

European Sustainable Development Network



ESDN Joint Understanding

prepared by the [ESDN Office Team](#),
discussed with the participants of the ESDN Conference 2006 in Salzburg,
adopted by the [ESDN Steering Group](#) on 11 September 2006,
updated and adopted by the [ESDN Steering Group](#) on 12 September 2008.

www.sd-network.eu

About the ESDN Joint Understanding

(1) The ESDN Joint Understanding clarifies some important issues of network governance and it sketches possibilities of developing the ESDN further.

(2) The document builds on the “Draft Concept/Memorandum for a Permanent Support Mechanism of the European NSSD Network” that was discussed at the EU Sustainable Development Conference 2005 at Windsor, the Windsor Proceedings provided by IEEP,¹ and on the developments since then.

(3) The developments since the Windsor Conference in 2005 that are relevant for the ESDN can be summarized as follows:

- The ESDN Steering Group has been constituted at its first meeting that took place in February 2006 in Vienna. Currently, representatives from Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK are members of the Steering Group, and representatives from the European Commission have an observer status.
- RIMAS, the Research Institute for Managing Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration has been contracted to operate the ESDN Office for an initial period of two years.
- The ESDN Office Team launched the website of the ESDN at www.sd-network.eu in May 2006.
- ESDN members and associates met for the fifth annual ESDN Conference in Salzburg in early June 2006. In the concluding session of the conference, the participants discussed a draft version of the ESDN Joint Understanding. This revised version takes this discussion into account.
- The renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) was adopted by the European Council on 15-16 June 2006. Paragraph 42 of the EU SDS relates to the roles and functions of the ESDN as follows:

“Member States could make use of the existing European Sustainable Development Network with the aim of facilitating the exchange of good practices and experiences. It could gather views on specific priority themes and issues to be discussed by Member States in order to exemplify and document good policies and practices. This network could also be used to enhance the mainstreaming of sustainable development issues, vertical integration and coherence between the EU, national and sub-national levels of policy-making.”

(4) The issues clarified in the ESDN Joint Understanding are the following:

- Mission statement
- Membership issues
- Functions of the ESDN Steering Group
- Functions of the ESDN Office

¹ Both documents are available at <http://www.sd-network.eu/?k=ESDN%20conferences>

Mission Statement

(5) The ESDN aims to facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences on sustainable development across Europe between government authority representatives responsible for SD policy formulation and implementation, in close collaboration with stakeholders. It organises structured discussions on specific priority themes, issues and good practices. The ESDN also tries to enhance the mainstreaming of sustainable development issues, vertical integration and coherence between the EU, national and sub-national levels of policy-making.

(6) The ESDN Steering Group facilitates the activities of the ESDN and provides guidance for the network's future development.

(7) The ESDN Office supports the ESDN and its Steering Group on an individual basis and through internet-based services. It facilitates the exchange of good practices and experiences throughout the year.

Membership Issues of the ESDN

(8) An important step for the further development of the ESDN is establishing clear criteria for membership because

- An effective network needs a well-defined core group interested in regular interactions with each other.
- Policy learning works best when network members are willing to share both good practices as well as challenges. This, in turn, requires channels of communication that allow for confidentiality among network members.
- Since one of the functions of the ESDN Office is to assist network members on an individual basis, the Office Team needs to have a clear idea about its target audience.

(9) The ESDN is a network of government authority representatives mainly from Europe. It has close ties to other networks, institutions or experts working in the field of SD. Thus, we distinguish between ESDN members, associated partners and others.

(10) Members of the ESDN are government officials responsible for SD policy formulation and implementation that indicate their interest in joining the network. Although the focus of the ESDN is on Europe, for the time being the network is also open to non-European government officials. The membership status implies taking actively part in the exchange of information and experience among ESDN members and gives access to targeted individual support by the ESDN Office. The only obligation that comes with the ESDN membership is not to distribute information provided in the membership section of the ESDN website among non-members. Being a member of the ESDN is free of charge. Those who join the ESDN as members agree to share the ESDN Joint Understanding.

(11) Experts from other networks, national as well as international SD advisory councils, international organisations and NGOs dealing with SD, and senior experts

from research institutes with a long-term record of accomplishment that is relevant for the ESDN are invited to join the ESDN as associated partners. All associated partners are listed on the ESDN website, they receive the quarterly newsletter and they are invited to the annual ESDN Conferences. Associated partners are encouraged to provide a link to the ESDN website on their homepage.

