

**PARLIAMENTARY
MECHANISMS IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
2030 AGENDA**

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**19th ESDN
Workshop**

Discussion Paper

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Introduction

The 19th ESDN workshop on “Parliamentary Mechanisms in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda”, will explore the different ways and mechanisms through which parliaments can get involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This discussion paper will serve as preparation of discussions at the workshop, by explaining the different mechanisms parliamentarians can use to get involved in the achievement of the SDGs. In addition, the paper provides an overview of the mechanisms that are currently being employed in European parliaments. The 19th ESDN Workshop, for which this Discussion Paper serves as a base, will be held virtually in June 2021 and will be hosted by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology, as well as the Austrian Federal Chancellery, in cooperation with SDG Watch Europe.

While the mandate for implementing the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lies with the executive branch of each state, the Agenda itself being based on both a top-down as well as a bottom-up approach, parliaments play an important role in ensuring a just and representative process. Their role is described in §45 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

‘We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, subregional institutions, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others’ (2030 Agenda, p. 11)

In addition, parliaments have their own targets as part of SDG16 *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*; Target 16.6 (Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels) and 16.7 (Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels).

The workshop will focus on the question on how parliaments can fulfil their role in implementation of the 2030 Agenda in three sessions. These are exploring how the different mechanisms for involvement work, what different strategies parliamentarians employ and how citizens’ participation can be ensured.

This discussion paper will provide insights into how parliaments can get involved through the mechanisms that are mentioned in §45 of the 2030 Agenda that is quoted above: legislation, budget, accountability and involvement of civil society. In addition, the different strategies that parliamentarians use to get involved are explained, for example the role of parliamentary committees (which will also be featured in the workshop).

The first chapter of this paper will describe the tools that parliamentarians have at their disposal to promote implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The second chapter provides a short overview of the international and European initiatives and networks of parliamentarians who are working on integrating the SDGs in their parliamentary work. In the third chapter, a survey of 24 parliaments in Europe and their practices with regards to the 2030 Agenda will be analysed. This survey was conducted by the ESDN Office in cooperation with the parliamentary administration of the Austrian Parliament. The results of the survey are discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 1: Mechanisms for Parliamentary Involvement in SDG Implementation

Due to its all-encompassing nature, all issues that come before a national parliament are related to the 2030 Agenda in one way or another. Parliaments play a crucial role in ensuring that implementation of the 2030 Agenda is just, equitable and leaves no one behind. In addition, they are the institution that provides democratic legitimacy for international agreements, such as the 2030 Agenda. Even though the 2030 Agenda is not legally binding by international law, ratification by the national parliament confers democratic legitimacy upon the government's actions that are targeted towards the achievement of the SDGs. On the other hand, the parliament's role is to scrutinise and support the government through passing on citizens' needs and opinions (Bexell & Jönsson, 2020).

The following paragraphs summarise the literature surrounding parliamentary involvement in SDG implementation. This is mainly drawn from documents by the [UNDP](#) and the [Interparliamentary Union](#). They provide a number of recommendations to parliaments, which are summarised below. These recommendations built the basis for the study of European Parliaments that is described in Chapter 3.

Depending on national institutional mechanisms, parliamentarians have varying tools at their disposal to work towards SDG implementation in their country. These tools roughly fall into the four categories that are mentioned in the 2030 Agenda itself (S45): legislation, budget, accountability and monitoring, and representation. These are the main responsibilities of parliaments in general. In the following paragraphs, the tools within each category will be described.

Legislation

While the executive branch (the government) is the designated entity for implementing the SDGs, parliamentarians play a crucial role in ensuring that sustainability issues are an essential part of a country's legal framework.

Parliaments can be involved in the strategic planning towards achieving the SDGs. Many countries develop a strategic document, often called the *National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)* that spans several legislative periods. Parliaments or individual parliamentarians can get involved in the development and preparation of this document. One way of doing so is by forming a parliamentary committee. Some countries have also established multi-stakeholder committees that include representatives from civil society, parliament and government (UNDP et al., 2017).

Parliaments can assess and analyse laws regarding their suitability to achieve the SDGs. Ideally, this would involve an impact analysis for new laws that includes sustainable development, as well as human rights issues (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

To ensure that the SDGs play an active role in legislation, it is helpful if there exists institutionalised or consistent cooperation between those parliamentary committees concerned with sustainable development and the government (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

Legislation

- Initiate laws that contribute towards achieving the SDGs and put pressure on the government to do the same
- Assess and analyse laws regarding their impact on achieving the SDGs
- Ensure that the interdisciplinary nature of the SDGs is considered in law-making

An important aspect of sustainable development and the SDGs is their interdisciplinary nature. Therefore, parliament needs to find ways to address the interlinkages between the SDGs (policy coherence for sustainable development), how to capitalise on their potential synergies and to balance trade-offs. One way of taking these interlinkages into account is to have one standing rapporteur, i.e.

one parliamentarian in every committee who is responsible for cross-cutting issues and who can coordinate with other committees (Niestroy, 2019). This is a way to prevent legislative proposals that actively counteract sustainable development, in general, as well as one or more SDGs.

Budget

The annual state budget is one of the primary ways for parliamentarians to channel funding towards sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda (UNDP et al., 2017). Many parliaments review and discuss the government’s budget in plenary and some have a dedicated committee for the budget. When discussing the budget, parliamentarians can question the government on what the budget intends to deliver regarding the SDGs. In addition, it is equally important that all fiscal and other economic policies are aligned to the national SDG plan or NSDS (Mesiano, 2015).

