



ESDN Conference 2020 Report

European Green Deal: Our Pact for the Future

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**Conference
Report**

**Berlin/Virtual
October 12-13, 2020**

This Report is published as a work of the ESDN Office. The opinions expressed do not reflect the official views of ESDN Executive Committee nor the views of the ESDN Advisory Board.

Please cite this publication as:

Fetting, C. (2020). “The European Green Deal: Our Pact for the Future”, ESDN Conference Report, November 2020, ESDN Office, Vienna.

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Introduction

This ESDN Conference Report provides an overview over the presentations, discussions and debates during the 2020 ESDN Conference under the title “The European Green Deal- Our pact for the Future”. It was organised by the ESDN in cooperation with the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and was an event of the German EU Council Presidency. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it took place virtually, with only the organisers and a technical team being present at the venue in Berlin. The Conference discussed the potentials and shortcomings of the European Green Deal, which had been introduced by the European Commission in December 2019. It also provided a global outlook by discussing the implications of the Green Deal for the Global South.

The Conference started with a Welcome and Overview, followed by three sessions over one and a half days. Notably, both the Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and Chancellor Angela Merkel provided inputs at different points during the Conference. The five sessions focused on different topics:

- Session 1: Our pact for the future - Inspiration and intent
- Session 2: The Future of Sustainable Development and how to address challenges
- Session 3: Transformation towards a sustainable future
- Session 4: Repercussions of the Green Deal and European Commission Priorities
- Session 5: European Futures - Strategic Foresight

To access the full documentation of the ESDN conference 2020, please go to the [ESDN website](#), where the Conference Agenda, the Conference Discussion Paper and this Report are available for download.

Welcome

Annika Lindblom, President of the ESDN Association, welcomed the participants of the ESDN Conference. She thanked the German government for organising the Conference in these difficult times, especially Minister Svenja Schulze from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety and her team who have been dedicated to making this Conference happen and adapting to challenging circumstances.

She then introduced the ESDN Association. It is an international non-profit association for government officials pushing sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda in their countries and on the European level. There are eight regular members, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Romania and Switzerland and around 100 associated members. Finland is holding the ESDN presidency from 2020-2021 and the Vice Presidents are from Austria, Finland, and Switzerland.

After functioning as an informal network for 20 years, the ESDN has now become a registered association. Like before, the association offers a Workshop, a Peer Learning Platform and a flagship Conference every year. The Conferences provide a unique opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences with a large and diverse group of interested people and organisations. There are politicians from the European, national, regional, and local level, academics, NGO representatives, think tanks, financial institutions and students.

She introduced this year's Conference topic. The discussions will revolve mostly around the question of how the European Green Deal (EGD) can accelerate sustainable development in Europe. A unique feature of this Conference is the opportunity to hear the voices of young people, who have been discussing the EGD in the days preceding the ESDN Conference at the European Youth Camp.

This year's Conference topic was chosen because the EGD seems to be a unique possibility for the EU as an integrated concept, a long-term and global strategy and vision, a basis for sustainable transformation and a pact for the future between European institutions and the people of Europe. These assumptions should be debated and questioned throughout the Conference. Annika concluded by saying that she was looking forward to hearing everyone's inspiring ideas and new entry points about how the EGD can help to transform Europe into a sustainable society. She again warmly welcomed everyone to the Conference.

Session 1: Our Pact for the Future – Inspiration and Intent

Voices of the Future: Messages of the European Youth Camp

In the days preceding the Conference, the German Ministry for the Environment invited 25 youth representative from all over Europe to discuss the EGD. Three of the participants presented the results of their discussions to the participants of the ESDN Conference.

Dana Novăcescu from Romania welcomed the Conference participants and thanked the organisers for the opportunity to voice their opinions, goals, and requirements. She explained that in the past days participants of the conference discussed deficits of the EDG and debated the necessary next steps, requirements, and a common vision for the future of Europe. One main outcome of the Youth Camp was the **demand to establish a European sustainability culture**, which puts the wellbeing and health of people and planet at the centre. They should be the starting point and focus of all governments, administrations and municipalities. The **economy should not be a goal in itself, but a tool to achieve prosperity of people and society**. The SDGs need to be at the heart of policymaking and of any political action. In addition, it is essential to involve children and youth and to create space for their innovative ideas and potential. Dana emphasised that participants of the Youth Camp acknowledge that the mission of the EGD is difficult to achieve and that it is important to have all EU Member States on board. The participants of the Youth Camp and young people, in general, have a strong commitment to helping with the transition.

Nicolas Kurek (Switzerland) continued by arguing that the **EGD should be the main tool to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the post-2020 biodiversity framework**. The EGD should respect a set of principles:

- 1) It should include a **whole-government and whole-society approach**. Also, there is a need to break the silos of administration and policy-making, to **ensure policy coherence**
- 2) **Accessibility, transparency, accountability** must be ensured
- 3) Implementation of the EGD must be communicated through **understandable language** and **publicly available information**
- 4) The **progress in achieving the goals must be tracked and assessed**, and if we are not on track there must be a mechanism to accelerate the transition

Pia Jorks (Germany) highlighted the importance of **intergenerational equity**. **Youth must be given the opportunity to participate in the policy-making process** and their voices must be heard. In addition, every policy should be tested to see whether it is **future proof**. This will ensure that resources are fairly distributed between generations and regions.

Europe should think globally and recognise its **global responsibility and leadership in tackling the climate crisis**. It should be leading the green transition. For this, it also needs to reduce its ecological footprint and ensure that the ways in which citizens consume and produce do not negatively affect other regions or the possibilities of future generations.

The Youth Representatives proceeded to present the results of their discussions around three focus topics regarding the Green Deal.

Pia Jorks started by presenting on climate policy and the European economy. She stated that the Youth Representatives demand Climate Neutrality by 2050 and reductions of 65% by 2030. The EGD is a step in the right direction, and economic activity must align with its goals and the emissions targets. Yet,

the Youth Representatives found a number of deficits with the EGD. **One main deficit is the lack of ambition, both in the targets, but also in implementation.** Consumption-based emissions are still not considered. Renewable energy targets are too low and there is not enough action towards the shift towards renewable energy.

Secondly, the EGD is very growth focused. There is no social dimension, rather economic growth is the main goal. Yet, Pia argued, **growth should be a means for society and a sustainable environment.**

In addition, there is **a lack of consideration for external implications of the EGD, for example the impacts of trade deals.** It is not ensured that carbon pricing will work internationally. There is no effective taxonomy for investments yet and not enough commitment and reference to nature-based solutions.

The Youth Representatives propose five main steps to improve these deficits.

1. There should be a greater focus on consumption-based emissions, in order to avoid externalising emissions. For this, the **European Union should develop a way to calculate consumption-based emissions by 2021.** This can also be an opportunity to lead globally with regards to external emissions.
2. The second proposal regards the goal of reaching climate neutrality by 2050. The Youth Representatives demand more collective efforts. More financial and other incentives should be created to start direct, decentralised action on renewable energy.
3. There needs to be **more investments in future generations, a just transition and climate neutrality, especially for green jobs.**
4. The youth representatives suggest to **put greenhouse gas emissions at the centre of trade deals.** If possible, the EU should enter green trade deals with other big emitters, such as China and the US, and with emerging economies. Greenhouse gas emissions should also be a deal breaker for trade deals.
5. The EU needs to focus on carbon pricing, especially on a carbon adjustment tax.

