



ESDN REPORT

EUROPE'S POSITION AS LEADING CHANGE AGENT AGAINST THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS

CONFERENCE REPORT 2022

ESDN Office



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Introduction

The ESDN Conference 2022 took place in Bucharest, Romania on 4th and 5th November. It was organized by the ESDN in cooperation with the Romanian Prime Minister's Office - Department of Sustainable Development. The Conference brought together sustainable development policymakers and experts from different stakeholder groups from all over Europe. In total, there were over 120 participants from 22 European countries.

The title of the Conference was "Europe's Position as Leading Change Agent against the Triple Planetary Crisis – Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss and Pollution" and focused on many topics relating to international and European approach to address the Triple Crisis, example from different member states on how they combat Climate Change, Youth perspective on these topics and other themes important for sustainable development. The Conference saw keynote presentations from the European level and national level, as well as inputs from Youth Representatives, who presented what they have previously discussed at the ESDN Youth Workshop.

The Conference also included Word Café format of discussion - 'Europa Café', where the participants could exchange their opinions and expertise. The purpose of this 'Europa Café' was to provide participants the chance to share good practice cases in addressing the triple planetary crisis. Some ESDN Advisory Board Members

kicked-off the session by providing their own good practice example(s) of how they are dealing with the triple planetary crisis. Then, all participants were invited and encouraged to also share their own good practice examples within their group.

This Conference Report seeks to capture the main ideas of presentations and discussions from the two days. Many keynote presenters made use of PowerPoint presentations, which have been converted to PDFs and uploaded on the ESDN website and can be found [here](#) under keynote presentations. Keynoters who did not make use of PowerPoints in their presentations are summarized more in depth in this Report. Those with PowerPoint presentations are be noted. The Report is structured into several sections that reflect the opening and welcomes for both days, the sessions and the closings of both days.

The key messages – Executive summary

1. The European Union has a solid potential to be a leading change agent in addressing the Triple Planetary Crises. There is a huge opportunity for European leaders to put forward European knowledge and experience in combating Climate Change, managing Biodiversity Loss and reducing pollution on an international level. The European Union can be a change agent, which shows the way forward in each of these issues, on which the planet's future depends.

2. The Just Transition is a fundamental way forward to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way, leaving no one behind.

3. Example from the Romania: Green and Digital transition are supported by Romania, making sure that it will be just transition, where the benefits of a green economy transition are shared widely. The Department of Sustainable development of Romania coordinates the implementation of SDGs through a coherent framework, setting necessary indicators and implementing action

plans for progress. Romania has the first promotion of 150 experts in sustainable development in local and central public administration to foster the achievements of SDGs.

4. Acknowledging the problem of the Triple crises is crucial. Each issue has its causes and effects, and each needs to be resolved. Scientists confirm that they are interlinked and need to be addressed accordingly. There is enormous pressure on resources, the effects of Climate Change on water and soil are immense, and pollution is the leading cause of premature deaths. The measures to address the crises require synergy. We need resilient ecosystems, and by adopting timely measures, we can reduce the risks for ecosystems.

5. Climate Change. Fit for 55 is one of the leading programs to address Climate change in the EU. However, to implement it, it is essential to map each region, and this mapping should be specific. To ensure the successful implementation of the Green Deal the social deal should be included. The slogans we have, such as „no one left behind“, should be translated into real concrete policies. The Green Deal will not succeed if all three pillars of sustainable

development, i.e. social, economic and environmental, are not addressed. Only this way the energy-green transition will become a just transition.

6. Biodiversity Loss. Climate Change and Biodiversity loss are interlinked. On the one hand, Climate Change is one of the main drivers of Biodiversity Loss. On the other, the destruction of ecosystems undermines nature's ability to regulate emissions and protect against extreme weather, thus accelerating climate change and increasing vulnerability. Nature is declining, with almost 80% of habitats being in poor conditions. Natura 2000 is an essential first step for species. This network supports the protection of rare and threatened species, and some rare natural habitat types, considering connectivity in these ecosystems and the species movement. For success in these, we need excellent implementation, good legislation, and necessary finance. We also need to work on the social dimension because the role of people is significant in nature conservation. And we need to encourage green businesses and show the opportunities and advantages of it.