Niestroy (2019) argues that the budgetary process usually brings together many different committees across political issues. It could, therefore, function as a role model for overcoming political silos in the implementation of sustainable development. Ideally, SDG implementation is mainstreamed into all government and parliamentary activities, also to ensure that different policies do not counteract each other and jeopardise the achievement of the SDGs (Inter-parliamentary Union & United Nations Development Programme, 2017). This is currently being implemented through the [European Semester](#) mechanism. The European Semester is a mechanism that seeks to align economic policies and strategies across European member states. In its country reports, the European Commission also analyses the contribution of macroeconomic policies on the achievement of the SDGs (European Commission, n.d.).

<p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scrutinise the proposed budget with regards to the SDGs in plenary discussions and committee hearings• Collaborate between different committees to ensure policy coherence• Assessing and auditing the budget with regards to sustainability and human and gender rights

Similarly to the impact assessment of laws mentioned above, it is recommended to conduct a sustainability check for the budget. Equally, the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) recommends an audit for the budget from a human rights and gender perspective (Rodriguez et al., 2016). The parliament, with the help of supreme audit institutions or national statistics offices, can also request a performance audit of the budget. This not only assesses whether the budget was spent in line with the law and government’s plan, but also to what extent it has achieved the desired results (UNDP et al., 2017).

Oversight and monitoring

Holding the government accountable towards its progress on the SDGs is arguably one of the most effective ways for parliament to become involved in SDG implementation (UNDP et al., 2017). The most direct way of doing this is to query the government during ‘question time’ and by posing inquiries to the government (Niestroy, 2019; UNDP et al., 2017).

To support its monitoring efforts, the parliament can request data from national statistics offices or supreme audit institutions, this could also apply to the SDGs or sustainable development. Sometimes, the parliament can be involved in defining the national indicators for sustainable development (UNDP et al., 2017). Based on assessments and audits, parliamentary committees can make recommendations to the government on how to address gaps in achievement and implementation (UNDP et al., 2017).

The other major avenue for parliaments to monitor their government’s progress is to participate in the drafting and writing of Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) to the High Level Political Forum (HLPF). The HLPF is the UN’s main forum for sustainable development and is central for follow-up and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations). VNRs are a way for countries to undertake a holistic assessment of their progress. Parliaments can make sure that the government collects all the necessary data and addresses the relevant gaps. On the other hand, the VNRs present an opportunity for parliamentarians and those in the parliamentary committee that is responsible for SDG implementation to assess and adjust their own work and focus (Mesiano, 2015).

Oversight and Monitoring

- Interrogate the government during ‘question time’ or use written questions to the government to inquire about progress
- Request and use data from supreme audit institutions and national statistics offices
- Participate in producing Voluntary National Reviews

Representation

Representing the citizens of its country is one of the main functions of a national parliament. In the context of the SDGs, this means that it is one of the key roles of parliaments to ensure that their constituents’ voices are heard when it comes to setting priorities in implementation and deciding on trade-offs between different goals (Bexell & Jönsson, 2020; Niestroy, 2019). Through public forums and citizen consultations, parliamentarians can make sure that the public dialogue about the SDGs keeps going (UNDP et al., 2017).

Founding an SDG committee can be a clear public statement about the importance parliament places on the 2030 Agenda and it can function as a focal point between parliament, the government, and civil society (Mesiano, 2015; UNDP et al., 2017). Citizen involvement is an especially important aspect of the parliament. Parliamentary committees can call on citizens to provide their views on implementation and potential trade-offs. This knowledge is then fed back into government planning (Niestroy, 2019).

One of the key principles and objectives of the 2030 Agenda is to *Leave no one behind*. Parliament plays a key role in ensuring that the needs of all citizens are taken into account and decisions are not made at the expense of the most vulnerable and marginalised (Mesiano, 2015). This is achieved by identifying and reaching out to the relevant stakeholders and making sure that they are included sufficiently in the public conversations and consultations.

Representation

- Conduct public consultations and citizen fora
- Found an SDG committee
- Identify and reach out to the most vulnerable and marginalised constituents

Challenges

As the SDGs are interdisciplinary and address the whole array of sustainability issues by nature, parliaments face the same challenges in their implementation as governments and civil servants often do. The overall structure of parliaments is often not conducive to cross-silo thinking and addressing overarching issues. Parliaments can be divided across party lines and/or government and opposition, and their thematic work is strongly structured in committees that do not necessarily interact with one another. However, sustainable development needs strong vertical and horizontal coordination, which parliaments often do not necessarily have (Niestroy, 2019). The Inter-parliamentary Union recommends that parliaments self-assess their capacity to contribute to the SDGs every three to five years. This self-assessment can include many of the mechanisms that were described above (Rodriguez et al., 2016).

<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overcoming silo-thinking• Overcoming party or government/opposition lines to collaborate• Achieving horizontal and vertical coordination

In order to establish parliamentary structures that are conducive to promoting the SDGs in all the above-mentioned ways, it can be useful for parliamentarians to join international networks and learn from each other's good practices. The next chapter describes some of these networks that operate in Europe and the resources they provide.

Chapter 2: International and Multilateral Initiatives

There are a small number of initiatives and organisations in Europe involving European parliamentarians that explicitly and continuously work on sustainable development and 2030 Agenda implementation (or make it part of their work). The following paragraphs aim to provide an overview of these initiatives:



Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU)

The [IPU](#) is a global organisation of national parliaments. Its mission is to empower parliaments and parliamentarians to promote peace, democracy, and sustainable development. The IPU has published two key documents on parliamentary involvement in SDG implementation.