Dana presented the proposals regarding biodiversity. She started by quoting John Comenius that **the whole world could be a garden.** Now, this is truer than ever as we are in the process of destroying the biosphere and using up all our resources. Europe can function as a role model and show the whole world that we can renature it. A key strategy is to **increase the value we give to protecting and enhancing nature.** In particular, the Youth Representatives suggest an urban development plan for the climate, a biodiversity strategy, and **a landscape strategy with a land use plan with integrated and multi-functional nature-based solutions.** There needs to be ecological and technological innovation for the preservation and creation of new natural spaces. Furthermore, **international scientific cooperation should be strengthened to encourage knowledge sharing about nature-based solutions.**

The EU should work proactively on the international convention on biodiversity and trade agreements to achieve a common approach for sustainable agriculture supply chains. There should be **biodiversity driven incentives and subsidies,** for example for turning farmland into wildlife conservation spaces. Finally, the Youth Representatives propose to create a scientific expert committee for biodiversity and nutrition. However, they also need to include civil society.

Nikolas presented the results on **youth participation, education and democracy. These are crucial aspects to create the European sustainability culture.** There is a need to raise awareness for the issues that need to be tackled, but also the available instruments for participation. Youth does not only need to be informed and educated, but policymakers also need to receive information and inputs from them. This is not part of the EGD, but it is crucial for its achievement. The question is; how can we get everybody on board? **We need to not only reach the people that are already interested, but also**

those who usually are not involved in these issues. For this, the Youth Representatives suggest to reach out through sports associations, social media influencers and art associations.

The European Green Deal: Our Pact for a Sustainable Future

Svenja Schulze, German Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, had talked to the Youth Representatives earlier that day, when she also recorded her address to the Conference. This address was streamed to Conference participants at this point. Minister Schulze started by emphasising the vibrancy of the EUREF campus, from where the Conference is streamed. She said that since we are meeting to discuss the 'pact for the future', we need to make sure that 'the future' is involved, meaning young people. She stated that, for example, the success of Fridays for Future has shown that involvement really pays off.

According to Minister Schulze, **the EGD is a message of hope.** Similarly, Germany has increased its climate ambition, for example, by a legally binding commitment to climate neutrality by 2050. Germany is on the right track, also with its agreement on a coal phase out.

The major threats and, therefore, tasks regarding climate change and biodiversity loss have not changed despite a shift in focus due to the Covid-19 pandemic. These threats are compounded by migration, poverty, nationalism and threats to social cohesion. The recovery package by the EU, therefore, means to ensure that climate action and environmental protection continue to play a central role in Europe and that the recovery will be sustainable.

Minister Schulze regards the implementation of the **EGD as a core responsibility of the German Council Presidency.** This includes all areas of policy, such as industry, finance, agriculture, transport, urban planning and energy. There are already many initiatives by the Commission that address this, for example the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, the Just Transition Fund and the Farm to Fork Strategy.

The **EGD means to combine environmental issues with the protection of human health.** The **importance of biodiversity protection** has been emphasised by the Covid-19 crisis. We need to think outside of the box to make environmental policy socially responsible and fair. We need new networks to be created, new approaches to be adopted and new alliances. This is the added value of the ESDN, where a growing network has the opportunity to have informal dialogues. This contributes to paving the way for successful environmental protection and climate action.

Discussion with Youth Camp Representatives

Florian Pronold, State Secretary, German Ministry of the Environment, reacted to the proposals by the Youth Representatives. He said that when he entered the world of politics 33 years ago, he felt very alone with the issues he was interested in, for example to save nature. He is happy that there are so many young people working on this issue now. They represent a powerful movement to change politics, and **to create this sustainability culture, we need a lot of power.** He says that from his own experience, you need a lot of stamina to change things in politics. However, when looking at the problems we are facing right now, **we do not have another thirty years to act.** Therefore, we need to be stronger than ever before. He thanked the young people for creating a vision of sustainability. We need to go out of our own circles and go and talk to everyday people about this vision. Without a vision, we will not have a democratic majority. Referring to Nikolas, saying that we need to reach all people, he said that he would be very happy if even 50% of the people could be persuaded by this vision. At the moment, a lot of people agree that we need to protect the climate or biodiversity, but they do not want to make personal changes. Thus, **we need visions and we need democratic discussions about the steps we need to take.** We need laws that require us to track our progress

regarding climate change. In Germany, a scientific panel convenes every year to assess progress in different areas and the government has to propose steps to improve in areas where Germany is currently not doing so well. Such a mechanism should exist in Europe, too.

However, we need to focus on a just transition. **If people are scared to lose employment or worried about rising housing costs, they will not care about sustainable development.** This is a difficult process.

We need a lot of young people, but we do not only need people who tell politicians what to do, but also people who want to become politicians themselves and to make changes themselves.

Moderator Peter Woodward remarked that Florian seemed to have embraced most of what the Youth Representatives demanded in their manifesto. The only difference may be the scale of ambition. Peter also remarked that this seems to still be a growth centred agenda, which the Youth Representatives criticised.

Nikolas remarked that there was a great consensus during the Youth Camp that sustainability issues should also include the social aspect, just as Florian had highlighted. Traditionally, there is a representation that there are three pillars of sustainability, namely environment, social, and economy. However, in the view of the Youth Representatives it is crucial to point out that **the environmental and social aspects should have priority.** The economy should be a tool to ensure the wellbeing of the people, which is not possible without a well-preserved environment. **The economy should be a means and not an end.** We maybe also need to **change the narrative around what we see as sustainability.**

Florian answered by referring to Naomi Klein's book *Profit over People*. He explained that in a capitalist economy, some people make profits, but a lot of people suffer under this economy. In the future, more people will suffer in this form of economy, due to the deteriorating environmental conditions. Therefore, **achieving sustainability requires a change in the way the economy is run, but also a change in the mind-set of people.** This will be a struggle, as there are people benefiting from the system as it is now. Many people are not looking far enough ahead.

In the comment section, many Conference participants supported the message of the Youth Representatives. Certain voices warned that **it is important to take young people seriously.** One participant referred to the great media response to the Fridays for Future movement, but the actual political change that has been affected so far is rather small.

Each of the Youth Representatives were asked to conclude with one sentence. Dana stated that she would like policymakers to turn the world into a garden, and that is the way we can achieve the EGD. Pia asked stakeholders to **recreate and rethink the economy that is centred on social and environmental dimensions.** Nikolas called for **creating the European Sustainability Culture and make it a part of our European identity.**

A History of Change

Ian Mortimer, historian and bestselling author, set the mood for the Conference by talking about the history of transformation over the last 1,000 years. He stated that on the social front, the history of change is very uplifting, but on the sustainability front, it is horrible. It is important to understand the reasons for change in the past, because they will likely be the same in the future. **The root causes of change fall into roughly three categories.** The first category is **external factors.** These include, for example, diseases, climate change and biological degradation. The greater the impact of these external factors, the greater the change they spark. For example, the Black Death in Europe, where a large

percentage of the population in Europe died, led to rising wages and the emergence of capitalism, among others.

