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**“Perspectives for European SD Policy & Governance
in the context of recent EU policy strategies and Rio+20”**

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Workshop Background & Discussion Paper

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Thematic outline

Currently, the framework for SD policy and governance in the European Union is in a state of change. On the one hand, the [EU SDS of 2006](#) requires the European Council in 2011 to decide “when a comprehensive review of the EU SDS needs to be launched” (para 45); a decision on the review will also influence the future of the EU SDS. On the other hand, SD issues and targets are increasingly included in other important EU policy strategies, most notably in the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#), Europe’s major policy strategy to achieve “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, and the Europe 2020 flagship initiative, “[A resource-efficient Europe](#)” (2011), and its [Roadmap](#) that was adopted on 20 September 2011. Additionally, the [UN Conference on Sustainable Development \(Rio+20\)](#) will focus as one of its major themes on the institutional framework for SD and issues of SD governance, including SD strategy processes at the national level.

All these recent developments and pressing current policy issues (e.g. fiscal consolidation, demographic changes, etc.) call for discussions on how SD policy and governance can be best addressed in current EU policy strategies and in preparation to the Rio+20 conference. The ESDN, which is mentioned in the EU SDS as mechanism to facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences as well as to support Member States to enhance mainstreaming SD issues and horizontal and vertical policy-making, is the ideal network to foster discussions about the current state of SD policy and governance and future developments.

Purpose

The workshop has the following aims: (a) analysis and discussion of how SD is addressed in current EU policy strategies and which governance mechanisms are applied; (b) reflection on SD governance experiences and good practices on the EU and Member States level; (c) discussion of the ESDN role in the current and future European SD governance system; and (d) development of ideas and future scenarios for SD policy and governance in Europe.

The workshop will focus on questions such as: Which SD topics and targets are currently included in EU policy strategies and which governance mechanisms are applied? Which experiences have been made with SD policy and governance in Europe? What is the added-value and future of national SD strategies (NSDSs)? Which monitoring/evaluation mechanisms are necessary to assess the achievement of SD policy and governance? What is the future role of SD institutions and mechanisms in the SD governance process (i.e. ESDN, national SD councils, bi-annual progress reporting period, etc) in Europe in? How should SD policy and governance in Europe look like in the future?

Format

Important aspects on SD targets and governance mechanisms in EU policy strategies as well as future perspectives on SD policy and governance in Europe will be introduced in panel discussions. An overview of experiences with SD policy and governance at the EU and Member States level will be given in interactive presentations. Parallel discussion groups will develop scenarios for future SD policy and governance in Europe and the potential role of the ESDN. Ample time for exchange among workshop participants will be provided in several plenary discussions.

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Introduction

Sustainable development (SD) is a complex policy concept which involves strategic objectives and high-level commitment, the integration and coherence of different policy sectors, the coordination between different tiers of government, implementation through adequate policies and related measures, monitoring and evaluation procedures, etc. All this points to the necessity of developing adequate governance mechanisms for achieving SD. One important tool of SD governance are policy strategies that outline a coordinated process and specified targets to achieve the balancing of economic, environmental and social objectives.

Currently, the framework for SD policy and governance in the European Union is in a state of change. On the one hand, the [EU SDS of 2006](#) requires the European Council in 2011 to decide “when a comprehensive review of the EU SDS needs to be launched” (para 45); a decision on the review will also influence the future of the EU SDS. On the other hand, SD issues and targets are increasingly included in other important EU policy strategies, most notably in the [Europe 2020 strategy](#), Europe’s major policy strategy to achieve “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth”, and the Europe 2020 flagship initiative, “[A resource-efficient Europe](#)” (2011), and its [Roadmap](#) that was adopted on 20 September 2011. Additionally, the [UN Conference on Sustainable Development \(Rio+20\)](#) will focus as one of its major themes on the institutional framework for SD and issues of SD governance, including SD strategy processes at the national level. At a recent UNCSD High Level Dialogue in preparation of Rio+20 in Solo/Indonesia on 19-21 July 2011, the [chair summarized](#) important messages to move the theme forward. Among them were (i) the renewed political commitment for SD and a translation of this into concrete implementation; (ii) ensuring the integration of economic, environmental and social policies; (iii) increased support for national SD strategies; (iv) SD governance at all levels needs to be reviewed, supported and strengthened; and (v) budgetary resources for SD implementation, capacity-building and technology transfer.

All these recent developments and pressing current policy issues (e.g. fiscal consolidation, tackling unemployment, demographic changes, etc.) call for discussions on how SD policy and governance can be best addressed in current EU policy strategies and in preparation to the Rio+20 conference. The ESDN, which is mentioned in the EU SDS as mechanism to facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences as well as to support Member States to enhance mainstreaming SD issues and horizontal and vertical policy-making, is the ideal network to foster discussions about the current state of SD policy and governance and future developments.

This background and discussion paper firstly provides an overview of the linkages between sustainable development and governance. Secondly, it focuses on the EU SDS and the Europe 2020 Strategy and presents how SD is included in these major policy strategies. It also provides a table on similarities and differences of the governance processes of both strategies and a cross-check of EU SDS objectives with Europe2020 Flagship Initiatives. Thirdly, the paper includes some background on the Rio+20 preparations. Fourthly, it presents the results of a survey we undertook for the preparation of this workshop with national SD policy-makers. Finally, the paper outlines the format for discussions and interactive formats applied in the workshop.

For more detailed information on several chapters of this discussion paper, please see the [ESDN Quarterly Report September 2011](#) which was prepared as an additional background paper for the workshop.

Sustainable development and governance

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the linkages between sustainable development (SD) and governance.

