

**WORKSHOP REPORT:
PARLIAMENTARY
MECHANISMS IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE
2030 AGENDA**

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**19th ESDN
Workshop
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Introduction

The 19th ESDN Workshop took place in Vienna, Austria on 14-15 June 2021. The title of this Workshop was “Parliamentary Mechanisms in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda” and looked more closely at national level and stakeholder mechanisms in Europe that exist to aid in parliamentary involvement in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The Workshop featured a mixture of keynote presentations, interactive sessions, and many opportunities for discussion.

The Workshop featured parliamentarians from Romania, Finland, Hungary and Austria as well as representatives from several civil society organizations in Europe that push for more engagement with the SDGs in parliaments, either in their home country or at the European Parliament. The Workshop also had over 100 participants from many European countries in attendance.

Throughout the Workshop, three main questions were investigated:

1. How do parliamentary mechanisms in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda work?
2. What are strategies and methods to implement the SDGs by parliamentary means?
3. How can the parliament and civil society collaborate effectively to implement the SDGs?

This Workshop Report provides a summary of the presentations and discussions at the Workshop. PowerPoint Presentations (if used) can be found on the [ESDN website](#).

Session 1: Opening Words and Welcome

Wolfgang Tertschnig, Austrian Federal Ministry for Climate Action

Wolfram Tertschnig welcomed the participants to the 19th ESDN Workshop. He underlined the importance of building back better from the pandemic, and to build more resilient societies. This Workshop is covering one way of achieving sustainability in Europe through parliamentary mechanisms.

The ESDN has a unique character as a peer learning and knowledge sharing mechanism: Different to many other interactions within the government sphere, it emphasises learning from each other and not negotiating with each other.

Wolfram Tertschnig explained that the Advisory Board of the ESDN had recently decided that, in order to reinforce their actions, the ESDN needed to move towards being more transdisciplinary. This Workshop exemplified this move, as it was organised in cooperation with the Austrian Parliament, the National Council, and the Civil Society Organisation *SDG Watch Europe*.

Harald Dossi, Secretary General of the Austrian Parliament

Harald Dossi opened his words of welcome with the observation that even before the Covid-19 pandemic, key democratic institutions were under threat, leading to civil and political unrest. National parliaments need to step up their efforts to increase political will and parliamentary engagement for the SDGs, this also includes parliamentarian engagement with society. For many issues related to the SDGs, solutions can be evoked through legislation and financing, two key competencies of parliaments. Harald Dossi emphasised that no size fits all when it comes to institutionalising the SDGs in parliaments. While some have set up committees or caucuses, others have assigned specific or all SDGs to existing standing committees. Worldwide, most parliaments still need to figure out how to give the SDGs a fixed locus in the committee structure.

In Austria, the SDG process has mostly been initiated by written questions by members of parliament, as well as motions for resolutions primarily addressing progress reports and implementation reports. Harald Dossi closed his opening statement by stating that the Austrian parliamentary building is EMAS certified, meaning it adheres to a number of environmental standards. In addition, the administrative practice of the parliament will be oriented towards the SDGs in the future.

Leonore Gewessler, Austrian Minister for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation and Technology

Minister Leonore Gewessler emphasised the importance of public servants. They are the ones who put the decision, that were made by parliaments, into practice. Therefore, networks like the ESDN are of utmost importance.

There is still an 'incredible' need for environmental legislation. It is a matter of public participation and of convincing citizens that change and transformation are feasible. Change will come, so we need to navigate it.

The 2030 Agenda shows global pathways out of the crisis. Therefore, we should exchange about what can be achieved in the next year and how we can find leverage synergies.

To *Build back better*, we should use the SDGs and the European Green Deal as a guiding principle. In Austria, 46% of funding from the European Recovery and Resilience Fund will go towards climate protection. 100% of the money will adhere to the “Do-no-significant-harm principle”.

Leonore Gewessler’s ministry, the Ministry for Climate Action, is the steering hub for the transformation process. There are several separate focus areas, but it always quickly becomes clear how interlinked the SDGs are.

It is clear that achieving the SDGs is a collaborative task. Leonore Gewessler emphasised again, that the ESDN has been an important facilitator for years.

Karoline Edtstadler, Minister for the EU and Constitution, Federal Chancellery, Austria

Minister Karoline Edtstadler opened her welcoming words with emphasising that the involvement of parliament in SDG implementation is crucial. She thanked the Secretary General of the Parliament and the parliamentary administration for hosting the Workshop.

