself as a strong player follow-up and review process at the regional level and support peer learning and voluntary review.

Ms Stützel concluded her presentation by quoting Chancellor Merkel (Government Declaration, 24 September), who reiterated the strong commitment of the German government to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, stated that the NSDS will be a key vehicle for implementation and that Germany will present its implementation efforts at HLPF 2016.

*Jaco Tavenier (Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, the Netherlands)* began his presentation on the SDGs and national policy challenges in the Netherlands by stating that, at the moment, there are **more questions than answers**. The Netherlands still has to find a way to address the 2030 Agenda and its transformative, integral and universal nature. He made the point that there is no blue print for an effective national roadmap or interministerial body to address this agenda in policymaking in a coordinated and effective manner. Thus, Mr Tavenier described current activities at the national level as a **learning process**.

Mr Tavenier explained that in the Netherlands there is work being done focussing on **policy formulation, implementation and monitoring**. In terms of policy formulation, he said, there it is the aim to make the SDGs integral to the process following an interministerial approach, focussing primarily ministers of development and foreign relations, economics and the environment, but also attempting to include other ministries such as health and finance. Mr Tavenier stated that the national implementation of goals will be carried out primarily through cooperation between national government and non-state actors. An example of this type of cooperation is the recent

launch of [Post-2015 Charter](#) of different sectors in society last September. In terms of review and monitoring, work is currently carried out by the PBL (Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency), which is undertaking a mapping / gap analysis, as well as analysis of policy coherence and monitoring. The main findings of the PBL suggest that many policies focussing on a clean, healthy and safe environment in the long-term are in place, with existing targets from the EU level (mostly from Europe 2020). Now, there is the ambition that a national interpretation of SDGs for 2030 should support the achievement of the 2020 targets. Then, Mr Tavenier explained that the **key national features** of the SDG implementation in the Netherlands will be (i) a co-production of the government and non-state actors, including knowledge centres; (ii) that progress on the SDG agenda will be sent to the Parliament and be a subject of Parliamentary debate; and (iii) that progress will be monitored and reviewed on a biannual basis (see [Monitor Duurzaam Nederland](#) for reports). Mr Tavenier highlighted the importance of utilizing insights from key studies, such as from PBL's Sustainability Monitor and reports of the OECD or the Bertelsmann Stiftung, in policymaking.

Mr Tavenier concluded that a clear division of labour, including the private sector, and policy coherence, are key challenges to be overcome in policy making. He further suggested that the EU could play a crucial role by sharing the burden of collecting and analysing data with national reporting systems.

*Mara Simane* (Cross Sectoral Coordination Centre, Prime Minister's Office, Latvia) shared her experience with planning the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda in Latvia with the participants. She began her presentation by reminding the participants of the wording of the Outcome Document "We encourage all member states to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the SDGs and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate" (paragraph 78). Ms Simane reported that in Latvia this call for action has been addressed by an **initial mapping exercise**, carried out by Cross Sectoral Coordination Centre. This mapping exercise compared the SDGs to indicators of the national development plan, and other active policies. Ms Simane stated that she thinks that this exercise will provide the government with an indication which policy areas need to be addressed most urgently.

Ms Simane further highlighted which important issues have to be considered in the **implementation process**. This includes considerations of fiscal space, whose agenda this really is and the importance of also investigating where there are real problems that are not covered by the commitments to the EU. Furthermore, it has to be decided if the country wants to follow a path of intense or moderate change and of a new national development council should be established or the current process adapted. The current process is constituted by a NSDS 'Latvia 2030' and National Action Plans with a duration of 7 years (the current one running 2014-2020, the next one planned for 2021-2027). Ms Simane then reported the actions towards the SDGs that are planned in Latvia, including: (i) publishing the official statistics (mid-2016); (ii) mapping existing plans (late 2016); (iii) formulating recommendations from policy impact assessments (late 2017); (iv) carrying out the National Development Plan mid-term review (early 2018 and possible changes from 2021 or in current mid-

term planning); (v) continuously and actively participating in EU strategic discussions; and (vi) possibly amending of Sustainable Development Strategy of Latvia until 2030.