7. Pollution. The recent increase in greenhouse gas pollution is trapping excess heat and causing the climate to warm. The European approach is to integrate air -, water- and soil pollution. This coherent policy considers cross impacts and tradeoffs, which can vary for different territories. The zero pollution vision for 2050 target is feasible with concrete KPIs, planning, implementation and fundamental actions.

8. We need Inclusive and Participatory Policy Development and Decision-Making processes to deliver on Environmental and Climate Commitments. For this we need: (1) embedding climate resilience in the institutional and legal framework (2) leveraging coordination mechanisms and instruments to deliver environmental and climate commitments (3) strategic planning for climate resilient development (4) climate resilient policy development.

WELCOME AND OPENING

Claire Doole, the Moderator of the ESDN Conference 2022, Switzerland, greeted the participants and explained the format of the two days.

ESDN Conference 2022 Opening by ESDN President – Topics and Goals

Daniel Dubas, ESDN President & Delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda, Federal Office for Spatial Development, Switzerland, opened the Conference, presenting the three main topics of the Conference: Climate Change, Biodiversity and Pollution. He underlined the importance of these topics and that they are interlinked and should be treated in a correspondent way. He presented the Agenda, the format of the discussions, and what the participants are expected to do in Europe's Café format.

Romanian Prime Minister's Office – Welcoming Address

Mircea Abrudean, Head of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, Romania, welcomed the participants. He referenced the Prime Minister, underlying that they are honored that Romania is hosting the event this year. He said that humanity faces the Triple Crises, and the

EU is a leading change agent in this context. European leaders have a tremendous opportunity to learn and put forward their practice. **Mircea Abrudean** underlined that the Green and Digital transition is supported by Romania, ensuring that it will be a just transition where the benefits of a green economy transition are shared widely. The Department of Sustainable development of Romania coordinates the implementation of SDGs through a coherent framework, setting necessary indicators and implementing action plans for progress. Romania has the first promotion of 150 experts in sustainable development in local and central public administration to foster the achievements of SDGs.

Introducing the Triple Planetary Crisis

Tánczos Barna, Minister of the Environment, Waters and Forests, Romania, thanked the ESDN network for keeping attention to the topic of the Triple Crises, even in these destructive times. As a leading agent Europe should contribute to this topic with new ideas. Europe should show the way forward in addressing these topics. Acknowledging the problem of the Triple crises is crucial.

Each issue of the Triple crises has its causes and effects, and each needs to be resolved. Scientists confirm that they are interlinked and need to be addressed accordingly. There is enormous pressure on resources, the effects of Climate Change on water and soil are immense, and pollution is the leading cause of premature deaths. The measures to address the crises require synergy. We need resilient ecosystems, and by adopting timely measures, we can reduce the risks for ecosystems. This type of work is a fundamental part of national efforts in Romania; from a total of 20 billion, 41 % go to green transition, 1.2 billion to the circular economy, and more than 1 bill for wastewater management, placing environmental management at the centre of ecological policies. Romania is committed to the Paris Agreement and shows solidarity and full support in preventive measures to address the Triple Crisis issues on the regional and national levels.

How the Romanian Presidency is Combatting Climate Change

Alexandra-Maria Bocșe, State Counsellor, Presidential Administration, Romania, presented the ongoing work on addressing Climate Change in Romania. Two years ago, the Department of Sustainability identified the priorities they will focus on. A few urgent areas of intervention were reducing pollution, climate mitigation, broader environmental education, increasing ambition for forest protection, energy transition, and sustainability of transport. The Department works closely with government partners and research organizations while also ensuring internal coordination between the mandates of the Presidency, the foreign policy departments, and EU council representation. The president's administration was instrumental in promoting work on forest protection, clean energy, and sustainable food production. It stimulated dialogue on the national level for adaptation to climate change and to make progress on all levels in Romania. The Working group for Climate Change education was established; measures suggested by the working group with the government included access to Climate Change

education more broadly, that every child would have access to Climate Change education. Also, this working group produced the report on Climate Change Challenges for Romania. They have identified the main challenges: limited awareness of Climate Change, disorderly Climate transition, and risk of an unjust green transition. Alexandra-Maria Bocșe noted that these challenges are typical for many European countries, and being here at this conference, we can explore possible advanced solutions together.