She stated that the Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of resilience, sustainability, and multilateralism. There is a need to accelerate innovative and joint actions. We also need to foster structural reforms, and the SDGs should be a compass for decision-making in that regard.

She referred to Austria’s first Voluntary National Review (VNR), which was presented at the High Level Political Forum in 2020. This VNR is a starting point and now it is time for concrete actions. We have to accelerate actions at all levels:

- At the European level, we need to act within the framework of the European Green Deal and can make use of the Conference on the Future of Europe;
- At the national level, we can use the structures of the parliament. In Austria, there was a four party consensus some weeks before the Workshop, which aims to improve parliamentary involvement in SDG implementation;
- At the regional and local level, actions are felt most immediately by the citizens; and
- NGOs and CSOs are the backbone of the transformation, and we need science and research as a basis for evidence-based decision-making.

Annika Lindblom, ESDN President

Annika Lindblom welcomed participants by emphasizing the critical role of parliaments for achieving the SDGs. She outlined the different themes of the Workshop:

- Exploring the different mechanisms through which parliaments can be involved in Agenda 2030 implementation and how they can fulfil their role; and
- How do different mechanisms work and what strategies are employed.

She explained that in her home country, Finland, the parliament is not only important for implementation, but also to make sure the government fulfils all UN obligations, thereby expressing accountability to parliamentarians and thus citizens.

Annika emphasised the importance of enabling longer term commitment and transcending legislative terms.

Session 1: National Parliamentary Mechanisms in 2030 Agenda Implementation –How do they work?

Denmark: 2030 Panel

Clara Halvorsen, Vice-Chair of the 2030 Panel, Denmark

You can find the slides from Clara's presentation on the [ESDN website](#).

The Danish 2030 Panel is an advisory body established by the Danish Parliament's All Party Coalition for the Sustainable Development Goals (The 2030-Network). It was set up because there was a need for partnerships and cooperation in order to reach the SDGs in Denmark. The Panel specifically aims at collaborating across sectors.

The 2030 Panel consists of 25 members that represent the diversity of key players of Danish society. They are designated by the 2030-Network of the Danish Parliament. The 2030 Panel supports the political work of the 2030-Network through knowledge sharing, analysis and sparring. However, it is not subject to political guidelines by the Network.

The biggest challenge is to make all the 25 organisations that are part of the Panel feel represented and included.

The main project of the panel is the establishment of inclusive and supplementary indicators on the status of the SDGs in Denmark. Other goals include:

- Taking initiative to the 197 National Danish indicators and measuring the progress annually;
- Strong involvement in the government's formal work on implementing the SDGs; and
- Promoting the 2030 Agenda.

Other activities of the 2030 Panel include:

- Interaction with ministers and civil servants to influence political SDG action plans;
- Information on the SDG agenda to spread and promote ownership widely in Danish society;
- Participation in SDG debates, events and campaigns;
- A specific working group on education, whose purpose is to anchor knowledge and learning about the SDG's as a part of the Danish educational system; and
- Identifying and distributing the yearly SDG award given to a person/corporation who has made an extraordinary effort to promote the SDG's in Denmark.

Hungary: National Council for Sustainable Development

Erzsébet Schmuck, Member of the National Assembly (MP), President of the Committee on Sustainable Development of the Hungarian Parliament, Hungary

You can find the slides from Erzsébet's presentation on the [ESDN website](#).

Erzsébet Schmuck began her presentation by looking at the progress in achieving the SDGs in the EU. While in some areas, significant progress has been achieved, in others, such as climate change, we are moving away from the goal.

The main pillars of sustainable development policy in Hungary are:

- The National Council for SD; and
- The Hungarian National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development.
 - Adopted in 2013
 - Integrates the SDGs
 - Defines 4 key national resources, 34 strategic goals and 77 associated tasks

Many institutions in Hungary support the implementation of SD. For example, since 2011 the constitution has included the principle of sustainable development and the rights of future generations. In addition, there is an Ombudsman for Future Generations, who is tasked with safeguarding the interests of future generations.

The two key groups in the Hungarian parliament are the National Council for Sustainable Development (NFFT) as the Parliament's advisory and interest reconciliation body, and the Committee on Sustainable Development (FFB) as the Parliament's standing committee.

The NFFT is a typical multi-stakeholder advisory body, which is responsible for managing the national SD framework strategy and is also responsible for its biennial progress report.