1) Self-assessment toolkit

[This publication](#) provides a catalogue of questions for parliamentarians to assess the ability of their parliament to effectively implement the 2030 Agenda. This includes topics like involvement of parliament in drawing up the National Sustainable Development Strategy or national development plans, how the parliament can hold the government accountable with respect to budget and laws, and how well the parliament communicates to, and includes, the public.

2) Global Parliamentary Report 2017 – Parliamentary Oversight

Chapter 4.3 of [this report](#) focuses specifically of how parliaments can hold their governments to account with regard to SDG implementation and how the SDGs can be mainstreamed in parliamentary work.



SDG Watch Europe – MEPs for SDGs

Under the auspices of SDG Watch Europe, an [initiative](#) in the current European Parliament has started to connect Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) who are interested in pushing the SDGs on the European level. This initiative was launched by German MEP Udo Bullmann in February 2020. The MEPs for SDGs Chapter intends to help the European Parliament and the EU, overall, to develop an informed, robust and coordinated approach towards the implementation of the SDGs in Europe. In addition, the members of this informal group would like to set up an SDG coordination structure in the European Parliament.



Parliamentarians for the Global Goals (PfGG)

[This initiative](#) was founded by former Danish MP and Minister of Environment, Kirsten Brosbøl. It is run by the do-tank 2030beyond. PfGG is a peer-to-peer initiative for elected members on multiple levels. Its goals, among others, are to: 1) increase knowledge sharing and awareness raising among parliamentarians; 2) to share and support policy and campaign initiatives; 3) to support MPs in establishing all-party parliamentary groups and to support them in integrating the SDGs in their work. For example, they offer workshops and assessments for national parliaments.

Circle of Mediterranean Parliamentarians for Sustainable Development (COMPSUD)

[This initiative](#), which is part of the Global Water Partnership Mediterranean Network, aims to promote suitable mechanisms to support the dialogue among MPs (from both EU and non-EU Mediterranean countries) and between parliamentarians, CSOs and other stakeholders. A strong focus of COMPSUD's work is environmental and water protection, especially. It also works on the socio-economic conditions that are necessary for the sustainable development of the region.

Chapter 3: National Activities

Together with the Austrian Parliamentary Administration, the ESDN Office conducted a study to assess the current state of parliamentary involvement in SDG implementation in Europe. The following chapter summarises the findings of a survey sent out via the European Centre for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD), a network of parliament administrations.

Method

The questions for the survey were developed based on the literature available on parliamentary involvement in Agenda 2030 implementation. In each category of parliamentary mechanisms (legislation, budget, oversight, representation), a part of the questions asked whether the tools described Chapter 2 were used specifically with regards to 2030 Agenda implementation. For each of those questions there were follow-up questions asking to detail how these tools were employed and to what effect. The questionnaire can be found in the Annex to this Discussion Paper.

The questionnaire was sent out through the ECPRD to parliamentary administrations all over Europe in the beginning of April 2021. Most answers arrived by the end of April 2021. In total, 24 parliaments out of 48 replied. In addition, the ESDN Office sent out questionnaires to its National Focal points, who are civil servants in national ministries that are responsible for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The information in *Table 1* on the Netherlands and Greece have been derived through answers by National Focal Points but were not included in the analysis.

A qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000) was conducted with the help of the coding software MaxQDA. The categories were derived through a mixture of inductive and deductive methods. The survey question provided the main category, while the subcategories were established inductively from the answers. As a result, there were many more subcategories for questions, where the answers tended to be more extensive.

In the analysis, the focus was on explicit references to the SDGs and sustainable development. Furthermore, the interest lay in the mechanisms that parliament employed. For example, if a national statistics office reports on the SDGs, but the parliament does not make use of that report, this will not be mentioned in the analysis.

There are several limitations to the analysis of this survey. As the survey was conducted with an open-ended written questionnaire, questions may have been misinterpreted. Often answers referred to topics or issues related to sustainable development, but did not explicitly mention the SDGs or even sustainable development. These answers are not mentioned in the analysis. Not all questions were answered by each respondent. It is unclear whether this is because no relevant activity is happening in this area or for another reason. Finally, as the answers were in written form, with limited opportunity for clarification, they may have been misinterpreted during the analysis.

Analysis

The first part of this section provides an overview of the different mechanisms used in each parliament. The answers to questions in each section of the questionnaire are summarised to give the reader an impression of which mechanisms exist.

The second part of this chapter focuses more on the forms that different mechanisms can take and they are described in more detail. The countries, to which a certain mechanism applies, are mentioned with their abbreviation in the footnote.

1. Table representation

Table 1 summarises the responses given by ECPRD respondents. For the purpose of simplicity, the most impactful mechanisms have been selected in the case of many different mechanisms falling under one category. Under monitoring and accountability, please note that most respondents indicated that MPs may use traditional elements of oversight, such as parliamentary inquiries.

Greece and the Netherlands are from NFP responses, but not in the written analysis.