Host Perspective – Prime Minister's Office – Department of Sustainable Development, Romania

László Borbély, State Councilor and SDG Coordinator, Prime Minister's Office – Department of Sustainable Development, and current Vice President of the ESDN, Romania. László Borbély expressed his great pleasure to host the Conference in Romania. He underlined that Romania is open to new partnerships and eager to invite colleagues from different institutions, establish new hubs, and work hard to have strategy and action plans. Romania has become a centre of

excellence. Sustainability work had many challenges after two years of the pandemic and now during the war in Ukraine. However, the ESDN does a lot to promote sustainability, and now nine countries are members of the ESDN. László Borbély noted that Romania could give added value to this endeavour. Romania has about 450 partners from different parts of society. To fulfil what is intended to do, the ESDN needs leadership and partnership. László Borbély thanked the colleagues, the ESDN office, and members.

SESSION 1

EUROPE'S POSITION IN THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS

Video Message – DG Environment's Management Plan 2020 – 2024: Is Europe Living well within the Planet's Ecological Limits?

Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, European Commission, Belgium, reminded that Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Pollution – are the fields where change is still possible, and all these issues are interlinked. There are already many extreme weather events, such as heat waves, freezes, heavy downpours, floods, and disappearing forests. Climate law is needed with efficient measures for deforestation, and other countries should follow the lead. For the best results, the focus should be on national production. Moreover, four out of five European countries already demonstrate good signs of improvement. Everyone should be on board with this work. With current challenges, such as the Russian invasion to Ukraine, it is essential to remember that sustainability is not a game but the work we do because we care about the future.

Fireside Chat: Youth Voices on the Triple Planetary Crisis

Two youth representatives who had been part of the ESDN Youth Workshop 2022 in September in Berlin, where invited to explain their views:

- **Elena Miron**, Youth Representative, Social Innovation Solutions, Romania
- **Mihai Marica**, Youth Representative, UCL London, Romania

Elena Miron reported on the work of Youth representatives of the ESDN and the primary outcomes of their recent meeting. They have discussed crises in three fields: education, digitalization and sustainable urban management. Specifically, she noted that Romania has a problem with urban mobility when “there are more cars than trees”. Youth representatives state that urgency in action and implementation are needed.

Mihai Marica talked about youth involvement in digitalization and the significant gap in rural and urban development.

Elena Miron said that young people are crucial for the development of Romania, and Romania is going forward with education for schools with a focus on Climate Change.

Claire Doole, the ESDN Conference Moderator, asked if Greta Thunberg's ideas are rather utopian and asked Youth Representatives where the reality check is.

Mihai Marica confirmed that young people tend to be idealistic, but it is rather productive to be ambitious since it helps to move towards common action. We must realize that working on Triple Crises is not a task of a certain group of people, but we are in the same boat, and common action is needed. Learning from the COVID-19 pandemic is essential, as it was a great example of common action.

Claire Doole asked about the green re-set after the pandemic.

Mihai Marica underlined that we have to work on education for youth and their involvement in policy making. Regarding ESDN, we need to set the role of Youth in ESDN as its official role. Youth is a Good example for all European organizations – youth bodies close to you come up with

resolutions, but not many do it. But it will be great for ESDN.

Fishbowl Discussions on the Triple Planetary Crisis. Tomorrow's climate depends on us – each of us!

Climate Change

Florian Marin, European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Belgium

Claire Doole asked, what the EESC's involvement is in tackling the climate crisis?