The scope of the Committee on Sustainable Development includes environmental protection, nature conservation, climate policy and environmental health.

Apart from environmental protection and nature conservation, the committee also addresses the issue of sustainable land use and the sustainable management of the natural resources, in general, and is proactively involved in these key areas.

The Committee and the NFFT work closely together and they also collaborate with the Office of the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights and the National Council for Environmental Protection.

According to a study by the European Parliament's Committee on Development, Hungary's institutions are well suited for sustainable development. Yet, in SDG performance, Hungary lags behind the European average. Erzsébet Schmuck asked, how this seemingly contradictory situation could come about. She argued that it had the following reasons:

- A lack of effective government coordination, weak horizontal integration;
- Recommendations by parliament have only been formally integrated;
- Laws enacted in a speedy manner frequently fail to consider and integrate the opinions and feedback by the institutions mentioned above; and
- The government fails to have a structured dialogue with social representatives.

Erzsébet Schmuck demanded to create a balance between: (1) governmental and non-governmental action; and 2) bottom-up and top-down approaches. Although the non-governmental institutions in Hungary are well-established and functional, the lack of governmental actions (focused on several topics only) are causing an unbalanced system of institutions in Hungary.

In Hungary, most of the SD measures are project based and therefore do not affect the fundamental unsustainable features of the socio-economic system. So there needs to be more emphasis on achieving structural change.

SDG Watch Europe's 'MEPS for SDGs' Initiative

Julie Rosenkilde: Director of Nyt Europa and Steering Committee member of SDG Watch Europe, Belgium

You can find the slides from Julie's presentation on the [ESDN website](#).

SDG Watch Europe is an alliance of civil society and non-governmental organisations. Its mission is to ensure that the European Union and all Member States are implementing the SDGs. MEPs should hold the European Commission and the Member States accountable on their implementation.

The initiative 'MEPs for SDGs' started two years ago with the purpose of ensuring that a structure to implement the SDGs is firmly established in the European Parliament. This means, for example, that MEPs are fully engaged in the process of mainstreaming the SDGs throughout legislation and policymaking.

Objectives include:

- Raising awareness about the SDGs within the European parliament;
- Ensuring that committees are familiar with the SDGs and what they mean for their work; and
- Finding targets that are relevant for the different committees.

SDG Watch mostly works with the Development and Environment Committee, but also with the Economic Committee, as they are responsible for the European Semester. One aim is to establish an intergroup between the different committees in the parliament.

SDG Watch Europe pursues a number of activities:

- Trying to identify different SDG structures in other countries and other parliaments;
- Finding out how parliaments can inspire and learn from each other; and
- Mapping MEPs that are involved in related activities and finding out who has been an SDG Champion.

One conclusion from the work of the last years is that the intrinsic motivation and willingness of individual MEPs is the most important aspect, independent of any lobbying work by SDG Watch or other organisations. This is why it is great that there is now an SDG Alliance in the parliament, as it shows ownership from within. This alliance is very informal so far and aims to bring together likeminded MEPs.

Romania: Importance of Parliament in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Rozália-Ibolya Biró, President of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Romanian Parliament, Romania

Rozália-Ibolya Biró highlighted that the Romanian Parliament was the first parliament in the Inter-Parliamentary Union that has expressed its commitment for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Romanian Parliament is at the core of all initiatives that shape sustainable development in Romania. It works closely with the government's Department of Sustainable Development, the main coordinating body in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the national level. The Department secures a direct link between the Government and the Parliament. It presents a report about the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to the Parliament annually.

The Foreign Affairs Committee of the Romanian Parliament established a sub-committee that focuses entirely on SD and the 2030 Agenda in 2016.

Both the Department and the Parliament are working towards the establishment of a Committee on Sustainable Development within the Romanian Senate.

Romania is considered a regional hub regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, because of its coherent vision, active promotion of the SDGs, and a strong institutional framework.

Question and Answer Session

In the Q&A panel after these keynote speeches, the following topics were discussed:

The added value of having (sub-)committees dedicated specifically to SD or the 2030 Agenda

Subcommittees can act like a caucus and bring together members from each party and maybe even different chambers of parliament. In Romania, the idea is that MPs also feel like speakers for SD in their region. This creates a bottom up movement for the SDGs as well. However, a subcommittee can only be a first step, afterwards there need to be more procedures to control and monitor. These procedures can also include guidelines on how all other committees can approach the SDGs, especially the Budget Committee.