Table 1

Country	Legislation	Budget	Monitoring and accountability	Representation	Committees and Multi-stakeholder Councils
Albania – Assembly of Albania	Draft laws have to be accompanied by a report that, inter alia, takes into account the extent to which the SDGs are being met	Budget 2021 includes explicit references to the SDGs	Statistical agency reports on SDG indicators to the Finance and Budget Committee		Subcommittee on Sustainable Development
Austria-Nationalrat		SDGs debated in budget plenary debate for the first time in 2021 Budgetary committee takes SDGs into account Budget-service of parliament analyses impact of budget and occasionally individual laws on SDGs	Government report debated in plenary and in constitutional committee Parliament takes note of the report Supreme audit court has assessed the SDGs, report used by parliamentarians		Budget committee, supreme audit committee, constitutional committee, committee for external affairs
Belgium – House of Representatives and Senate	Committee will examine the new Federal Sustainable Development Plan and hold hearings with the government				Committee on Energy, Environment and Climate
Bulgaria					The Chair of the Development Council invites the heads of all parliamentary groups as

					well representatives of relevant standing committees to participate in sittings of the council
Croatia	SDGs mentioned in almost all deliberations on draft laws and reports Parliament held a formal debate and vote on NSDS		Parliament adopts report by State Audit Office on implementation of SDGs		Jurisdiction of many committees, e.g. Environment, Health, Finance
Cyprus	MPs have submitted laws that explicitly refer to the SDGs, e.g. on environmental protection		Parliament consulted for VNR but does not participate in drafting Government in constant dialogue with parliament on progress of SDGs	Citizens' assembly 'Parallel parliament' was encouraged to deal with implementation of SDGs and also discusses sustainable development	Committee on the Environment, Committee on Foreign and European Affairs Committee with participants from all areas of government, including parliament, planned
Czech Republic – Chamber of Deputies	MPs are part of the body that provides key strategic development documents		Ministry of Environment preparing report on Agenda 2030 implementation to parliament, which will be discussed in the Environment Committee		Subcommittee on Sustainable Development (within Environment Committee) Government Council for Sustainable Development includes one representative of each chamber of the Czech parliament
Estonia – Riigikogu	Parliament debated and approved the Estonian NSDS	Prime Minister presents to the parliament how the budget is related to the strategic goals of the NSDS			
Finland – Eduskunta		SDGs have been raised in budget debates but not played a crucial role	Government submits report to parliament which debates report Committee of the Future prepares parliamentary response	Committee for the Future organises seminars and other events for stakeholders and civil society	-> Parliamentary Committee: Committee for the Future ->National Commission on Sustainable Development is a multi-stakeholder council,

					including government, MPs, other stakeholders
France <i>Assemblée Nationale</i>	– Parliamentarians were part of multi-stakeholder working groups preparing the national roadmap for the SDGs	Green budget that assesses the environmental impact	The government must present progress on 10 indicators related to SD to the parliament annually	-> Consultation launched by several MPs to gain civil society's opinions on SDG implementation -> Initiative "Parlement & Citoyens" allows citizens to co-write laws with MPs	Committee on Sustainable Development and Land Use Planning
Germany- <i>Bundestag</i>	Several initiatives by different parties to make SD a guiding principle of law making have been adopted Government submits SD strategy to parliament, which takes notice of it		Advisory Council on Sustainable Development assesses whether the Impact Assessment of draft laws provided by the government is sufficient, can request more details Government regularly updates parliament and Advisory Council on its progress Parliament has adopted a motion according to which the government needs to report on the status of SDG implementation in the middle of each legislative period	Council of elders of the parliament has initiated a citizens' council which provided a list of recommendations to the parliament about the future of Germany	Advisory Council on Sustainable Development
Germany- <i>Bundesrat</i>	Federal States have submitted laws with reference to the SDGs to the Federal Council				
Greece			Parliament participated in elaboration and presentation of VNR The submission and discussion of government		Debates mostly initiated and steered by Committee on Environmental Protection, but no

			progress reports is envisioned		committee has an explicit mandate
Hungary – Országgyűlés	NSDS debated in parliament, amendments proposed, adopted by a vote		NCSO prepares progress report, which includes members of the government and parliament		Speaker of the parliament is president of the multi-stakeholder National Council for Sustainable Development Subcommittee for Sustainable Development
Israel – Knesset			A representative of the Knesset was involved in writing a progress report		
Italy – Senato	Amendment of Italian Constitution foreseen to include SD and environmental protection Parliament debated the NSDS	A series of indexes of sustainable welfare are published as annex to the Economy and Finance Document Minister of Economy and Finance has to present a report to parliament that reports on effect of budget on different SD indicators	Minister of Finance reports to the parliament each year		
the Netherlands	SDG assessment was added to draft laws at the request of the parliament MPs request the government to strengthen its performance with regards to SDGs At least one legislative initiative referring explicitly to SDGs	The monitor on wellbeing indicators that is submitted by the government to the parliament also includes reference to the budget	Annual <i>Accountability Day</i> : Government submits wellbeing report with SDG indicators to parliament, parliament debates the report with the Prime Minister		Committee for Foreign Trade and Development, mainly looks at SDGs in context of international development
Latvia - Saeima	<i>Saeima</i> approved the National Development Plan The Sustainable Development Committee		The Supreme Audit Office assesses SDG indicators and submits reports to parliaments		Sustainable Development Committee

	was involved in the preparation		The SAO cooperates closely with different parliamentary committees		
Lithuania- Seimas	Members of the Commission were involved in preparation of NSDS <i>Seimas</i> approved the concept of spatial Plan for Lithuania	<i>Seimas</i> called on government to integrate long-time goals of SD into budgeting and financial instruments			Commission for Energy and Sustainable Development Working Group developing a document reflecting the Assembly's commitment to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
Poland- Sejm	The national strategic document was discussed with ministers in several committees		Supreme Audit Office: activities related to the SDGs are presented to the <i>Sejm</i> annually Government consulted select parliamentary committees for national progress report		
Portugal – Assembleia de República	<i>Assembleia</i> is currently discussing a national climate law SDGs have been the subject of several speeches by MPs				
Slovakia – National Council	Currently discussing legislative measures to mitigate climate change MPs were involved in preparing NSDS through inter-institutional working groups	Committee on the Environment discusses Environment Chapter of the Budget with regards to SDGs	The Supreme Audit Office submits a report about its activities, SDGs are debated in this context		Committee on Agriculture and Environment Head of Parliament Office is a voting members of the multi-stakeholder Government Council for the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development
Slovenia - Državni zbor, National Assembly	Parliament has adopted resolution on environmental protection strategy				