Florian Marin explained that the EESC is advising in key issues, such as Climate Change, economic situation etc. Majority of legislative initiatives are under discussion at the EESC and they have broad activity with NGOs, combining different interest, i.e. employers and employees. In addition, EESC advises other public institutions.

Claire Doole: Can you give an example of a proposals you were working on regarding the Climate Change?

Florian Marin said that the Fit for 55 would be one of the most important ones. In order to implement it, it is

necessary to have mapping of each region, which should be very specific. And no Green Deal would be possible without a social deal. Green deal will be a failure, if we do not take into account all three pillars of sustainable development. In addition, the energy green transition will become just transition. The slogans we have, such as „no one left behind“, should be translated into the real concrete policies.

Clair Doole: it is logical, that being from the trade union, you have mentioned the social component. With the current energy crises and Ukraine invasion, is it realistic to expect to continue having social component?

Florian Marin: it is realistic and even mandatory to have a social component. Look at due diligence, and how it is delivered and used at the supply level. The consumers should have responsibility to the consumers. Supply chain level – green acquisition have problems, in Romania. But we need to have more synergies with principles of sustainable development. Right track in discussion, take on board big organization, citizens, in order to have strategy and implement plan.

Biodiversity Loss

Orieta Hulea, Country Manager, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Romania, explained that Climate Change and Biodiversity loss are two sides of the same coin, as they are closely linked.

Claire Doole asked why the Biodiversity Loss does not have same prominence as Climate Change.

Orieta Hulea replied that the EU Green deal partially addresses the questions related to the Biodiversity strategy, also there are the Farm-to-fork strategy and restoration law. But still it does not have same importance, as the Paris agreement.

Claire Doole asked about the protection aspects in Natura 2000.

Orieta Hulea answered that nature is declining, 80% of the habitats are in poor condition. Natura 2000 was important as a first step for species protection, taking into account their connectivity, species movement. This type of legal regulation is important for sustaining nature. But implementation is a critical aspect. Underfinance problem is present, not clear conservation. In addition, the social dimension is important, the role of

people in nature conservation. Compensation for loss should be in place, if land is taken.

Participant asked: when it comes to the EU policies and systemic approach, what do you think about the Farm- to- Fork strategy? Does it need the legal basis?

Orieta Hulea replied that there were published already policy reviews on this reporting tangible results. We need the indicators, on how to encourage the change. In the decision-making process – the conflicting interests should be considered, so that there is a tradeoff found with benefits for all. In addition, we need to get more concrete on national level, with clear indicators from the EC. We need excellent management plans in all EU countries.

Zero Pollution Action Plan

Christian Schaible, Policy Manager for Industrial Production, European Environmental Bureau, Belgium, underlined that Climate Change and Pollution questions are linked. The EU's approach to addressing pollution is integrating air, water, and soil pollution. Christian Schaible said that the first task is ensuring policy coherence and being aware of the cross-impact. For different areas, the tradeoffs might be different on what to focus on from these three directions, air, water and soil. Life cycle solutions and integrated approach help with tradeoffs.

Claire Doole asked if the Zero pollution target is realistic.

Christian Schaible replied that Zero target does not mean Zero pollution but rather Zero harm. He reminded us that it is essential to keep in mind that we need to balance what is feasible vs economically acceptable. The level of pollution should be as low as possible. Feasibility is measured in the milestones, KPIs, and toxic-free environment. However, we need more concrete KPIs, and actions and implementation are crucial.

Claire Doole: What data do we have now on pollution at hand?

Christian Schaible answered that despite of digital age, it is still difficult to compare the data on pollution for the production side of different industries. It is also not clear what they are “allowed” to pollute and not. There is no centralized “click and compare” tool with all these data, which would allow to benchmark. So we do not know what good performance is. Moreover, we do not have access to these data types from the EC, and European Council is also a black box. Also, on an international level, there is a problem with inconsistency in reporting. The EC is now planning to make these data more meaningful, and there are more concrete unified “tick boxes exercises”, but at least three years will pass until these data are available.