How the newly formed group in the European Parliament works

It is a very new group, so their activities have not gone on for a very long time. However, the plan is to work mostly on cross-thematic issues, such as the European Semester, or the recovery plan. These have a broader outlook on policy. The group also want to create an annual SDG report to the EP and reach out to civil society organisations to discuss these issues. Often informal groups and meetings can be more effective, especially if you want to become more concrete.

Political silos, synergies and trade-offs

Research shows that there are more positive synergies than trade-offs when it comes to the SDGs. The key is that policymakers understand them and make use of them for effective and cost-efficient policies. In addition, there are also trade-offs between short- and long-term interests. Climate change targets are the prime example for this. In Hungary, there is a discussion about a climate tax. Finding synergies with other targets could make this more socially acceptable.

To overcome political silos, indicators could be used as a tool for communication between government and parliament.

Political will

We have spent six years talking about how to implement the SDGs and making plans, now it is time to get started. The most important for this is political will. The pandemic and the European Green Deal should be used as a turning point and an opportunity to move forward faster. The political will to move towards implementation should also be reflected in the state budget. There need to be procedures and indicators to measure progress.

Session 2: Strategies and methods on how to implement the SDGs by parliamentary means

Finland: Committee of the Future

Joakim Strand, Member of Finnish Parliament and Chair of the Committee for the Future of the Finnish Parliament, Finland

The Finnish Committee for the Future is not a legislative committee. It has five main tasks:

1. The Committee provides the parliamentary response to government reports. There are two reports per parliamentary term, the report on the future and one report on national implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
2. Identify phenomena and issues relevant for the future of Finland. For this, the Committee consults hundreds of experts per term and has a separate research budget. These reports are available in English on the Committee's [website](#);
3. Innovation for democratic processes and political decision-making;
4. Evaluation of impacts of technologies. The Committee's analyses have been used by the OECD and the EU foresight committee; and
5. Development of Future Studies and Foresight as a discipline and methodology.

In Finland, the government is responsible for the implementation of the SDGs, specifically the Prime Minister's Office. So far, the government has prepared two national implementation plans. Currently, a roadmap for implementation of the individual SDGs is being drawn up.

The government submits the report to the parliament and the Committee prepares the parliamentary answer. This includes statements provided by other committees, for example the Environmental or Educational Committee. The Committee also consults lots of experts and organises seminars with stakeholders.

If the resulting response contains any resolutions, they obligate the current and following governments to act upon them. The government reports annually on their progress on the resolutions until the parliament declares that the matter has been resolved.

Presentations by Parliamentarians from the Austrian National Council

Carmen Jeitler-Cincelli, Member of Austrian Parliament, ÖVP (Austrian People's Party), Austria

Carmen Jeitler-Cincelli introduced her speech by underlining how everyone working in the field of sustainable development is very committed and enthusiastic, which is motivating.

The Austrian Parliament has several plans to advance the promotion of the SDGs. Most importantly, MPs need to be more informed. According to Carmen Jeitler-Cincelli, many of her colleagues still believe that the SDGs are only an issue for development assistance. There are several activities planned:

1. Conduct a survey to learn from others' good practices;

2. SDG Ambassadors: inviting colleagues to be ambassadors for one of the 17 goals, supporting their implementation and spreading information about their goal; and
3. A mini-expo: during each plenary week, inviting CSOs and companies to set up booths in the parliament to present their ideas.

One focus is to bring experts to the table and raise awareness for the relevance of the Goals for Austria.

Petra Bayr, Member of Austrian Parliament, SPÖ (Social Democratic Party of Austria), Austria

At the beginning of her talk, Petra Bayr emphasised that no one size fits all and what might work for one parliament might not work for a different one.

She started by outlining how to take stock of what is needed for SDG implementation in parliaments:

- Where do we stand with regards to the 196 targets?;
- Where have we already reached them and where is a lot to be done still?;
- Who is responsible for implementing the Goals as a whole and individual goals? What ministries and committees are responsible?;
- What is the time frame that could be realistic to achieve certain goals? What is urgent to achieve and where should we leave ourselves more time to consider and plan?;
- Whom should we cooperate with? What are other stakeholders that need to be involved?;
- What resources and budget are necessary?;
- Where is the knowledge? Where are the synergies and how can we use them?; and
- Where are potential conflicts between the goals?