Switzerland	SDGs are completely mainstreamed and therefore not explicitly the subject of any specific actions, debates or committees				
European Parliament		The EP added the implementation of SDGS to the Inter-institutional agreement on the Multi-annual financial framework 2021-2027			Environment Committee mostly debates these issues but does not have an explicit mandate

2. Description of mechanisms

This section of the analysis focuses on the forms that the different mechanisms described in Chapter 1 can take in different countries. For example, while almost every country has tasked a specific committee with sustainable development issues, in some, the topic is integrated into other committees, while others have established a specific committee to explicitly deal with sustainable development. Similarly, the tasks and mandates related to the topic are very different.

The countries, to which each description applies, are mentioned in the footnote. A list of country abbreviations can be found in the Appendix to this paper.

General Activities and Committees

The SDGs were explicitly the subject of a plenary debate at least once in almost all parliaments¹ that responded to this survey. Many countries² indicated that the SDGs are regularly mentioned on the parliamentary floor. For example, the respondent from the German *Bundesrat* (Federal Council) stated that the SDGs had come up at least 400 times in discussions since 2015. In Croatia, they are mentioned regularly in debates on a variety of topics. In others³ the topic has come up in reference to adopting the National Sustainable Development Strategy or in response to a government progress report⁴. This usually provides an opportunity to debate the general state of 2030 Agenda implementation in the country. In several countries, the subject was mostly debated in the relevant committees⁵.

Finland was the first to establish a parliamentary committee dedicated to issues that are now reflected in the 2030 Agenda. The Parliament's Committee for the Future was first established in 1993 as a temporary committee, but has been a permanent fixture of the Finnish Parliament since 2001. The German Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development was established in 2004. Latvia and Hungary have established a standing committee for sustainable development in 2014. Similarly, France has a committee dedicated to sustainable development. In the Czech Republic and Albania, sustainable development is the responsibility of a subcommittee.

In most other countries, one, or several, standing committees usually deal with issues related to sustainable development. Often, the responsibility lies with committees on the environment or energy⁶, as well as committees of foreign affairs⁷ or international development⁸. Sustainable development can also be part of the work of committees on finance, budget or economics⁹. The Croatian respondent pointed out that the SDGs had become an inherent part of national legislation and therefore fell under the jurisdiction of various committees, including environment, finance and budget, health and social policy. Parliament also has a regular standing committee on sustainable development.

The responsibilities of the committees mandated with sustainable development are mainly related to monitoring and supporting the government's strategy and implementation. For example, the Finnish Committee for the Future prepares the parliamentary response to the government's annual Report on

¹ The Bulgarian correspondent did not provide an answer to this question. In Belgium it has not been debated on the federal level. In Switzerland, the SDGs are mainstreamed and therefore not explicitly topics of debates.

² AL, AT, CY, DE (BR+BT), EP, FI, FR, HU, HR, LT, PO

³ AL, DE (BT), EE, LT, SL

⁴ AT, CY, FI

⁵ BE, EE, IR, IT, LV, SK

⁶ BE, CY, DE, EP, HR, LT, PO, SK

⁷ CY, IT, PO

⁸ DE, EP

⁹ HR, LT

the Future, including recommendations. In many other parliaments, the responsible committee monitors the implementation of the national sustainable development strategy or is actively involved in its preparation. In addition, it can push the government towards strengthening its activities. In the Czech Republic, the Committee is responsible to link the activities of the parliament with those of the Government Council for Sustainable Development. Similarly, in Latvia, the committee liaises with other public, non-governmental and private sector bodies that are involved in strategic planning for the country's future.

The German Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (*Parlamentarischer Beirat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung*, PBnE) is not a committee, but, as the name suggests, a council. It has several tasks: firstly, it develops position statements on sustainable development issues, which are noted by the plenary, but not voted on. Secondly, it makes visible the work of the parliament and raises awareness in civil society. Finally, the PBnE also works with the government on 2030 Agenda implementation. This includes the development of indicators and national goals, deciding on specific mechanisms and instruments and connecting different policies.

Committees are also an important vehicle in representing civil society. For this purpose, almost all committees regularly invite stakeholders to hearings and consultations. This usually does not exceed the usual practice for such parliamentary committees.

While usually the relationship between the government and parliament is defined by the parliament monitoring and overseeing the work of the government, as well as approving legislation, there are several examples of a more close cooperation between the government and parliament with regards to the 2030 Agenda. This often happens through the involvement of parliamentarians in multi-stakeholder or government councils for sustainable development. In several countries¹⁰, parliamentarians are members of the government council for sustainable development. In Hungary, the National Council for Sustainable Development is a multi-stakeholder council that was initiated by members of parliament. In 2008, it was established through a five-party consensus. It is chaired by the incumbent speaker of the parliament and includes representatives of the Academy of Science, churches, local governments and ethnic minorities, as well as members of parliament and representatives of several ministries. It is mandated to be an advisory and interest reconciliation body and its responsibilities include the definition of principles, objectives and tasks of sustainable development in Hungary, as well as supervising and promoting the implementation of the SDGs in Hungary.