After these short inputs on different national experiences and future prospects for the implementation of the SDGs and needs that could be addressed by the EU level, the participants of the conference took part in a second interactive group work exercise. The theme of this exercise was **‘national governance architecture and strategic frameworks’**. The participants were divided into groups and tasked to discuss and decide upon key messages and recommendations to be shared with all conference participants. The results were then presented and clustered at the conference using long moderation cards. Please read the following synthesis of group work results carried out by the ESDN Office:

### Interactive group work on national governance architecture and strategic frameworks

#### 1) Member States’ Agenda 2030 experience share: Any strategic messages?

##### (a) Multi-level governance and implementation:

- Common but differentiated SDG governance is going to happen: therefore, developing coordination, collaboration and co-creation mechanisms are key;
- Developing a ‘governance reform’ in order to respond to 2030 Agenda implementation requirements;
- Involving EU and national parliaments;
- Maintain the overarching ambitious vision and transformative character of the 2030 Agenda in the implementation at national level: it should be ‘transformational’ and not ‘revolutionary’;
- Need to integrate SDGs in the core business of governments and civil society: use 17 SDGs as a reference point;
- Implement sustainable development at the local level (i.e. school level learning, local authorities engagement);
- Link-up with sub-national levels of governments/governance;
- EU 2030 Agenda is needed to energise Member States and to provide legitimacy and co-ownership;
- Subsidiarity: determine appropriate level; national level is key but look beyond EU (UNECE, regional groupings, 10YFP SCP, OECD, WTO → TTIP);
- No prioritizing SDGs, but developing clear action programs for implementation;

##### (b) Policy coherence, learning mechanisms and tools:

- Evaluate the mechanisms already in place for political coherence to achieve sustainable development objectives;
- Regular national gap analysis with SDGs as reference, also in terms of national priorities in regular policy cycle;

- Use the 2030 Agenda for broadening knowledge and initiating debate on prevailing economic models;
- Get operational: there is a need to demonstrate concrete results in line with a long-term vision;
- Use the available and existing transnational (i.e. Baltic sea region) and EU level platforms (ESDN) for learning;
- Creative innovative mechanisms of exchange.

**(c) Communication and new narratives:**

- Communication to provide visibility is key: (1) being open to new approaches to SD with increased ambition by changing communication strategies i.e. “out of the administrative box”; (2) clear marketing of the SDGs for public buy-in to the 2030 Agenda by using common language; and (3) positive storytelling/narratives (as practical as possible), e.g. “world’s BEST news”;

**(d) Stakeholders’ involvement:**

- Need for implementation framework by government to enable partnerships and clarify responsibilities;
- Stakeholder involvement for commitments beyond consultation.

**2) What more should we do together to enable best progress on Member State implementation of the Agenda 2030 across Europe?**

- **Peer learning and exchange through the ESDN:**
  - Exchanges of good practices based on gap analysis;
  - Improve peer learning to share best practice and responsibility at all levels, particularly national level;
  - Team up with peers on specific issues (tools, actions, priorities, governance) – ESDN as a ‘match maker’ for peer learning now;
  - We need all MS in the ESDN for mutual learning and exchange;
  - Peer learning and make results visible;
  - Exchange of information on communication of case studies (i.e. a collection of successes);
  - European peer review and learning – good examples to build on;
- **ESDN task force/support group:** compare MS (and EC) gap analysis – methods and results;
- **Institutionalizing’ ESDN,** cooperation between ESDN and OECD on governance.
- **ESDW:** Use the ESDW to promote SDGs, develop a system to match ESDW activities with the SDGs;
- **European-wide meetings:**
  - EU ministerial level: cross sector meeting for discussing SDG implementation
  - Organized meeting by EU Presidencies and ESDN on national 2030 Agenda implementation;
- **Stakeholders are key** – need cooperation and independent national support.