The second root cause are changes **from within society**. Ian mentioned the example of the magnetic compass, which was not used for navigation until 500 years after its invention. An innovation will only change the world if it is actually needed at that point in time. There is a hierarchy of needs, both on the personal level, but also on a societal level. Innovation in medicine has led to a population growth that is unsustainable. However, the world has changed, so certain behaviours that were long accepted are no longer suitable.

Thirdly, **discovery** can be a root cause for change. 300 years ago, everyone in the world was living a sustainable lifestyle. Even when coal was burnt, it was on such a small scale that it did not matter. This was changed by the industrial revolution. Ian argued that the first inventors of coal powered machines did not want to get rich, but **they wanted resilience**. In the decades preceding the invention of the steam engine, a huge famine was ravaging Europe. Yet, in England, almost nobody died as the agricultural revolution was already underway and communities were resilient and prepared for the famine. Sustainability was not enough, people needed **resilient sustainability**. Once more food was being produced, the profit seeking started. The rewards for unsustainable living on the social side are remarkable: reduced inequality, increased life expectancy, individual liberties and more. The problem is that in our efforts to be resilient through specialisation and to secure our wealth, we forgot about the basis of our wellbeing. We now need to change our outlook, as **the free market is no longer delivering resilience**. This means that we need to give up some of our privileges, but that should not be too hard. Over time, people have ceased many practices that suddenly seemed suddenly undesirable, such as slavery.

Ian argued that the processes for us to give up unsustainable practices are there. For example, the literacy rate has almost reversed in the last century. This was brought about **by collective needs and social pressure** and has exponentially large impacts. **Every small gain in sustainability can result in exponentially large gains in the centuries to come**, but of course, the reverse is also possible. However, sustainability can become as normal as literacy. Ian Mortimer concluded his talk by stating that we will always need a world where things can happen. Sustainability is not a comfort blanket, but the very bedrock of our existence.

Moderated Discussion and Feedback by Parliaments, National and Subnational Level

Frédéric Vallier, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), argued that we do not know what changes we are experiencing right now. Maybe we are living through the biggest changes society has ever experienced. In Europe, there are 100,000 municipalities, which is a big army to develop new ways to do things. Most mayors already listen to the messages of the youth that we have just heard. Now, we **need to create the link between European ambition and the involvement of municipalities and regions**.

In the Covenant of Mayors, 10,000 mayors have already signed the intention to be more ambitious than their national state or the EU. Now that the EU is very ambitious, they follow the EU's targets and to develop policies in their municipalities to reduce emissions drastically. Mayors exchange a lot about different strategies, for example mobility. In addition to the Covenant of Mayors, there is also the Green City Accord, which helps to translate Green Deal ambitions into local policies. There is also the European Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities, a platform for exchange practices and a tool for municipalities to monitor the effect of their policies. **Most SDGs have a link to municipalities and local action**. For this, it is useful to have the Multi-Stakeholder Platform of the European Union. It is important that political silos are broken, even at the local level, to bring coherence in implementing

the Goals. Member States and local governments can all do their part. When it comes to the SDGs, they need to be brought to, and include, the people. People and municipalities want to contribute to the design of policies, so the EU needs to work with them to **make sure that policies are developed at the local level**.

Stefan Liebich, Member of Parliament in Germany, opened by saying that the EGD is a great opportunity. What we need to do now is to create a majority that supports it. For this, the transition needs to be just. So far in the EGD, there is no social pillar. **Only when the poorest are taken into account, can the transition be just.**

László Borbély, from the Romanian Prime Minister's office, is optimistic about the future and stated that he felt a lot of positive energy. To him, **the EGD is a new way of living**. He referenced Pope Francis who said the EGD was a human guide to protect our planet. László underlined the **need for an ethical approach**. Currently we are not on track for achieving the SDGs or for protecting our planet. We need monitoring, leadership and good governance. We also **need a guide for national governments to prepare the European Semester**; this can be used to prepare institutions, society and governance. One crucial aspect to achieving sustainability is to reach a critical mass.

Moderator **Peter Woodward** remarked that it seems that, at the moment, most of society does not understand the scale of the crisis. It seems that like the band on the Titanic, we are enjoying our consumerist lifestyle without thinking about the future.

Ian replied that people usually do not learn from crises or threats, because threats might not come true. People hope for the best and seek to enjoy what they can before the threats come true. Yet, over history, we have been very versatile and have managed to come out of disastrous situations. For example, we have emerged from the Black Death, where half of the population of Europe died. In addition, there is the aspect of **social justice**. When we were still all living sustainable lifestyles, inequality was much greater. There is a danger that with sustainability measures, we give up on the improvements in equality that we have achieved. However, when we give up on fighting inequality, the poorest will not take sustainability seriously anymore.

To the question whether Covid-19 was not enough of a threat, he answered that this is an unprecedented time. He argues that it is cause for optimism that we are looking to governments for help rather than praying to God. However, the changes in behaviour due to Covid-19 are not great enough yet. For every airplane that is not flying, people also use public transport less and use their cars more in order to avoid crowds.

Frédéric argued that it is important to design policies with municipalities in mind, according to the principle of 'partnership in governance'. Europe is well placed to make changes in the way things are run. However, **Europe should not tell anyone what to do**. Ideas have to come from somewhere, and if **Europe can show how it can be mutually beneficial** to lead a sustainable lifestyle, other people will take it up.

Ian called for believing in human imagination, as the story of humans is a story of imagination. We should not bet against **human imagination**.

The comments made in the comment section, however, were not so optimistic. One participant wrote that **humankind has had the technical possibility to destroy itself** only since the 20th century. Another argued that **society, as a whole, is not learning rapidly enough**. Minorities are not sufficiently powerful enough to drive changes as fast as they are necessary. Political leaders have to anticipate election results and are therefore too cautious.

Session 2: The Global Perspective

The Global Perspective

Achim Steiner, Administrator at the United Nations Development Programme, stated that he has no doubt that the EGD is a huge financial and transformative signal. It is important for Europe internally, to prove that they can act as one, but also internationally, to show that Europe is one of the most important blocs in international cooperation. The EGD is primarily an inward-focused deal. Within the context of Covid-19, it has sent a very important signal; both in terms of a recovery and a stimulus, but woven into it is the idea of a green transformation. This is most clear in the climate arena. We need to remind ourselves that a 55% reduction as proposed by the Commission, or even 65% reduction of emissions by 2030 as demanded by the European Parliament would have seemed extremely unlikely just a year or a year and a half ago. This provides an important signal that despite the economic, social and political setback due to the crisis, there is ambition.