The German Parliamentary Advisory Council for Sustainable Development cooperates closely with the state secretariat in the Federal Chancellery, which coordinates the government's sustainable development activities. Members of the Advisory Council participate in meetings of the State Secretariat's Committee.

However, most respondents indicated that in their parliament, the main role in relation to the government was to monitor the government's activities (also by inviting ministers to relevant committees)¹¹, call on the government to strengthen its commitment towards sustainable development¹² or respond to the government report.¹³

¹⁰ CZ, CY, DE, FI, HU

¹¹ AT, BE, CY, EE, HR, IT, LT, LV, PO

¹² LV

¹³ FI

Legislation

Laws that explicitly refer to sustainable development or the SDGs are relatively rare. Many respondents indicated that there were no laws that explicitly referred to the 2030 Agenda or specific SDGs¹⁴. However, due to the all-encompassing nature of sustainable development, it was pointed out several times that the laws often do address issues that are raised in the 2030 Agenda, even though there was no specific reference made to the Agenda or individual SDGs.

On the other hand, in Albania, the report accompanying a law must analyse the law's contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. In several other countries¹⁵, there have been draft laws that explicitly refer to the SDGs. In France and Italy, there are initiatives to include the SDGs (FR) or SD principles (IT) in the constitution. In addition, in France, there is a mechanism that laws cannot be detrimental to the SDGs. Several respondents¹⁶ mentioned general environmental or climate mitigation laws in answer to this question.

Impact Assessments are another way to influence legislation. Most respondents to the survey stated that their parliament's impact assessments usually included sustainable development issues in a more general way.¹⁷ Several impact assessments place a focus on environmental issues¹⁸, gender issues¹⁹, or social and societal issues, in general²⁰ without explicitly referring to sustainable development.

As mentioned above, in Albania, draft laws have to be assessed, among others, regarding their contribution to achieving the SDGs. In Austria and Finland, assessment takes place especially with regard to the budget. In Austria, the intended impacts of the budget need to be attributed to relevant SDGs. Similarly, in Finland, the budget often refers to the 2030 Agenda, however, not to individual SDGs. In several countries, Impact Assessments do not refer to the SDGs.²¹

Being involved in drafting the NSDS represents another mechanism through which parliament can be involved in legislation regarding sustainable development. This was the case in several of the responding countries²². This usually happened either through the sustainable development committee or working groups specifically formed for the occasion. For example, in Slovakia, a specific working group was formed in the parliament to participate in the creation of the environmental strategy. In Italy, the involvement of a newly created committee is foreseen in the development of the next NSDS.

Even when parliaments were not involved in the elaboration of the NSDS, it was often a subject of debate. The NSDS was debated in the plenary in many countries²³ and in the relevant committees²⁴. In Italy, the Minister for the Environment, Land and Sea was heard by Senate's Environment Committee on the environmental aspects of the National Energy Strategy and on the Strategy for Sustainable Development. The German National Council produced a statement on the German Sustainable Development Strategy.

¹⁴ AT, CZ, FI, HU, HR, IR, LT (EE and LV stated that no analysis had been conducted in this regard)

¹⁵ AL, CH, CY, DE (BR & BT)

¹⁶ E.g., CY, SK

¹⁷ BE, BU, CH, CZ, DE, HU, IR, SK

¹⁸ CZ, HU, SK

¹⁹ IR

²⁰ CZ, HU

²¹ CY, EE, IT, LV, LT, PL

²² LV, LT, SK, IT, CZ, FR

²³ DE (BT), EE, FI, HR, HU, IT, LV, SK

²⁴ EE, IT, CZ, PL

In addition to a formal debate, national strategies were voted on in the plenary²⁵ and in the relevant Committee.²⁶

Budget

In almost all corresponding countries, the SDGs have so far not played a crucial role when the parliament has debated the budget.²⁷ The SDGs may have been mentioned, but they were not a major topic during the debate. In Estonia, the Prime Minister presents the budget to parliament, which includes a reference to how the budget relates to the goals laid out in the National Strategy 'Estonia 2035'. The Lithuanian *Seimas* has adopted a resolution which calls on the government to integrate the long-term strategic development goals into all policy documents, including the budget and financial instruments.

France has introduced a green budget in 2021, which assesses the budget with regards to favourable, neutral or unfavourable impacts of the budget items with regards to the six areas mentioned in the recently published EU Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance (climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, protection of marine resources, transition to circular economy, pollution prevention and control, protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems).

In Austria, the budget office of the parliamentary administration analyses the budget with regards to sustainable development. All intended impacts of the budget have to be attributed to at least one of the SDGs. The budget service occasionally also analyses individual laws with regards to the SDGs.

The annex of the Italian main budget and finance document (DEF) includes a number of sustainable welfare indicators. The parliament adopts a resolution on this document, which includes an exam of these indicators. In addition, the Finance Minister has to submit a report to both Chambers annually, in which he outlines the evolution of BES indicators based on the effects determined by the budget law for the current three-year period. However, the respondent from Italy pointed out that over the last five years, fulfilling the SDGs has not played a big role in parliament.