## Session 5: Challenges and opportunities for actions at the EU, national and trans-national level to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Session 5 reflected on the insights of the conference through a **final panel discussion** on ideas for actions and initiatives at the EU, national and trans-national level to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

*Ulf Bjornholm* (Head of the UNEP Brussels Liaison Office, UNEP) stated that the adoption of this new, universal agenda for SD is an **immense achievement**. Now, the question is whether this will turn into yet another document that is adopted, but not sufficiently implemented. He argued that the atmosphere at the moment is upbeat because the SDGs represent a major **conceptual breakthrough**. In the 2030 Agenda, we are attempting to merge two major processes, taking the best elements of the Rio Conference and the Millennium Development Goals and thus creating an agenda that allows all actors to pull into the same direction and have real impacts on the ground. The notion of **universality has a strong impetus for developed countries**, since they have a moral responsibility to actively promote this agenda. In particular, in the OECD countries there will be a lot of moral pressure through active stakeholders and civil society organisations. However, there is no guarantee that this agenda will be implemented. Mr Bjornholm argued that it will take time, it will be messy – and for us, the policy-makers and experts in this room, it might always be an uphill struggle – yet it is our job to look at the opportunities and seek to inspire others to play their part. Mr Bjornholm asked the participants to be very careful not to become cynical. A central factor of success, he stated, will be to **ensure political leadership at EU and national level**. If we pool our resources and engage all the actors it is possible – evolution rather than revolution will be possible.

*François Wakenhut* (Head of Unit F.1 Resource Efficiency & Economic Analysis, DG Environment, European Commission) began his statement with a sobering note, since he feels that it is essential for us to appreciate the magnitude of the effort ahead of us. He made the point that the **level of political ownership inside and outside the EU is not where it should be**. What needs to happen now, he said, is for ownership to be built up supporting this new agenda. Those who believe in SD should reach out beyond the circle of the already converted and show political leadership, and we are not there yet. He further argued that what is needed is a clear translation of this agenda into practical policies. Moreover, the timing of our efforts is crucial, since we need to **utilize the momentum to build the conditions for implementation** and continuous commitment. The window of opportunity is now, he exclaimed. We need governance changes now, because we will not get them in a years' time. Mr Wakenhut also argued that there is a need for **multipliers to promote grass roots level developments**. Furthermore, we need to be aware of the long-term consequences that our decisions will have; a possible way to communicate this could be to **link policy proposals to the SDGs**. Politics and politicians are behind because economics is the essence of politics– it is our



role to adjust these economics lenses – we need to communicate and translate the essence of the 2030 Agenda for policy-makers and parliamentarians.

**Stéphane Bernaudon** (*Ministry for Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy, France*) called upon the participants to be optimistic, while being aware of the challenges that we are facing. He made the point that, we, the policy-makers and experts in this room have to ask ourselves what we can contribute to the promotion and implementation of this ambitious agenda. Mr Bernaudon stated that he believes that the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) could play a supporting role by facilitating the exchange of best practices and solutions to key challenges between countries and acting as a **platform for peer learning**. For this to be successful, Mr Bernaudon urged **Member States to consider joining the ESDN Steering Group** to increase the number of countries that contribute to the organisation of this network, both financially and through their ideas. Moreover, Mr Bernaudon highlighted the success of the first [European Sustainable Development Week](#) (ESDW). Plans for 2016 include a greater alignment of this SD action week with the SDGs, making this a useful tool to mobilize citizens to organize activities promoting the SDGs in Europe. Finally, Mr Bernaudon announced the [13th ESDN Workshop "Strengthening environmental and sustainable development dialogue in Europe in the context of the 2030 SD Agenda"](#) taking place in Paris on 12-13 November 2015, which will be a joint event with the EEAC.