In dealing with the impacts of Covid-19, **green jobs and employment stimuli are crucial**. If one looks at the impact of Covid-19 outside of Europe, the impact is massive. A number of countries, even middle-income countries are headed towards bankruptcy if there are no signals from the G20 and other institutions that they will help. For the most vulnerable, the impact has already been disastrous. We are facing significant setbacks in terms of development, which also limits the space for looking towards the future. An enormous potential for signalling may be lost due to the economic and social crisis.

Achim Steiner argued that if economic stimulus were to happen from the G20 and others in the next few months, **the EGD should translate into very clear signals regarding energy futures**. The signalling impact of the EGD could go beyond Europe, also as a partner for the developing world. Developing countries do not have the choice in what they can invest. They have to act within a highly constrained fiscal space. So far, Covid-19 has been an unmitigated crisis, but this has not shown up so clearly on macroeconomic growth yet. The big problem is that there is no social protection for about half of the world's population. **Covid-19 represents a major setback and a systemic disruptor**. It can become a distractive force for global cooperation and is a potentially distractive game changer. The key impacts so far have been on inequality and on sustainability. Achim argued that **climate change and digitalisation can be drivers in both directions: either they will increase or reduce inequality**.

We are currently five years into the Paris agreement. Every five years, ambitions of countries are to be reviewed. The UNDP will help countries reviewing their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). The development decisions taken in one country will influence the decisions of others. This connectivity is important to consider. **Greater cooperation should be a corollary to the EGD**.

In Africa, when looking at energy, the first concern is access to energy. Improving on this issue combined with creating renewable energy sources would be beneficial for all, but huge investments are necessary. A lot will depend on whether we can stabilise economic and fiscal crises outside of Europe. Achim proposes a **China-Europe-Africa triangle** of cooperation to tackle these challenges.

Panel Discussion: The Challenge of Assuring an Integrated View

Patrick Gaspard, President of the Open Society Foundations in the USA, opened his presentation by stating that systemic failures in cooperation have been true for the climate for a long time. He emphasised **the power of average people to mobilise and challenge the system**. One of the key purposes of the Open Society Foundations is to use resources to help citizens hold their governments to account on issues of inclusion. This crisis has led to the opportunity to create new models of

participation. Patrick said that climate protesters have been inspirational by calling governments out. The **failure to act on climate in the US has been intentional**, including pulling out of the Paris Agreement and consistently denying science. Patrick argued that climate action needs a new model of citizen participation. The resources of philanthropy, however, are modest in comparison to what governments can do.

Climate justice can also bring greater economic justice. The Overton Window of opportunity is now open and discussions are happening that seemed unthinkable before the pandemic, including universal basic income and a gendered approach to economic justice. The European Union needs to use trade policy and aid so that the burden of climate action is fairly distributed and also to prevent the impression of protectionism.

Christopher Hurst, Director of the European Investment Bank, started his presentation by reiterating the urgency of acting on climate change. He emphasised the **key benefits of greening urban areas**. He also argued that key investments have to be made into the electrification of the economy, with electricity coming from renewable sources. This means **we have to transform our industrial base**. In addition, innovation is needed in many areas, especially in recycling. The EGD covers a range of areas. A key element is also circular economy.

A participant asked how climate lending is defined. The participant found the framework established by the European Commission 'problematic' and asked whether gas infrastructure qualifies as climate finance. Chris answered that the EIB took the decision last year to no longer invest in fossil fuel technologies.

A participant commented that we need a mind shift from seeing developing countries "as people to earn money on" to cooperating with them on the same level. We need to remember that this debt is often brought on to these countries by us. Maybe it could be a solution to grant debt relief in exchange for a commitment to a clean energy system and economy. This is important for all of us to survive.

Achim argued that what usual happens is to go back to how it was before. But right now is a moment of choice. Right now there is an emerging economy of cooperation and co-investment. **Debt management measures have to be taken in the next few moments.** They provide opportunities for rescheduling, write-off and renegotiating conditions. Also, the issue is that borrowing on international markets happens under unequal conditions around the world, so it is harder to access funds. **Europe could play a significant role in changing the conditions for development cooperation.**

Patrick added that Covid-19 has sparked a new conversation around **debt relief in the Global South**. Massive resources need to be infused into economies in the Global South, however, these resources do not exist anymore.

Chris explained that the different rates for borrowing for emerging and poor countries is due to private rating agencies and how they perceive the risk of borrowing from these countries.

Another participant commented that we should rather invest in the right topics, as there will be more control over where the money goes than with debt control. However, these investments would have to be similar in magnitude as the debts.

Achim argued that with the financial constraints rich countries are facing now due to the pandemic, there is less of a focus on development. The vast majority of citizens in rich countries do not understand how much we depend on each other. So far, **we are not able to sell a positive vision of development cooperation**. Yet, investing in the African continent, for example, into halving the people who do not have access to electricity costs less than a cup of coffee per citizen. Even if the public can understand mutual dependency, people cannot see the excitement of the mutual challenge and the way **the**

European economy can also benefit. Therefore, we have to go more into the public arena. Communication is a key tool in order to change the narrative.

Chris answered a question by a participant on how the EIB distinguishes between real green investments and not just green washing. He said that we want economic growth and prosperity and it is a difficult question that will remain a challenge in the future. There is a need for a definition for greenwashing.

Achim argued that the transformation of the 21st century is a journey and we cannot flip a switch. We just need to make sure it is a green journey. One of the problems is that we **are still stuck with the GDP growth paradigm**, when in fact, for example, **Germany has been doing really well in the past years leading up to the pandemic with virtually no growth**. The UNDP has long challenged the idea of economic growth, using instead Armatya Sen's concept of capabilities. We have to move beyond GDP. The question is whether we can find another singular indicator. The advantage of GDP is that it is simple and indicates something. As the pie was growing, some crumbs were falling off.

Patrick added that growth is talked about religiously. Instead we need to talk about sustainable and more broadly shared prosperity. A diverse set of actors is already engaged in this.

Adolf Klope-Lesch from the German Development Institute, entered the conversation as a further discussant. He argued that sustainable growth strategies used to be referred to as a tool, now **there is a question about the use of growth overall**.

Peter then asked all discussants for a final word on how to make the most use of the EGD and how to drive it forward in difficult times. Chris started by arguing that **when we question growth, we have to understand the perspective of people who lose their jobs and keep them in mind when we design policy**.

Patrick argued that the EGD needs to be grounded in cities and jobs. People can understand what mutual dependency looks like, but they need vehicles to act upon this. He reiterated the importance of **mainly focusing on cities and jobs**.

Achim said that in the short-term, there will always be topics that dominate more than the question of development. The SDGs are a vision of the way forward. They move us beyond the era of trade-offs, as **we cannot trade off people's wellbeing against an industry's success**. We will have to learn to deal with uncertainty, as we have never been in a situation like this before. The SDGs need to be at the forefront and act as a compass out of the crisis. They can hold governments to account and businesses are beginning to view them as a way of investing more smartly. Pursuing the EGD in a smart way might mean that an African gets to switch on a light bulb for the first time. **A dollar invested in the SDGs and development will yield multiple dollars in return**. For example, Mexico recently issued an SDG bond. This shows how they can become a compass for investment.