This stocktaking of the status quo should be publicly available.

Next, we need to look at the structures that are already there and how they can be used.

- Are the existing parliamentary committees working efficiently?;
- How can we tear down silos?;
- How can we encourage thinking outside the box?;
- Should we think about informal structures to have all chairs of committees come together for a regular stocktaking exercise?; and
- Do the respective ministries provide sufficient information or does the parliament require more information about future plans?

One of the main roles of parliaments in SDG implementation is monitoring and controlling the government's progress. The Court of Auditors or the country's supreme audit institution can be a tool for that. In Austria, the Court of Auditors makes sure that taxpayers' money is spent efficiently, effectively and economically. Petra Bayr argues that these conditions could translate into 'sustainably'. The Court of Auditors can evaluate the general performance of the government, but can also follow up on single SDGs. The Austrian Court made a suggestion on how the ministries could better coordinate and better involve the parliament in implementation processes. It will conduct a follow-up investigation to see if these recommendations have been implemented.

Petra Bayr closed her statement by demanding that we *build back forward* instead of *building back better*, as we need to leave many structures from the old system behind.

In addition, more men need to be involved in Sustainable Development.

Astrid Rössler, Member of Austrian Parliament, Die Grünen (Greens), Austria

The SDGs are a perfect example for interdisciplinary work. We have learned that we need to find out who the partners are and how we can solve problems together. One single issue of one SDG spreads out like the branches of a tree, so we need to cooperate.

The hardest part of this is to change political processes and discussion culture. As there is always a competition of ideas between political parties, parliamentary discussions are not the ideal environment for cooperation.

Parliaments are nevertheless an important actor in SDG implementation, because they:

- Are the place of legislation ;
- Decide about the budget; and
- Control the government's actions and progress.

This not only includes the National Council of Austria, but also the nine federal and many regional and local parliaments that exist in Austria.

It is important to keep in mind that the SDGs do not only concern environmental issues. For example, climate action should not only be the concern of the committees for energy or environment, but every single committee deals with issues that are related to climate action. The question is: How we can inform all committees about their responsibilities in this regard?

Another important step to leave the silos is to involve MPs more into governmental processes, for example the process of developing the Voluntary National Review. In addition, MPs need to actively invite civil society, for example NGOs like SDG Watch, scientists and experts.

One important tool for monitoring progress is an impact assessment for new laws. In Austria, the budget now undergoes an SDG screening. This is not yet a full impact assessment, but it investigates how the budget will support certain goals and targets.

Question and Answer Session

The following themes were discussed during the question and answer session with the Austrian parliamentarians:

Having a (sub-)committee dedicated to sustainable development

- Having a concrete point of contact in the parliament for administration, government and other stakeholders makes it easier to connect between different institutions;
- This committee can push for discussion of SDGs, both in the plenary and in other committees and make sure these issues are taken care of;
- The Committee for the Future does not have to issue legislative proposals, so it can focus on more qualitative work and in-depth research;
- The Committee for the Future does not issue legislative proposals. This means that it is sometimes not taken as seriously by other committees; and
- There is the danger of silo- thinking and other committees not feeling responsible.

Overcoming silos and taking advantage of synergies

- In Austria, the issue is that there are set procedures of which law is discussed in which committee, so the challenge would be to change this process;
- We should discuss how we can discuss economic and environmental questions together, while not forgetting about the social dimension;
- There are examples of different committees holding consultations together when dealing with a similar issue. This encourages working together and communicating with each other; and
- To overcome silos, it is also important to invite stakeholders and civil society into the parliament and make them feel like they are welcome and like their suggestions are being heard.

The role of Supreme Audit Institutions

- In Austria, the Court of Auditors is an institution of the parliament, so the parliament can ask the Court of Auditors to create a report on a specific issue with a simple majority;
- It is important to convince the Court of Auditors that this is an important issue so they take it up on their agenda;
- INTOSAI (the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions) has annual seminars and workshops on how to include the SDGs; and
- The report by a supreme audit institution can incentivise the government to take action and can be used in negotiations with the government.

Impact Assessments

- The parliament can request and conduct impact assessments that go beyond those of the government;
- In Austria, there will be a 'Climate Check' for new laws soon, including an impact assessment referring to climate action;
- However, there needs to be a broader focus on all aspects of sustainable development; and
- We need to be cautious about having too many impact assessments and focus on creating synergies between the different assessments.
 - The knowledge is already there and many scientists are eager to participate in creating more holistic assessments and action.