SESSION 2

'EUROPA CAFÉ' ON NATIONAL LEVEL GOOD PRACTICE CASES IN ADDRESSING THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS

The 'Europa Café' was organised to provide participants the chance to share good practice cases in addressing the triple planetary crisis. ESDN Advisory Board Members kicked-off the session by providing their own good practice examples of how they deal with the triple planetary crisis. Then participants were invited and encouraged to also share their own good practice examples within their group.

The 11 tables for the discussions were:

1. Austria – led by Elisabeth Freytag-Rigler, Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology
2. Austria – led by Pia Nagl, Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology
3. Finland – led by Annika Lindblom, Ministry of the Environment
4. Finland – led by Taru Savolainen, Prime Minister's Office
5. Germany – led by Stefan Bauernfeind, Federal Chancellery
6. Luxembourg – led by Marguy Kohnen, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development
7. Netherlands – led by Lieke Willemsen, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
8. Romania – led by László Borbély, Prime Minister's Office
9. Romania – led by Gabriela Ciulacu Bitan, Prime Minister's Office
10. Romania – led by Ioana Dospinescu, Prime Minister's Office
11. Switzerland – led by Mirjam Walker Wedekind, Deputy Head of Sustainable Development Section, Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE

After the discussion, Marguy Kohnen, ESDN Vice President, Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainable Development, Luxembourg gave an overview for the Day and summarised the main outcomes.

SESSION 3

EFFECTS OF THE TRIPLE PLANETARY CRISIS ON A JUST AND FAIR TRANSITION

Annika Lindblom, ESDN Vice President, Ministry for the Environment, Finland, opened the discussion with a reflection on the Just transition – that there are winners and losers. Also, she said, the famous concept “leave no one behind” is at the core now, but it should instead be reformulated to “take everyone on board”. She also introduced the agenda of the day and the speakers.

Video Address – Triple Planetary Crises’ Connection to the SDGs

Olga Algayerova, Executive Secretary, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), Switzerland

Olga Algayerova started with a topic of environmental protection and how to foster the shift to a circular economy. She noted that without the protection systems, SDGs could not be achieved. Recent reports show environmental degradation and the current measures need to be better to meet the targets. Now it is even more challenging. For example, sustainable agriculture is more demanding to promote as air pollution impacts agriculture. Biodiversity loss risks food production – such fish stocks are under additional threat. Pollution costs health lives, and well-being for all.

We need more efforts to ensure SDG6 “clean water and sanitation for all”. Now we have water stress, water pollution and heat stress. For SDG 11 “sustainable cities and communities”, support is needed, with ecosystem service, essential services, and inclusive societies. Climate change causes more than 2500 conflicts across the planet. Escalation is required to act together on global, regional and national levels.

How Climate Change Affects Democracy and Economic and Social Justice

Heather Grabbe, Director of the Open Society European Policy Institute, Open Society Foundations, Belgium said that Climate Change strongly challenges democracy. In addition, the current energy crisis leads to a more extended transition and challenges for society during this transition. She compared it to the Industrialization period and changes in post-communistic countries with disruptive events in the community and an increase in inequality. However, at that moment, people knew where they were going having a clear example of developed countries. This time it is different – no one has a clear vision of the future with the model of the

economy to be expected. This makes the choices difficult. We do not know what kind of society people will live in and how they will earn a living. People do not have a sense of it. Overall, vision is lacking. Specifically, unlike in 1989, no low carbon economy model is available. People underestimate the impact of Climate Change. While we expect energy poverty caused by more substantial energy crises climate defeatism is more dangerous than climate denial.

Find more on this issue [here](#).

Inclusive and Participatory Policy Development and Decision-Making processes to deliver on Environmental and Climate Commitments

Emma Phillips, OECD, France updated on the current work of OECD, supporting Romania in Green projects. She presented the instruments to strengthen decision-making processes for climate-resilient development, such as Strategic planning to support a just transition.