Broadening the Discussion: the Development Perspective and the Global South

Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, MEP, Vice-Chair of the Development Committee, Vice-Chair of the Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament, spoke to the Conference participants through a pre-recorded video message. She started by thanking the Conference participants and stating that conferences like these help to foster exchange and learning about the EGD. She argued that the EGD cannot work in isolation. It needs to be constantly negotiated and discussed between different stakeholders and actors. The week before the Conference, the Commission adopted the proposal for the first ever European Climate Law, requiring all Member States to reduce emissions to

net zero by 2050. In her role as shadow-rapporteur for the EU-Africa strategy, she is interested in consolidating the EU-Africa relationship in a meaningful and viable manner. That means that she and her colleagues **take the perspective of their African partners on the EGD very seriously.**

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 crisis, the EU-Africa relationship is not in the focus at the moment. The Post-Cotonou negotiations (The Cotonou-Agreement is the framework for the EU's relation with African and Caribbean and Pacific Countries¹; author's note) and the vote on the report on the EU-Africa strategy have been delayed. In general, there is a new dynamic in the relationship due to Covid-19. There have been many unexpected challenges for the two continents this year. However, Covid-19 also presents a unique opportunity to re-establish our relationship and **make it a true partnership of equals** and to cast out structural mismatches.

The goals of the EGD are primarily focused on the EU, but they need to be comprehended in an integrated way, especially with regard to its effects on the so-called developing countries. Not all Member States are maintaining a strong relationship with African countries, so **the exchange of views and needs with regards to environmental protection, sustainability and becoming climate neutral** is not always happening. Germany wants to play a pioneering role in establishing a strong relationship with Africa within the EU. The EU-Africa summit was supposed to be the centrepiece of this, however, it has been postponed and no longer falls in the time of the German EU-presidency.

The supply chain law planned by Germany puts human and workers' rights and environmental protection in focus. **The green transition and sustainable development can mean very different things on the two continents.** The different understandings and potential areas of cooperation need to be defined through exchange. It is time to try to **end the paternalistic relationship and mere donor-recipient models.**

Youth and women need to find extra consideration in negotiations and exchange, because they are very **important, but are often unseen actors and agents.**

In the European Parliament's Development Committee, Pierrette focuses a lot on questions and developments with regards to **food security and food sovereignty, which is a priority for many African countries.** It is influenced by the European conception and production behaviour and its effects on the planet.

As Vice-chair for the Committee on relations with the Pan-African Parliament, she is especially concerned about the question how the European Parliament can demonstrate its sincere commitment to African partners. She believes that the protection of our planet for future generations with smart and innovative solutions coming from learning and exchange is the best footing for a sustainable and fruitful partnership that is able to overcome difficult moments of the past and in the future.

Maria Flaschsb Barth, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development in Germany, warned that a **sustainable future in the developing world is under threat.** The SDGs will not be met worldwide. This was already a fact before, but the current crisis has made it much worse. 100 million people worldwide have been pushed into extreme poverty. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that between April and June 230 million jobs have been lost in middle and low income countries. Young people all over the world are losing their prospects. **Developing countries are sceptical of the EGD**, as they do not see what it holds for them, especially while undergoing an economic downturn. They **fear that they will face additional aid conditionality and trade restrictions.** The European agenda is not necessarily in accordance with their interests, but some are **interested in the opportunities this may offer** and how they can be a part of it. The EGD does call for a global outlook, but that has not yet been sufficiently operationalised. The EGD is already

¹ More information can be found here: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/cotonou-agreement/>

the key for achieving the 2030 Agenda internally within the EU, but it should also be used for external actions. **The recovery from the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic must be guided by economic, ecological and social objectives.**

Imme Scholz, Deputy Chair of the German Council for Sustainable Development and Vice Director of the German Development Institute, said that the size of **financial constraints that are faced by developing countries** are not only dire in light of social and economic fallout, but they also **threaten the deeper transformations that are necessary**. The EU needs to make some real financial commitments. Otherwise, the gap between the North and the South will open up again **and some structural transformations will move out of reach**. We need to make a massive investment and establish new parameters for development cooperation. This is no longer charity, but a necessity. **If efforts to stop global warming are not global, they are not going to be successful, also not in Europe.** Europe, however, is very self-centred, also Germany. If governments do not do what is necessary, development cooperation cannot fill the gap. It needs to happen from a global perspective. There are several things that Europe needs to do:

- It needs to push for **debt relief** and be more decisive in stopping illicit financial flows, for example through closing tax havens
- It needs to clearly shape international trade in a way that does not close markets and also **avoids that the burden of climate action is shifted to the Global South.**
- In development cooperation, Europe should distinguish more clearly between different categories of developing countries, e.g. LDCs, emerging economies, etc.

Imme reiterated how important it is to **listen to the voices of partner countries**. The EGD should be the centrepiece of discussions with partner countries. They need to see that it does not only serve European interests, but also theirs. Europe should be strongly engaged in fostering multilateral cooperation.

Manish Bapna, Executive Vice President of the World Resources Institute (USA) started by saying that there is a reversal of progress towards the SDGs, due to the compounded impacts of Covid-19, climate change and conflicts. This is the framework, within which we currently have to think about development cooperation. If we are looking at how different countries have responded, we can see that many big economies have embraced sustainability in their recovery packages, but others have not, such as Russia, China and India. **Climate ambition is important**, because it creates momentum, and its **relevance for development cannot be overstated**. Developing countries cannot also be expected to face the challenge of 3-4°C warming. We know of the impacts and we can already see the warming of 1.1°C right now. Climate finance is absolutely critical, in addition to measures for mitigation and adaptation.

Another question is how small, developing countries can build back better. How can the response meet the short-term needs of creating jobs and maintaining livelihoods, while at the same time laying the foundation for structural shifts for climate adaptation and mitigation? We need to identify the investments that can achieve both. The EGD includes very important investments around building efficiency, clean energy, resilient, sustainable food systems, and more. **If they are designed well, these investments can generate multiple wins in terms of creating jobs and climate friendly industries, but also for creating resilience to various shocks.** For this, we need a better evidence base. Most evidence for evidence-based policy making currently comes from the developed world. **We need to create a better evidence base for policies in the developing world.**

Debt is another crucial topic for the developing world. In small countries, the weight of debts will be massively oppressive. 14% is to bilateral donors, 27% is to China, 27% to the private sector, 30% to multilateral development banks. The IMF and the World Bank want **debt relief or terms that create resilience to future shocks**. Debt relief is going to be crucial in the coming months and heads of the

IMF and World Bank will be coming to Europe to convince governments to suspend debts. The question is under what terms debt will be forgiven. Resilience is an important term for debt relief. Any types of efforts around debt relief also need to bring in China and the private sector, as each holds about 30%, so together more than half of the debt in the developing world.