Monitoring and Accountability

One key task of parliaments is to monitor their government's activity and hold their government to account.

One way of monitoring the government is when the government reports on its activities itself. However, many governments do not submit a progress report on the SDGs to the parliament.²⁸ The Swiss and Estonian parliaments take note of the government's report, but neither debate nor take any other action. In several countries, the report is mainly discussed within a committee.²⁹ The Cyprian government is in constant dialogue with its parliament when it comes to sustainable development. The German Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development is currently developing a position statement on the next part of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and its implementation. This document will also be debated in parliament. In Finland, the government annually reports to parliament on progress in the area of sustainable development. The Committee for the Future prepares the parliamentary response, which includes an assessment of sufficiency, as well as suggestions for further measures. In the next annual report, the government then has to report on the measures to implement the position statements that were given by the parliament.

²⁵ EE, HR, HU, LV, LT

²⁶ CZ

²⁷ AL, BE, CH, CY, CZ, DE, EE, FI, HR, HU, IR, PL, PO

²⁸ AL, FR, IT, IR, PO, SK

²⁹ AT, BE, CZ, DE, PL

Another progress report by the government is the Voluntary National Review (VNR). This report usually covers a longer period of time, as governments are recommended to submit them every two to three years, but at least twice before 2030 (UNDP, 2017). Most governments do not involve their parliaments in the preparation of the VNR.³⁰ In Albania, the Assembly reports to the relevant institutions collecting the data. The Cyprian parliament is consulted, but does not participate in the drafting of the report. In Israel, one representative of the *Knesset* administration was involved through the Inter-ministerial Committee that was drafting the report. The Croatian government included MPs in the delegation to the HLPF in New York, but did not include the parliament in drafting the VNR. In Hungary, the parliament is involved through the NFFT, which is chaired by the speaker of the parliament. It prepares a progress report every two years.

Most statistics agencies do not submit their reports on the SDGs to the parliament and parliaments do not make use of it formally, if such a report exists. However, the German Parliamentary Advisory Council prepares a position statement and the plenary of the parliament takes note of the report. In Albania, the statistical data regarding SDGs is reported to parliament. The Report on the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the Czech Republic, which was in part prepared by the Czech statistical office, serves as a basis for the work of the committee for sustainable development.

In a similar vein, many supreme audit institutions examine SDG implementation. Some of them also officially submit this report to the parliament.³¹ In Poland and Croatia, the report is presented to the parliament and noted and adopted respectively. In Austria, the report is submitted and strongly influences the work of parliamentarians. Notably, it serves as a basis of discussion for the budget committee. In Finland, the National Audit Office cooperates with the parliament and provides an annual report including recommendations on how to improve SDG implementation. Similarly, the Italian Court of Auditors sends an annual report to the parliament with suggestions on how to better monitor the SDGs, specifically on how to integrate non-monetary indicators. In France, the government needs to present a report annually on the evolution of 10 indicators related to sustainable development.

With regards to other mechanisms, many respondents stated that parliamentarians may use the traditional tools to hold the government to account, namely oral or written questions, and hearings in standing committees. Several respondents stated that this had happened with regards to the SDGs.³²

Representation

While all parliaments have mechanisms for civil society engagement, there are only a few initiatives that relate directly to the SDGs. The Council of Elders at the *Bundestag* initiated a civil society council in the beginning of 2021 to consult randomly selected German citizens on issues that correspond to standing committees in the *Bundestag*. One sub-committee was specifically tasked with questions of sustainable development. The conclusions of this civil society council were handed over to the parliament in April 2021.

In France, parliamentarians founded a group called '*parlement & citoyens*' (parliament and citizens) in 2013. This group allows members of civil society to co-write laws together with parliamentarians for full transparency. In both Finland and France, there were specific consultations on the 2030 Agenda and the national roadmap for achieving the SDGs.

³⁰ AT, BE, DE, EE, FI, IT, LT

³¹ AL, AT, BE, EP, FI, HR, HU, IT, LV, PL, SK

³² DE, EE, HU, IT, LIT, PL

Discussion

As the above analysis shows, there are a lot of different mechanisms that parliamentarians make use of to further the implementation of the SDGs in their country. In addition, the ways in which these mechanisms are applied and used are very different. In none of the responding countries did parliamentarians make extensive use of all or even most of the mechanisms that were recommended in the literature. In addition, none of the responding parliaments is active in all of the four categories of legislation, budget, accountability and representation. However, due to the all-encompassing nature of the SDGs and sustainable development in general, it is very likely that these mechanisms are used to promote the aim of the SDGs in spirit, but without an explicit reference to the SDGs. Indeed, many of the responses to questions referred to laws or initiatives that are close to the heart of sustainable development, often environmental or climate related issues, but also gender or human rights issues.

It is, however, noticeable that sustainable development is often still attributed to environmental issues. This can be seen, for example, in the allocation of responsibility to different standing committees. When there is no standing committee specifically dedicated to sustainable development, SDGs or sustainable development is most often allocated to the environment, land use or agriculture committee. Yet, sustainable development attributes equal importance to all three of its pillars, namely environmental, social, and economic issues. The attribution to the area of environment corresponds to the allocation within governments, as often it is the Ministry of Environment that works most closely with parliaments on these issues or who chair inter-institutional or multi-stakeholder councils.

In the field of legislation, many answers mentioned laws or initiatives that address the issues of the SDGs (most often environmental issues), without explicitly referring to the SDGs. It is therefore difficult to say whether the adoption of the 2030 Agenda has had an influence on promoting and pushing for sustainable development in parliaments. A more common way is to be involved in the national strategic development document, either in the preparation of the document itself or through debating and voting on the document.