(12) Regarding the nomination of ESDN members and associated partners we propose the following procedure:

- Government officials that have participated at the ESDN Conference 2006 in Salzburg are registered automatically as ESDN members.
- Government officials that are responsible for SD policy formulation and implementation are invited to become ESDN members by contacting the ESDN Office (email: esdn-office@sd-network.eu).
- Those interested in becoming an associated partner of the ESDN are also invited to contact the ESDN Office in this regard (email: esdn-office@sd-network.eu).
- Others who are neither ESDN members nor associated partners, but who would like to obtain information about the ESDN on a regular basis, are invited to subscribe to the ESDN Newsletter at <http://www.sd-network.eu/?k=resources>.

The ESDN Steering Group

(13) The ESDN Steering Group consists of a chair, members and observers.

(14) Functions of the ESDN Steering Group and its members are:

- To facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences within the ESDN;
- To advise and support the host countries in preparing the annual ESDN Conferences;
- To finance and oversee the activities of the ESDN Office;
- To provide guidance for future activities of the ESDN and further development of the network.

(15) In order to keep the decision-making process in the Steering Group manageable, the number of Steering Group members must be limited. The decision about a new country joining the Steering Group should be taken by the Steering Group unanimously within half a year after a country's expression of interest.

(16) The ESDN Steering Group members agree on the chair of the Steering Group unanimously. The functions of the chair are (i) to ensure that the Steering Group meets regularly, (ii) to prepare the agenda of the Steering Group meetings in co-operation with the ESDN Office and the other Steering Group members, (iii) to moderate the Steering Group meetings and, (iv), to oversee and manage financial aspects of the ESDN and its Office.

The ESDN Office

(17) The activities of the ESDN Office are financed and overseen by the ESDN Steering Group based on semi-annual work plans that are provided by the ESDN Office Team.

(18) Functions of the ESDN Office are

- To expand and update the ESDN website at www.sd-network.eu so that it serves as an up-to-date “one-stop-shop” on SD strategies in Europe and as communication platform for the ESDN;
- To circulate quarterly newsletters that highlight new entries on the ESDN website;
- To support the Steering Group in preparing initiatives in order to develop the ESDN further;
- To support the annual ESDN Conferences in cooperation with the host countries which decide about the format of the event;
- To help ESDN members in finding information on an individual basis and in exchanging knowledge and experiences at workshops and conferences.

The ESDN and other exchange mechanisms ²

(19) The ESDN regards close relationships and cooperation with other networks and exchange mechanisms that are concerned with SD issues as important and mutually beneficial. Therefore, the ESDN invites these networks to collaborate and share experiences on the different aspects of SD.

(20) **The ESDN and the peer review** initiative launched by the European Commission in April 2006 form two complementary tools for enhancing mutual learning about SD policy making. The ESDN Office could support countries that are willing to undergo a peer review by identifying possible peers and by disseminating the results. To improve communication of the outcomes of the peer reviews to all interested parties, they could be shared on the ESDN website and discussed at the annual ESDN Conferences. However, the involvement of the ESDN Office in peer reviews is left to the discretion of each country, and it should not interfere with other important activities of the ESDN Office.

(21) **The ESDN and the EEAC** (the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils) are two networks with similar objectives but different tasks. They both facilitate the exchange of information and experiences in the context of SD policy making. They also seek to review policies and related procedures to promote the implementation of SD in the European Union, its Member

² Paragraphs 19, 21 and 22 were added in September 2007. Paragraph 21 was amended in June 2008. Paragraph 19 was amended in September 2008.

States and in other European countries. The EEAC primarily facilitates exchange between Councils for SD (most often representing Civil Society Organisations, businesses and academics) that provide policy advice and communicate SD issues to governments and the public. The ESDN, on the other hand, serves primarily public administrators that are concerned with the formulation and implementation of SD policies. As the two networks are perfectly complementary, we regard a regular exchange of knowledge, experience and views with the EEAC as highly desirable.

(22) **The ESDN and the SDS Coordinators Group** (the EU Sustainable Development Strategy Coordinators Group) both aim at exchanging information, good practices and experiences among public administrators in the context of SD strategies. Because the ESDN is a more open and informal body, it could support the SDS Coordinators Group in various ways. Therefore, we regard a close cooperation between the two bodies as desirable.³



³ The ESDN is mentioned in the mandate of the SDS Coordinators Group as follows: "Furthermore, the Group can exchange information on the relevant work of other institutions and bodies such as the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee as well as of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)." (emphasis in the original)