Adolf Klope-Lesch added that we have to **stop seeing developing countries just as victims**. They have shown significant agency in the face of the Covid-19 crisis and **many have put in better regulations than rich countries**. Rich countries have invested roughly 10% of GDP, middle-income countries 3% and Least Developed Countries 1% of GDP into their stimulus programmes. Through bailouts in rich countries, their **competitiveness is reinforced. This includes technological competitiveness, because a lot of the stimulus is targeted at innovation**. We need an external dimension for the EGD, not only through providing aid, but also through changing the way we interact with other regions. **Trade and investment patterns need to be changed**, not only with developing countries. Cooperation needs to deliver change and not aid. We should avoid putting developing countries into a separate box, isolated from cooperation between countries in the rich world.

A participant asked why the BMZ (German Ministry for International Development Cooperation) is against integrating the SDGs in the European Semester. Adolf answered that the present set of actors in establishing the European Semester come from the finance world. He agreed that the SDGs and development cooperation need to be included, too.

Maria added that it is critically important to **leave behind thinking in political silos**. A state secretary from the Ministry for Development Cooperation will have a very different approach than a state secretary from the Ministry of Finance. Communication is critically important, not just among the government, but also with civil society.

Manish said that the German government has been a champion in helping countries design their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). It has an NDC partnership with about 120 countries and 50 international institutions. During post Covid-19 recovery, economic advisors have been strategically placed in finance ministries in order to **better integrate NDCs into recovery plans**. That way, recovery plans can not only create jobs in the short-term, but also create resilience and help achieve climate plans. This is a very practical example of cutting across line ministries. It is critical to consider developing countries' agency. They are very concerned that solidarity will be undercut in the aftermath of Covid-19. Developing countries are wondering how it was possible to come up with \$12 trillion for recovery, when tens of millions of dollars are needed to help suffering people in developing countries. In addition, they are often suffering impacts of something for which their countries are not responsible.

Imme added that **solidarity is very important**. You cannot care about only those that are immediately around you, especially if you benefit so much from globalisation. Therefore, we need to transcend the silos and look at what brings you together and what are shared concerns. The question should be, what can I add to make my agenda stronger by joining others. This is more difficult in an environment where you feel that you are competing for resources.

Session 3: Transformation towards a Sustainable Future

Recap of Day 1

Daniel Dubas, ESDN Association Vice President, Delegate of the Swiss Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda, Swiss Federal Office for Spatial Development, opened the second day of the ESDN Conference by recapping the discussions of the first day.

He stated that a crucial outcome of the presentation by the Youth Representatives was the call for a European Sustainability Culture. Daniel argued that the EGD might be one of the main answers to this demand. What Daniel found most interesting about the speech by Minister Schulze was her statement about the changing priorities in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Daniel, we are all aware of this issue and we know **that the challenges that we are facing with regards to sustainable development are just as important, if not more important, than ever before**, as we are still facing large destruction of our eco-systems. A main take-away from the discussion between representatives from the national and subnational level was that **all levels of governance have to be involved in order for sustainable development to be successful**. The afternoon's discussions about impacts of the EGD on the Global South emphasised **the importance of solidarity between the Global North and South**.

The Future of a Sustainable Europe in Light of the EU Green Deal – Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany

The focus of the German Government's actions at the moment and the EU Council presidency right now is to **overcome the Covid-19 crisis**. In general, sustainability is one of the greatest challenges we are facing right now, and, in particular, environmental protection and climate action are a focus. In the area of the **environment, the situation has actually gotten worse since the 2030 Agenda was agreed upon** and the pressure to act has intensified since the outbreak of the pandemic.

The EGD guides the way to climate neutrality, without reducing innovation or competitiveness. It combines ecological and economic necessities. Europeans should be role models and **show that economic growth and CO₂ emissions can be decoupled**. The transfer of technical knowledge will be crucial for this, especially in the field of development cooperation. The European example will be under close scrutiny. It is up to us as to whether other countries will follow our lead. However, this has become more difficult in times of the pandemic, as social and economic consequences need to be tackled first. Yet, in every crisis, there is a chance. Germany supports the proposal by the Commission for a 55% reduction target by 2030. It is very ambitious, but **with the EGD we have a compass that can show us how we can have an economy that is low on emissions, but also competitive**. This is a comprehensive transformation, with deep structural adaptations in our economies. In Germany, this will lead to new perspectives in terms of jobs.

The 2030 Agenda and EGD need to **ensure a just transition**. For this, we need a holistic framework for the 2030 Agenda. The Commission has announced that it will soon publish such a concept. **Strategic foresight will play an important role in ensuring that the EU is future-proof**. We need to prepare better for crises. In addition, sustainability needs to be promoted on all levels. In Germany, there are specific targets and deadlines for each SDG. This is constantly being evaluated. We also need an **alliance of all parts of society**. The European Sustainable Development Week has shown that sustainability is not just a topic for the good days, but it is a cause close to people's hearts. Each and every one of us needs to internalise the principles and urgency of sustainability, because **sustainable development can only be successful as a common effort**. The EGD can be used as a basis from which this communal effort for a sustainable Europe can be achieved. The ESDN has accumulated a lot of knowledge and experience, which can help to bring the idea of a sustainable Europe with life.

Session 4: Breakout Groups: Repercussions of the Green Deal and European Commission Priorities

Breakout Groups Reporting

Sustainable Growth

André Martinuzzi, Head of the ESDN Office at the Vienna University of Economics and Business, was the moderator of the first breakout group. One of the main results of the discussion was the need to talk about **discovery rather than recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 outbreak**. We need to discover new ways and not go back to what it was like before. The **new sustainability culture**, mentioned by participants of the Youth Camp, **should be the new narrative for the European Union**. While it was 'No More War' for our grandparents, 'Economic Growth' for our parents, this could be the narrative for the current generation. Growth should be considered as the means to an end, and we need more imagination what that end can be.

The participants of the breakout group proposed several concrete steps. Firstly, there should be **no new money for old ideas**. That means that all recovery packages should undergo an impact assessment. In addition, **external effects of activities need to be internalised and prices need to be set right**, for example through taxes. This also means that everyone needs to **consume less**. Another important aspect is education and communication, especially to young people who are interested in this topic more and more. We also need to develop new welfare measures. Finally, participants of the first breakout group argued that we need to better leverage the power of capital markets and **reward true value creation**.

Sustainable Food

The second breakout group was moderated by conference moderator **Peter Woodward**. Breakout group participants first discussed the positives of the new **farm-to-fork strategy (F2F)**. The strategy is a remarkable first step towards the needed transformations of food systems. It includes an **integrated perspective from production to consumption and sets ambitious quantitative targets** (e.g. regarding pesticides, nitrates, antimicrobials, organic farming). However, **policy coherence and ambitious implementation are the key to creating positive lasting impacts in the food system**. For this, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needs to deliver on the targets of the F2F and it needs the buy-in of Member States and the European Parliament. The issue of animal consumption is very vague in the F2F. **The need to reduce the consumption of animal products is not mentioned**. In addition, the F2F pays too little attention to the potential of cities and regions and regional food systems.