Climate resilient policy development for a just transition include two directions of work in policy development:

- Managing the knowledge eco-system for just transition
- Engaging stakeholders in the development of climate-resilient policies

Find more on this issue [here](#).

Participants asked: about public engagement: How do you engage those who normally avoid joining the policy making process?

Emma Philips replied that you need a strategy to engage on multiple levels. When the public is rather sceptic, it is good to start engaging on the local level. It is important to establish a dialogue with government.

Decarbonization of the Health System in Romania

Valentin Veron Toma, Senior Researcher at “Francisc I. Rainer” Institute of Anthropology, Romania said that Romania progressed fast in the green transition. As a result, Romania has a lot of expertise, and people with different specialisation discuss the larger picture. However, Valentin Veron Toma noticed that the healthcare system was neglected in this decarbonization process. In general, there was little

research on decarbonization and its impact on health. In Romania, they organized a round table in June 2021 with representatives of key institutions. That is how the working group on the decarbonization system in Romania was established. They have set a unified method to measure the healthcare system's carbon footprint. The national organization have signed a memorandum and started to implement policies and put targets in reality.

Participant asked about the gap between data and knowledge in this field.

Valentin Veron Toma replied that they created a new methodology, based on many case studies from the UK. Now they try to make this experience and knowledge available for others. Such, working group of Armenia visited them to learn on Romanian case. Decarbonisation in healthcare sector is also now included in international reports.

Financing Climate Solutions

Lara Tassan Zanin, Head of EIB Group, European Investment Bank, Romania introduced the main activities of the European Investment Bank. The EIB manages 25% of their portfolio supporting Climate Change projects in Europe. When the EIB decides on new investments, it ensures that 50% will go to green products, and the remaining 50% of products should be emission-free. The EIB is developing its methodology for green investment. The EIB developed the guarantee instruments banks reserve to finance projects that otherwise would not be funded because of high costs. We see that these investments cannot be postponed. Companies have to undergo these investments to give more financing to green projects. These mechanisms are essential enablers in the market. The banking sector has turned green and European funds are pushing for a green agenda. In Romania, many investors hold back investments because they need help in finding skilled labour.

Participant asked: Is green financing cheaper?

Lara Tassan Zanin replied that no, it is not. Banks remain pragmatic. However, investment is moving away from non-green investments and is the beginning of a new journey, with more pressure for sustainability-related projects.

Participant asked: What are the economic policies to promote green projects?

Today it is 'attractive' to be green politically and economically. Economic policies are already in place; for example, the Green Deal includes 30% of a green project. While the market should remain free, it is essential to increase leadership from the public and private sectors to go green.

'Europa Café' on Europe's Position as Leading Change Agent – How does Europe move forward in tackling the triple planetary crisis and a just transition?

Participants were split up into groups and discussed how Europe should move forward in the short-, medium-, and long-term to address all the issues that

had been discussed over the two days of the Conference:

- What are the goals in the short-, medium-, and long-term in the European countries?
- What are the practical steps that need to be taken to reach these goals?

The tables had a pre-prepared flip chart that were used to collect the ideas. Main Collective Learnings - Results from the different groups were presented in plenary.

Closing of the ESDN Conference 2022

László Borbély, ESDN Vice President, said thank you words to all the participants, speakers and ESDN office.

Daniel Dubas, ESDN President, closed the conference with the appreciation words to the hosting country and Prime Minister's Office, participants, speakers, ESDN office.



ESDN

The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is a non-profit, pan-European peer-learning, networking, knowledge, and advocacy platform for sustainability professionals in the public sector working in collaboration with other organisations and institutions dealing with sustainable development issues. It is based on the transparent and trustful cooperation of these actors. It collects, compiles and shares information on sustainability policies, strategies and practises, and provides expertise to political decision-makers at European, national and sub-national levels. The ESDN also fosters sustainable development through active communication and continued cooperation with other stakeholders and civil society.