Creating Awareness and Political Will

- When communicating about the SDGs, we need to highlight potential synergies more and the chances they provide; and
- We also need to make clear how much higher the costs will be if we do not act now.

Session 3: NGO – Parliamentary Mechanisms in 2030 Agenda Implementation

The Netherlands: Policy Coherence for SD and “Adopt an SDG” Campaign

Rosa van Driel, Building Change Project Manager, The Netherlands

You can find the slides from Rosa’s presentation on the [ESDN website](#).

Rosa van Driel explained that in the Netherlands, the implementation of the SDGs is coordinated by the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. The Parliament, so far, only plays a very limited role.

When they participate in the Adopt an SDG Campaign, MPs adopt one or two SDGs that are most relevant to their work. They take over ‘their’ SDGs in a video, in which they answer questions about their goals and how they will work towards achieving them. Civil society supports and follows their work and they get publicity and media attention.

Over 25 MPs have joined so far. They represent eight parties and are part of a wide range of standing committees.

According to Rosa van Driel, the campaign still faces certain challenges:

- The agenda is still seen as an agenda for Development Cooperation - both within Parliament and the central government;
- There is no overarching committee or political discussion on sustainable development; and
- How to maintain a positive attitude towards the campaign when MPs who committed to the SDGs fail to act accordingly?

In the future, Building Change plans to advocate for the inclusion of the SDGs in the new coalition agreement. They will hold SDG masterclasses for parliamentarians to raise awareness in the Parliament.

European Economic and Social Committee

Peter Schmidt, President of the EESC Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, Belgium

You can find the slides to Peter’s presentation on the [ESDN website](#).

Peter Schmidt outlined the work of EU institutions on SDG implementation. The former EU Commission published a Reflection Paper in January 2019 ‘Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030’ which outlined three different scenarios for the EU:

- An overarching strategy;
- Mainstreaming the goals; and
- Focus on external action.

In addition, Von der Leyen's Commission has provided several political guidelines:

- The European Green Deal;
- Each Commissioner is responsible for mainstreaming the SDGs in their policy area and the Commission as a whole; and
- Integrating the SDGs in the European Semester process.

The EESC has set up a Sustainable Development Observatory in 2006. It was the first body dedicated to Sustainable Development on the European level. It follows a strategic approach, linking environmental, economic, and social dimensions. It convenes space for civil society through events and consultations. The EESC has a specific focus on youth engagement in sustainability and climate issues.

One of the main outputs of the EESC are Opinions on the work of the European Commission and other institutions. In their opinion on the Reflection Paper by the European Commission, the EESC demanded a paradigm shift and a new model of growth and that the European Green Deal should be green *and* social.

The EESC takes several actions to involve civil society in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on a European level. It called for the Multi-Stakeholder Platform to be upgraded and brought into a formal and inter-institutional consultation framework. However, at the time of the Workshop the Commission was not planning on renewing the Multi-Stakeholder Platform on the SDGs or any other structured involvement of civil society.

The EESC acts as a bridge between civil society and EU institutions. The Sustainable Development Observatory reputation provides access to the European Parliament and Council Presidencies on SD-related issues. The EESC Members have national and regional networks in their countries of appointment – they often participate in debates organised by stakeholders or by governments in the Member States. There is an opportunity in connecting EESC Members with national/regional parliaments to expand the debates on the Agenda 2030 implementation.

SDG Watch Austria

Bernhard Zlanabitnig, SDG Watch Austria

SDG Watch was involved in preparing Austria's first Voluntary National Review (VNR). It was a participatory and transparent multi-stakeholder approach. The main take-away from this process was the constant and transparent dialogue with government institutions. In addition, many other stakeholders were involved in the process, for example academia, the private sector, representatives of NGOs, etc.

One key demand of SDG Watch Austria was to involve the parliament more. This means regular and transparent reporting to and in the parliament. The *Outlook* chapter on governance clearly states that the federal government has to regularly inform parliament.

However, parliament needs to be enthusiastic about being involved, too. While engagement was quite slow in the beginning, parliament is now moving in the right direction. Parliament faces the same challenges and problems as government with regards to the inter-disciplinary nature of the SDGs. The structures of parliament do not encourage overarching thinking.

