



Bubbling conversations and laughter among friendly colleagues. This was in the air as the participants of this year's ESDN Conference gathered in Bucharest, eagerly engaging in in-depth exchanges and inspiring discussions about sustainable development and finding solutions to the triple planetary crises we are facing.

Once again, expectations were met in full by a myriad of interesting panel discussions, presentations and group work called the Europa Cafés. At the end of the Conference, sincerest thanks echoed in the room for the hospitality of the Romanian Conference hosts.

These are the reflections of the ESDN, in general, and of the Conference, in particular, from Finland's representatives: Annika Lindblom, ESDN Vice President, and Taru Savolainen, a newcomer in the ESDN family.



Annika Lindblom,
ESDN Vice President,
Ministry of the
Environment, Finland

&



Taru Savolainen,
ESDN Advisory Board
Member, Prime
Minister's Office,
Finland

Annika

"I have served the ESDN Executive Committee for almost three years now. I was privileged to be part of the transformation of the informal ESDN network into an ESDN Association in 2019 and lead the first leg of the new Association in 2020–2021 as President of the ESDN. The global pandemic did not make the journey easy, but with the great help of my Vice Presidents, Daniel Dubas, Sissy Freytag-Rigler and Sami Pirkkala, we managed to bring the Association into a new decade. The legacy of the informal network since 2002, its events and broad community of sustainable development practitioners have provided a firm basis for the new Association and new activities.

For me, the best reward as a President and as a member of the ESDN Executive Committee has been that we survived through the pandemic and the virtual reality we were living in. The ESDN is about people working together and learning from one another. Information technology, including Teams, Zoom and others, is a great means, but it does not replace the physical meetings and get-togethers that we are luckily able to organize again.

I am also happy that we managed to prepare and adopt a new ESDN strategy 2022–2025 that aims to profile the ESDN as the main networking, peer learning, knowledge and advocacy platform for sustainable development professionals in Europe. We have also increased the number of Regular Members and set feasible collaborative mechanisms with the EU institutions. There is still a lot of work to do, but it is important that we have a joint understanding on where we want to go.



The ESDN Association is in good hands. Daniel Dubas from Switzerland will continue for another year as President of the Association, and Laszlo Borbely from Romania and Marguy Kohlen from Luxemburg will hold the Vice Presidencies. Long-time Austrian ESDN activist, Sissy Freytag-Rigler will return to the Executive Committee for 2023 to make the operational hub even more effective. I will step aside from the Vice President position after this year, but let me assure you that Finland will continue as an active member of the Advisory Board with new, able experts from the Prime Minister's Office: Eeva Furman and Taru Savolainen. However, you will not be totally rid of me, either."

Taru

"For me, this was the first time I was able to join the ESDN Conference and the first meeting with the network overall. I had my head full of new ideas and joyful memories on the way home from the Conference. Being new, also at my job at the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, I was happy to have the opportunity to discuss with European colleagues and experts on ways to work together across government and the entire society for a systemic, just transformation towards sustainability. These are challenges we are trying to tackle in Finland when implementing our new strategy for sustainable development.

Achieving systemic sustainability transformations in six key areas of change, ranging from the economy and work life to land use, energy and social inclusion, is the essence of the strategy. We are in the process of finding the most impactful ways to implement the strategy in a policy coherent manner, leaving no one behind. This means we need to work with a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

My colleague Eeva Furman, the Secretary General of our National Commission on Sustainable Development, and I are convinced that the ESDN will be an invaluable support network in this work.

We are both looking forward to working with the ESDN. I will be more involved in the day-to-day work of the network and cooperate with the ESDN Office on initiatives like to European Sustainable Development Week. Eeva will be Finland's main representative in the ESDN Advisory Board and guide our substantive contributions to the network's activities. I trust I speak for the both of us that we cannot wait for the next opportunity to meet you!"

Annika Lindblom & Taru Savolainen