*Kirsta Kampus* (Senior Adviser & Head Baltic 21 Unit, Council of the Baltic Sea States) said that she thought that she heard some interesting new ideas during the conference, but that she also experienced a feeling of déjà vu. This, she argued, highlighted that we have to engage more frequently and effectively with actors outside the established SD community. Ms Kampus made the point that what is needed is a **stronger engagement of different stakeholders, commitment by the government and following a holist approach to policymaking**. She explained that in through Baltic 21 this has been done in the Baltic region since it was established by the heads of government and the EU Commission in 1996. Ms Kampus said that the challenge is how to get the right people around the table, since the holistic approach was lost the Europe 2020 Strategy, which did not sufficiently foster cross-departmental cooperation. To succeed, we need to make better use of the networks and platforms that exist in Europe, in particular their expertise in bringing together government and different stakeholders. This includes the ESDN and regional bodies such as the Council of Nordic States, the Council of Baltic States and bodies in the Danube and Mediterranean regions. These thematic platforms can contribute to implementation and support inter-country peer learning and exchange of best practices. Ms Kampus also reported that the Baltic countries have agreed on a new post-2015 strategy on a regional level.

*Alan AtKisson* (Adviser on SD, corporate responsibility, and transformational change, AtKisson Group, Sweden) reflected on the rich discussions of the conference and especially the interesting input on the intricacies and successes of the negotiation process by Ambassador David Donoghue, the co-facilitator of the post-2015 process at the UN level. The 2030 Agenda, he argued, calls for **universality, integration and transformation**. Firstly, Mr AtKisson stressed that what is new and different about the 17 SDGs is that these are goals that apply to every nation and every sector. Universality challenges nations, but also cities, businesses, school and organisations to act. Secondly, Mr AtKission stressed that this new agenda recognizes that the goals are all inter-connected in a systemic way. This means that we cannot aim to achieve just one goal, but we must achieve them all though an integrated approach. Moreover, he argued, it is widely recognized that this agenda requires making transformative and fundamental changes in how we live on this earth.

Then, Mr AtKission highlighted the importance of **communicating** the complexity of the agenda to the public and policy-makers alike. As an example, he explained are the four 'Compass Points' of sustainable development: nature, economy, society and well-being, which was recently adopted to include a visualization of the SDGs. Mr AtKission stressed that there is a need for creating tools and access for stakeholders to inform themselves and interact. He has started the Initiative [17 goals website](#) for this purpose.

Mr AtKisson then presented four **key messages to the participants of the conference, using a musical metaphor**. Firstly, we have to '**rewrite the song**' by communicating that SD is no longer a marginal / add-on subject, but essential, integrative, action-oriented, motivational, transformational and providing clear added value for every sector. Secondly, we need to '**beat the drum**' by continuing to communicate the SD story. Setting up new routines and procedures that embody universality, integration and transformation could do this. In cases where governmental openness is limited it will be particularly important to establish regular, multi-stakeholder processes. Thirdly, we

need to **‘form a new band’** to make sure that the ‘right people are telling the story’. This includes raising the level of integration, constellations of people, processes and institutional arrangements and mobilizing new personalities to multiply and amplify communication efforts. Fourthly, we need to **‘take the show on the road’** to include actors that are new to SD processes such as finance, social dimension and lagging behind economic sectors. Furthermore, we need to create or use new venues, events and processes to reach these new audiences.



## Reflection on the conference and next steps

**Elisabeth Freytag-Rigler** and **Wolfram Tertschnig** (ESDN Co-chairs, Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management) offered their reflections and concluded the conference.

*Ms Freytag-Rigler* described the SDGs as a ‘window of opportunity’ and stressed that now we have to work together to keep this window open as long as possible. For this purpose, she **invited countries to join the Steering Group** of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) to broaden the base of the network. She took up Mr Ullah’s suggestion that the ESDN will evaluate how to best support policy-makers and experts that are promoting SD in Europe.

*Mr Tertschnig* argued that we run the risk of getting too cynical due to the deficiencies that are difficult to be overcome. On the contrary, he said, this meeting filled him up with **aspirations, hope, and ideas**. We are very successful as a network, he stated, but if we want to continue to be successful we have to **evolve**. This we could do by gaining resources through further collaboration with others. Importantly, we need to go beyond the converted, Mr Tertschnig argued. He said that it would be a missed opportunity not to engage with other networks. The specific **task of the ESDN will be to support policy-makers and give them a platform to interact and learn from each other and experts**.







**European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)**

***[www.sd-network.eu](http://www.sd-network.eu)***