Regarding concrete steps moving forward, participants concluded that governance and participation are crucial. There needs to be **equal participation of stakeholders and decisions on the future of the CAP need to be taken together**. **Cities and regions need to be better integrated into the process**. Also, the countries need to set up **national strategies** for sustainable and healthy food.

A New Push for Democracy

Heather Grabbe from the Open Society Foundations European Policy Institute moderated and presented results from the breakout group on democracy. She stressed that **a just transition does not only require financial or economic support, but also the engagement of the citizens**. There are many new and innovative forms of citizen engagement, for example citizen's assemblies and engagement and deliberative processes. However, **in the area of climate change policy, there is a poor track record**

of representative democracy, yet creating and sustaining public consent is crucial in order to move things forward. Climate assemblies and other forms of deliberation can be very helpful, but they need to be tied into democratic processes and well thought out. The question is how this can be applied at the EU level. At the moment, the most successful examples of citizen engagement happen at the regional level. The **Conference on the Future of Europe** is the Commission's strategy of including more citizen's engagement in policy-making. However, the Commission is rather unexperienced in this field and needs sophisticated methods. For this, it can learn from the regional and local level. This way, we can **create sustained ownership and buy-in of citizens and regional and national institutions**.

Participants of the breakout group also discussed the model of China, where no democratic culture exists and things could move faster, because they are imposed top-down. However, the breakout group concluded that there are not only ideological reasons to support democratic processes with regards to implementing climate policies, but that **only through allowing people to voice their opinions, can public support be sustained**.

Sustainable Finance

Sami Pirkkala from the Finnish Prime Minister's Office and ESDN Vice President reported on the results from the fourth breakout group. Participants are convinced more and more that **considering sustainability aspects will help companies be more successful in the future**. One key means of achieving a more financially sustainable world would be to create more interaction between the national and international level. This reinforces **the importance of the sustainable finance taxonomy of the European Union**. However, at the moment this taxonomy merely focuses on environmental aspects. **Social aspects need to be included**, too. Overall, the taxonomy is a way in which the European Union paves the way for sustainable finance globally.

A second topic that was discussed in this breakout group is the question of national budgets. **There is a need for tools to measure the impact of policies and activities**. However, it is not always easy to measure positive and negative impacts of, for example, subsidies. The breakout group also discussed the importance of the Court of Auditors in assessing national policies and budget decisions.

Resilience and Strategic Foresight

This breakout group was moderated by **Gerald Berger** from the ESDN Office at the Vienna University of Economics and Business. The breakout group participants first discussed how both the Covid-19 crisis and sustainability challenges connect people globally. **The impacts of Covid-19 are a global experience of crisis, but on the other hand the SDGs are a globally shared framework of action**. Covid-19 has exposed aspects that were not going well in society, including environmental and societal issues. Furthermore, societal assets have been uncovered. However, sometimes governments could not absorb these assets and declined societal offers.

Participants then discussed **the meaning of resilience. It describes the capacity of systems to prepare for, respond to, and recover from risks**. To increase resilience, it is crucial to have an integrated management approach with operational crisis management for practical application. The question remains whether **resilience can be a compass for a systemic transformation towards a sustainable society**. The next steps towards increasing resilience include, firstly, political leadership to set the tone and drive the process. This includes 'preparedness' and trust in society. We also need an 'all-risks approach'. Covid-19 is not the only risk we are currently facing. **Evidence-based policy-making** is another crucial aspect for resilience, which includes expert analysis and guidance. Finally, it is important to engage all of society to be responsive to diverse needs.

Sustainable Mobility

Ursula Kopp moderated this breakout group. She first pointed to the importance of **putting people first. The ranking of different means of transport should give walking the first priority**, then cycling, public transport, sharing individualistic transport and finally cars, ideally electric cars. This is important because **people tend to choose the easiest means, so the more sustainable alternatives need to be the easiest**. A high level of convenience and service is needed to convince citizens to choose sustainable transport options. In the end, transport is just a means to get from A to B. The more important consideration should be about the quality of life in the city, and in which way transport can contribute to it.

The breakout group discussed how to achieve more sustainable transport. **It needs to be an effort at all levels of governance**. The EU should set the general rules, and at the national level, taxes and other steering instruments can support the efforts. At the city level, planning should include more space for sustainable transport options. The public needs to express the need for more sustainable transport options. The means and instruments that should be implemented include an energy strategy, electrification of modes of transports, biofuels, attractive public transport, mobility-as-a-service, and active mobility.

Missing Links

The final breakout group discussed the topic of missing links in the EGD. It was moderated by **Simon Callewaert** from the Federal Institute for Sustainable Development in Belgium. The breakout group concluded that **a holistic approach within the EGD is crucial** and it needs to rhyme with the concept of sustainable development. **A sustainable and social deal without lowering environmental ambitions** would be perfect. Secondly, the group discussed the involvement of businesses. The EGD will require massive investments that will open up new business sectors. It is therefore crucial to **ensure good business conditions to avoid the creation of new problems**. Finally, the breakout group agreed that **the EGD needs broad support to create a European sustainability culture**, as was proposed by the participants of the Youth Camp. This includes finding new alliances and working together.

Session 5: European Futures- Strategic Foresight

Panel Discussion

Daniela Jacob, Co-Chair of the Science Platform Sustainability 2030, opened the panel on strategic foresight. The Science Platform Sustainability has two mandates: it gives policy advice for the German sustainability strategy and related policies, and it tries to stimulate momentum for science. For foresight, she argued, **we need dialogue in different directions**. This includes a **science-policy-society interface**, a platform for the scientific community, but also strong communication with the policy arena. This requires other formats for interaction and engagement, such as laboratories. These are similar to citizen assemblies, but with a mixture of practitioners and scientists who co-design. This needs to be interwoven into foresight processes. However, these processes take a long time.

Foresight is about limiting vulnerabilities of the present and of the future. It means to use the experience of the past and combine it with the knowledge about the future. This includes traditional knowledge, as well as climate change scenario development. Especially in dialogues between scientists and policymakers, it is important that expectations are clear. Scientists tend to want to explain everything in much detail, whereas politicians and policymakers do not have enough time to listen to the details.

These dialogue and interaction formats **should be included in the ongoing infrastructure of policy-making**. This way, we can create real added value.

Jock Martin, Head of Integrated Assessments for Sustainability (IAS) at the European Environmental Agency (EEA), explained that the EEA has been using strategic foresight almost since its establishment 25 years ago. It is a smaller portion of the work, where the biggest part of the EEA's work concerns tracking progress over time and from the past. However, he believes that foresight will be given more weight in the coming decades. He presented what is called the 'piano table' of progress and foresight. The first row (resembling the keys of a piano) shows the progress made in the arenas of natural capital (e.g. marine and terrestrial protected areas, common species, air pollution and impact on eco-systems, soil conditions and climate change and impacts on ecosystems), a low carbon and resource efficient economy (e.g. material resource efficiency, waste management, emissions of chemicals) and health and wellbeing (e.g. concentrations of air pollutants, preservation of quiet areas, climate change risks to society) in the past 5-10 years. There **have been improvements in the past, but the outlook into the future is discouraging**. This has informed the EEA's thinking about **the need for structural and fundamental transformations in the way we produce and consume**, as consumption and production are the activities that contribute most to environmental degradation.