SDG Watch has several demands for parliament:

- Self-assess its capacity to deal with SDGs regularly;
- Ensure that constituents' voices are heard in the implementation process, for example through public fora and consultations;
- Name a standing rapporteur in each of the standing committees that is responsible for crosscutting issues. A standing committee for sustainable development could act as a focal point;
- Develop a mechanism to institutionalise the implementation of the SDGs in parliament; and
- This should lead to a national sustainable development strategy and an overarching vision.

Mobilizing Parliamentarians and Multi-stakeholder Engagement

Kirsten Brosbøl, CEO & Founder of 2030beyond and Founder of Parliamentarians for the Global Goals, Denmark

Kirsten founded and chaired the Danish all party parliamentary group for the SDGs. Up to the date of the Workshop, this group has mobilised over one-third of parliamentarians to join the group. This is an informal group and members encourage the voices from all parties represented in the Danish parliament.

The parliamentarians from the all-party group formed stronger connections to the standing committees. It was a particular milestone when the Budget Committee formed a sub-group on monitoring progress. There is still not on a systematic way to do this, but there is much more awareness in all of the committees.

From the outset, the all-party group sought out connections to civil society, youth groups, businesses, academia and other associations and interest groups. The 2030 Panel was set up as one of the first initiatives and it has been a success story.

Since the 2030 Panel was born out of parliament, there has been a strong sense of ownership in the parliament to this dialogue. It is a very dynamic process and not controlled by the government.

Next year, the government will provide funding to the 2030 Panel for the first time, so there will be more capacity to do more things, such as a shadow report on the government's progress report.

Kirsten Brosbol also introduced her 'do-thank' 2030beyond and the initiative Parliamentarians for the Global Goals (PfGG). As a former active parliamentarian, she found that there was a lack of an international perspective and of an opportunity to engage with colleagues to exchange best practices. The aims of PfGG are:

- Increase political leadership and awareness of the SDGs;
- Provide a forum for exchange of ideas and best practices;
- Support parliamentarians around the world in establishing cross-party and cross-sector collaboration to embed the SDGs in their work; and
- Accelerate political action for the SDGs.

It brings MPs together to share ideas and best practices on parliamentary action for the SDGs. PfGG offers:

- Webinars with global thought leaders and peers;
- Facilitation of workshops; and
- Hands-on guides and tools for MPs.

In addition, 2030 Beyond organises 2030 People's Festivals to foster new cross-sector partnerships and innovative action. The aim is to increase local and civic engagement in and contribution to SDG implementation in Denmark and in partner countries, thereby strengthening good governance and dialogue for sustainable development. This will hopefully go global when members of the PfGG will initiate their own festivals in their countries.

Questions and Answers

The following themes were discussed during the question and answer session:

How Covid-19 has influenced the work of these civil society organisations:

- The crisis helped more people to understand how interlinked and how fragile our world is and how there are multiple crises;
- It is easier to reach out and connect to people internationally, because everyone is now so used to making contacts and having meetings online; and
- More awareness of and willingness to join webinars, so it is easier to reach many people.

However,

- Fundraising activities are near impossible, and governments have other priorities; and
- It is harder to negotiate and find common ground with people as the human interaction is missing.

How to bring back efforts for the SDGs to pre-Covid levels

- We do not need to just bring it back to 2019 levels, because even then no country was on track;
- We need to mobilise new resources and then distribute these resources much more equally;
 - We need to close the financing gap, for example through taxation and a wealth tax
- Countries in the North need to acknowledge where they need to act more decisively; and
 - Most rich countries are lagging behind specifically on SDGs 12-15
 - A gap analysis will help identify the biggest need for action
 - Assess where they can have the biggest impact internationally
- We should discuss more about well-being, circularity, and especially social aspects.

Why it is so hard to gain political support for the SDGs

- While the SDGs are not inherently ideological, some inconvenient truths will inevitably come up when you start implementing them, for example CO₂ reduction, meat consumption or pollution;
 - This requires very detailed discussions about the interlinkages between the economy and the environment
 - Once one party starts going into details, other parties will react with opposing it and make it an ideological debate, especially when it comes to these inconvenient truths
- You cannot make profits easily from achieving the SDGs, so we need to raise awareness about where power is located and address power dynamics and inequalities; and
 - At the moment, that is mainly done by populists and we should not leave it to them
- We need to be more innovative about how we communicate about the SDGs.
 - For example, the renovation of the Austrian Parliament is a SDG success story, because it is very sustainable, but this is not communicated well enough

- We need to celebrate the successes more

The power of citizen initiatives

- Mobilising civil society is a crucial issue, especially those who do not belong to the elite and will seek out opportunities to participate;
 - Pressure comes from the street and not from top-down initiatives because many people do not have access to them.
- We also need to invite the youth;
- Youth should not be 'invited', we should have an equitable inter-generational dialogue; and
- For media initiatives, we should measure the results, it is not the content produced, but the people reached that matter.