A sustainable budget is considered a crucial means to ensure SDG implementation, but also as a way for parliaments to ensure that funds are channelled towards the right goals. Both, the UNDP (2017) and the IPU (2017) recommend a strong involvement of parliaments in this regard. Yet, very little activity by parliaments was reported in the survey. While the SDGs might be mentioned occasionally in budget debates, the majority of parliaments do not have any formal mechanisms to make sure that the budget is in line with their country's national SDG indicators or strategic aims with regards to sustainable development.

There are many different instruments for parliamentarians to monitor their government's progress and hold the government to account. This is reflected in the answers to questions in this field. Government reports are one of the mechanisms that are used most often, but there is variance in how they are used. While some parliaments merely take note of them, others debate or even give recommendations. Supreme audit institutions and their reports on the SDGs or sustainable development are used more often than reports by national statistics offices. Supreme audit institutions also sometimes give recommendations on further actions.

While representation of citizens is one of the main mandates of parliamentarians, there are hardly any special mechanisms to hear citizens' or marginalised voices on SDG implementation. However, it is important to note that the questionnaire specifically asked for mechanisms that go beyond the usual consultation of stakeholders in committees or other mechanisms a parliament may use to hear the voices of its citizens.

Overall, it is clear that parliaments are often very involved in their country's 2030 Agenda implementation process and utilise many different tools to ensure the achievement of the SDGs. Yet, it is hard to detect to what extent the SDGs have influenced the way in which parliaments become involved in sustainable development, in general. For further discussion and research, it would be interesting to explore in more detail whether the 2030 Agenda has strengthened or helped parliaments in their sustainable development activities.

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Annex

List of country abbreviations

AL – Albania
AT – Austria
BE – Belgium
CH – Switzerland
CY – Cyprus
CZ – Czech Republic
DE – Germany (BR – Bundesrat, Federal Council, BT – Bundestag, Federal Parliament)
EE – Estonia
FI – Finland
FR – France
HR – Croatia
HU – Hungary
IR – Israel
IT – Italy
LT – Lithuania
LV – Latvia
PL – Poland
PO – Portugal
SK – Slovakia
SL – Slovenia
EP – European Parliament

Questionnaire

General questions concerning the engagement of parliaments with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/SDGs

- 1) Has the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development been the subject of parliamentary deliberations and/or activities in your parliament/chamber since 2015?
 - a) If yes, when and how often?
 - b) What initiated the parliamentary discourse?
- 2) Does a particular committee primarily deal with the 2030 Agenda or sustainable development?
 - a) If there is such a committee, what led to its establishment?
 - b) Does this committee also involve stakeholders from outside the parliament in its work or are there other platforms for stakeholder involvement? Are there any other peculiarities regarding this committee's working methods?
- 3) Do the government and the responsible administrative bodies include your parliament into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
 - a) Are there any established or institutionalized formats in place for the involvement of the parliament?
 - b) Are there any special formats in place for the exchange between Members of Parliament and officials of the ministries regarding sustainable development and/or the 2030 Agenda? Are any other stakeholders participating in these procedures?

II. Legislative Procedures

- 1) Have Members of your parliament/chamber initiated legislation that explicitly takes account of one or more SDGs (e.g. in the legal text or explanatory materials). If so, did parliament enact such laws?
- 2) Are the SDGs an integral part of impact assessments of government draft bills and members' bills? If yes, does the assessment highlight possible positive and negative effects in light of the SDGs? If no, are there proposals or discussions to implement such assessments?
- 3) Did your parliament/chamber participate in the formulation of the national strategy or the national plan for sustainable development? If so, was there a formal debate and vote in a committee or in plenary?

III. Budgetary Planning

- 1) Are there any formal rules or informal practices to consider the SDGs when parliament debates the budget? If yes, in which form?
- 2) Has the question of fulfilling specifying SDGs played a crucial role in budget debates of the last five years? Have there been debates on the budget allocations with reference to SDG-fulfilment?

IV. Parliamentary control of the government

- 1) Does government submit regular progress reports on SDGs to your parliament/chamber? How does your parliament take notice of such reports? Does it vote on recommendations?
- 2) Do supreme audit institutions in your country review the implementation of the SDGs and report to parliament? What impact do such reports have on other parliamentary business and debates?
- 3) Do national statistical agencies evaluate and report the implementation of the SDGs? What impact do such reports have on parliamentary business and debates?
- 4) Is your parliament/your chamber involved in the preparation of progress reports? (i.e. Voluntary National Reviews) If so, how?
- 5) Which other instruments does your parliament/chamber use to hold government accountable with regard to the implementation of SDGs? (e.g. written questions, evaluations, reports)

V. Representation of the civil society

- 1) Are there any multi-stakeholder-committees in your country, which include Members of Parliament and deal with sustainable development or SDGs? If yes, how are the Members of Parliament selected?
- 2) Apart from the one mentioned in I. 2, has your parliament/chamber introduced any further ways of involving the civil society and/or academia into the implementation or the monitoring of the implementation of the SDGs (e.g. Citizens' Dialogues or online debates)?

VI. Further activities

1) Has your parliament/chamber initiated any further activities to promote the SDGs? For instance: Education for sustainable development, events, changes concerning the infrastructure or procurement procedures of the parliament, etc.

2) If yes, have these activities positively affected the work of the administration?