The EGD mainly covers the next policy cycle to 2024, but it is also a long-term agenda through 2030 and even 2050. Therefore, we need to work out ways in which foresight can contribute to its success. According to Jock, one way is to inform policymakers on the synergies of different policies and how we can address trade-offs. The **trade-offs are often between the different dimensions of sustainability, environment, society and the economy**. In addition, **there are trade-offs over time, between the generations, and over space, within Europe and between Europe and the rest of the world**.

Foresight can inform us how we address uncertainties. For example, Covid-19 was not really such a surprise; we were just not ready to address such a possibility and to include it in our day-to-day decision-making. Many countries had actually made preparations through foresight exercises, but they did not carry the results into their policymaking. Foresight can also support the EGD by designing a destination. The question is how we achieve sustainability and what kind of positive visions we can have about the future. In this increasingly complex and uncertain world, we should find a way to integrate foresight, something that is usually at the periphery, and integrate it into policy-making.

The key value of foresight is the ability to bring together people with different perspectives and world views and challenge our current assumptions with an exploratory mind-set. It is important to change the mind-set of 'you can't change what you can't measure', because **we will need to manage a lot of things that we cannot measure**. Foresight can help to do that by integrating things we do not usually integrate into our way of thinking. If we want to arrive at sustainability, we also have to move away from unsustainability and make choices and trade-offs. This requires us to **think about innovation, especially social innovation**. So far, when we think about innovation, technological innovation has dominated the discourse, but this needs to change.

If we want to move foresight to the centre of our thinking, we need to make studies relevant for policymakers, build capacities to develop and implement foresight outcomes, engage high-level organisations to take up these strategies, and develop targeted and effective communication. It is important to have an effective strategy to communicate uncertainty in a world that is more and more looking for certainty.

Manfred Rosenstock, Deputy Head of Unit Environmental Knowledge, Eco-Innovation & SMEs, DG ENVI at the EU Commission, started by saying that the high-level institutional support for strategic foresight as demanded by Jock might actually be coming. The Commission is working with strategic foresight now. Thanks to VP Šefčovič, the Commission has a designated Commissioner for inter-institutional relations and foresight. The idea is to embed strategic foresight into policy-making as a part of better regulation. This can be achieved through **building collective intelligence to anticipate and future-proof the policies for new opportunities and challenges**. The plan is to undertake strategic foresight exercises on major policy initiatives.

The **first Annual Strategic Foresight Report** was adopted in September. Its aim was to assess upcoming disruptive factors, providing foundations for developing and aligning strategic priorities as a basis for discussions with the council, the European Parliament, stakeholders and external partners. Finally, it is also **a tool to drive the green and digital transitions**. The report focuses on the subject of **resilience in various dimensions: social and economic, geopolitical, green and digital**. It analyses what needs to be done to enhance resilience and how foresight can contribute to that by identifying the risks, opportunities and pathways. Prototype resilience dashboards of indicators serve as a basis for further discussions with Member States and stakeholders. They are the basis to develop foresight informed policies. Scenario-building exercises serve as a reference for debates and to inform policy-making. In addition, the report provides a strategic foresight agenda, with policy-specific exercise, e.g. on the future of green jobs and skills, or the link between the digital and green transition.

FORENV, the European Environmental Foresight system, is a foresight exercise for **detecting, characterising and prioritising environmental issues**. It is based on a five-step process, which is in turn based on horizon scanning, for distilling expertise on emerging environmental issues into an analytical report. The **five steps are information collection, sense making, characterisation, validation and outputs**. This will enable EU policymakers and other stakeholders to exploit emerging opportunities and to manage emerging risks. FORENV projects include exercises on technology in urban environments and emerging issues at the environment-social interface.

Conference Closure

Peter Woodward said that he hoped that this Conference would not become the new normal, despite it being cheaper and lower in carbon emissions. Everyone has hopefully learned a lot, but human endeavour is usually successful, because we interact as human beings. Therefore, Peter is looking forward to rebuilding and building new relationships and trust, because through technology this is limited. A lot of what we have heard at this Conference is reinvigorating and he is encouraging everyone to keep doing what they are doing, especially in these challenging times.

Jörg Mayer-Ries said that when we hear what is about to happen, in Germany, Europe, and the world, there is no real reason for optimism and happiness. However, he also mentioned chancellor Merkel saying that she believes that Europe will be the forerunner for sustainable living and a sustainable mode regarding the economy. The EGD has great potential, but what is needed are structural reforms.

We also have to solve the conflict between different SDGs. This is the big challenge that we have to face within the next 6, 12 or 18 months, while leaving no one behind. The EGD addresses mostly economic policy, and many financial and business entrepreneurs are ready to act. In his breakout group in the morning, he heard from the World Business Council on Sustainable Development that they want to reinvent capitalism. In the economic system, true value should be created, which to Jörg means that there is no exploitation of people, nature or the future. He closed by saying that the manifesto of the young people was really impressive. He thinks that the idea of turning Europe into a garden will stay with us for a long time.

Sami Pirkkala thanked Germany for an excellent Conference, especially since this has been a very difficult Conference to organise in terms of the logistics. Yet, everything has run smoothly and all participants have enjoyed the great interventions that we have heard. He gave a special thanks to Jörg Mayer-Ries and all his colleagues at the Ministry for the Environment, the chancellery and the Ministry for International Cooperation.

Sami mentioned that ESDN Conferences are often hosted by the country that currently holds the presidency of the EU Council. The next German presidency will be after 2030, but Sami hopes that the next Conference organised by Germany will be much sooner. It was a huge honour to welcome chancellor Merkel to the Conference. Sami also thanked Peter and Tanja, the moderators, for making it easy to forget the distance between all Conference participants. He thanked all the excellent speakers and youth delegates, as well as the ESDN Office team, the technical team at the EUREF campus in Berlin and to all the participants, who made the Conference a success. He thinks that through team bits there may have even been more discussion than usual.

The ESDN will continue with its three main tasks: functioning as the European networking platform for sustainability experts, fostering experience exchange and dialogue between practitioners and advising decision-makers at the European, national, and sub-national level. Sami thanked the regular members of the ESDN, Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Romania and Switzerland for their contribution for fostering debate in Europe. He stated that the ESDN would be very glad to welcome more regular members. Of course, all events will stay open to sustainability experts.

He closed by stating that when everyone goes back to their desks the next day, their business as usual will have some new and unusual flavours.

Tanja Busse thanked Sami for reinforcing the feeling of acceleration and the urgency of getting into action.

Jörg Mayer-Ries closed the Conference by thanking the technical team, the logistical support in Berlin, the ESDN Office and the event team in the Ministry of Environment. Hopefully we will meet again at the next Conference in person.