Session 4: Breakout Groups

Three of the breakout groups discussed the question of how parliamentary mechanisms could be strengthened in 2030 Agenda implementation. These were some of the key points they reported back:

The role of parliament

- All countries have different mechanisms in place that they can use, so it is very different what role parliament could take in each country;
- But many mechanisms could be strengthened or utilised more for the SDGs;
- Do not forget about regional parliaments;
- Citizen assemblies can play a big role, they should be involved when it comes to developing longer term strategies; and
- The Conference on the Future of Europe should also look at the SDGs.

Monitoring

- The Court of Auditors can be a big support to the parliament through stock-taking of the status quo; and
- VNR reports are a good instrument to engage a number of actors in SDG implementation.

Challenges

- There is a general need for more guidance and leadership both from the governmental and the parliament's side;
- We still need to raise awareness with the SDGs and make clear that urgent action is needed;
- We need to raise the knowledge base among MPs about the SDGs and sustainable development;
 - This can also happen through bilateral meetings
- Short-term often prevails over long-term thinking and sectoral often prevails over systemic thinking;
 - MPs need a more holistic approach
- Visibility of the SDGs is still lacking; and
- Sometimes continuity and a long-term strategy are lacking.

The fourth group discussed the mechanisms for parliaments and NGOs to work together. These were the key points that were discussed during the session:

- Single events are not enough: there needs to be a continuous interface;
- There is a need for more meetings and a structured dialogue between parliament and civil society;
- The parliament needs to make the SDGs more visible and offer a medial stage to civil society and NGOs;
- There is still apprehension about the 'other side' and a feeling of working against each other: we need to create an atmosphere of cooperation and trust;
- It is important for parliamentarians and civil society to break out of their silos.

Session 5: Collective Learnings

Wolfram Tertschnig, Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Austria

Wolfram Tertschnig stated that he was ‘tired’ of calling for certain measures. For example, we should no longer call for a comprehensive strategy; if we have not gotten one yet, we will not get it. We should also no longer call for political will, leadership, and dedication if we do not have it yet. We should not call for it, but think about how we can create it. This Workshop has provided a lot of good ideas on how to create momentum across parliaments. It has also given inspiration on how to think outside the box as government officials, and how to apply breaking down the silos, not only to dimensions of sustainable development but also to the governance mechanisms that we use. Government officials should invite and interact with parliaments, they should be considered as stakeholders and invited to multi-stakeholder events.

Government officials should also seek new approaches in how to do their work. They should not only rely on old instruments, because they have their limitations, for example impact assessments. When tasks are done in an efficient way, in bureaucratic language that means with the least possible effort. This might not be enough to fulfil the challenges.

The ESDN should open up to other actors more often. This Workshop is a good example, where civil servants worked with parliamentarians and civil society. Wolfram suggested to continue this dialogue. These activities are trust-building; they open up dialogue and possibilities for further liaising.

Sabine Schneeberger, Federal Chancellery, Austria

Sabine Schneeberger highlighted that it is important to find ways and instruments that work in a specific context, as no solution fits all. It is important that we continue this exchange with actors and other stakeholders and with the parliamentarians, in particular. It was a first step to come out of the silos and enter into a partnership approach, which is what the 2030 Agenda is all about.

Daniel Dubas, ESDN Vice President, Delegate of the Federal Council for the 2030 Agenda, Federal Office for Spatial Development, Switzerland

Daniel Dubas said that for him one of the main take-aways was the phrase to ‘build *forward* better’ instead of ‘building *back* better’.

We all know that civil society, parliaments, academia and business sector are important actors that need to be included in the work of civil servants. It is really important to learn from each other and some of the examples that were presented at the Workshop could be replicated, maybe in a slightly different way, in other countries.

To engage parliamentarians, it is important to look at what the particular area of interest is of the parliamentarians. If you find SDGs that correspond to that, it can be an incentive. It is also important to give them visibility and media attention.