General aspects in the relation between SD and governance

The objective of **sustainable development** – namely, achieving simultaneously economic well-being, environmental protection and social equity – poses significant challenges for government institutions on all political-administrative levels, which were originally established on the basis of more sectoral concerns. In order to address these challenges, SD strategies have been developed on the international and national level since the mid-1990s, but mostly in preparation for the 2002 UN World Summit in Johannesburg. These strategies aim to outline a fully integrated process of strategic decision-making for SD, including objectives and governing mechanisms (Meadowcroft, 2007a). The renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) of 2006, as the EU's main policy document for strategic and integrated decision-making, also contains principles for governance that reflect governance processes and that aim to more effectively steer the processes of SD policy-making in Europe: open and democratic society; involvement of citizens; involvement of businesses and social partners; policy coherence and governance; policy integration; make polluters pay (European Council, 2006).

The link between governance and SD is thus fundamental and has already been addressed in the Brundtland Report of 1987 (WCED, 1987). Generally, **governance** refers to the *managing, steering and guiding of public affairs by governing procedures and institutions in a democratic manner, especially in relation to public policy decision-making* (Baker, 2009; Jordan, 2008; Lafferty, 2004). 'Good governance' is a specifically normative usage that prescribes certain steering procedures and institutions – based on principles, values and norms, i.e. participation, transparency, rule of law, etc. – that should be adopted to achieve preferred outcomes.

Governance mechanisms are crucial for achieving SD. '**Governance for sustainable development**' can be defined as "processes of socio-political governance oriented towards the attainment of sustainable development. It encompasses public debate, political decision-making, policy formation and implementation, and complex interactions among public authorities, private business and civil society – *in so far as these relate to steering societal development along more sustainable lines*" (Meadowcroft, 2007b, 299). In turn, SD can be understood as a reform agenda not only for sectoral policies, but also for cross-sectoral governance structures and processes (Lafferty, 2004, 2002; OECD, 2002). The first document to frame **SD as a governance reform agenda** was Agenda 21, the action plan adopted at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio 1992 (UNCED, 1992). The governance aspects of the action plan were reiterated and complemented at the UN World Summit in Johannesburg 2002 (Rio +10). The World Summit Report pointed out that "good governance is essential for sustainable development" (UN, 2002). The forthcoming Rio+20 Conference will again address governance issues in one of its two main themes, ['Institutional Framework for SD'](#).

Governance for sustainable development – requirements and challenges

Governance for SD involves some important steering requirements and challenges that we shortly describe below. They refer to a steering logic that is specific for the aim to achieve SD (this section is largely based on Baker, 2009 and Berger, 2009):

(a) Steering in the context of uncertainty and ambivalent steering objectives:

Promoting SD is not a blueprint nor is it about helping society reach an identified or identifiable end state. Rather, it is an *open-ended and on-going process* whose desirable characteristics change over time, across space and location, and within different social, political, cultural and historical contexts. Thus, promotion efforts are undertaken in the context of open-ended goals and on-going change, in short, within the context of inherent policy ambivalence and amidst the complex and dynamic interactions between society, economic development, technology and nature.

(b) Steering for the long-term

The SD concept includes a very strong inter-generational element. However, *long-term decision-making* presents particular governance problems, as it adds to uncertainties. However, it is not easy to include long-term thinking into current modes of policy- and decision-making, which are usually characterised by short-term orientation (e.g. election cycles).

(c) Steering through multiple levels (vertical integration)

Due to the fact that policy-making for SD involves the responsibilities of different tiers of government, *coordination among these tiers is crucial*. In other words, governance for SD requires steering activity that cuts across functional and administrative boundaries and established territorial jurisdictions and that included economic actors and civil society organisations. Tensions and struggles within and between the authorities and actors operating at these different levels are typical of modern political processes. Therefore, promoting sustainable development requires overcoming failures of co-ordination in public policies.

(d) Steering across multiple sectors (horizontal integration)

The concept of SD fundamentally addresses *the integration of various policy sectors and the coordination of different policy arenas* (Jordan, 2008; Pezzoli, 1997; Sneddon et al, 2006). Therefore, SD calls for horizontal policy integration that balances economic, social and environmental interests and policies in a way that *trade-offs (or negative effects) between them are minimised and synergies (or win-win-win opportunities) are maximised* (Berger & Steurer, 2009; Steurer, 2008). The governance challenge is that governments should make their economic, social and environmental policies more coherent and establish institutional mechanisms that foster coordination between sectoral ministries and their related administrations. In practice, however, the challenges of integrating and coordinating different policy sectors seems to increase in the context of complex decision structures and established political-administrative cultures, e.g. government departments responsible for sectoral policies ('departmentalisation'), thinking within 'sectoral silos' (Berger & Steurer, 2009).

(e) Steering together (participation)

It has become an acceptable dogma that *participation is a necessary quality of SD governance*, from both economic actors and from within civil society. Agenda 21, for instance, emphasises that “one of the fundamental prerequisites for the achievement of sustainable development is broad public participation” (UNCED, 1992, para. 23.2). In this context, participation is expected (a) to help define SD objectives, (b) to facilitate reflexivity through the exchange of relevant knowledge and information, (c) to increase the societal ownership of sustainable development policies, and (d) to foster horizontal policy integration through reconciling different stakeholder interests (Steurer, 2008).

(f) Steering with tools and instruments

Recent practices of governance have made *a range of new tools* available for the promotion of sustainable development. Besides regulation or other ‘command-and control’ instruments, other mechanisms such as market-based tools, voluntary agreements, and information and awareness raising are increasingly used. As Baker (2009) argues, on a pragmatic level, it is hoped that the use of new instruments will help to reduce the implementation deficit with respect to environmental policy, thereby helping to achieve more effective implementation of EU regulatory and SD goals. Another important tool for steering and achieving SD is the use of **overarching policy strategies** which will be the focus of the next chapters.

EU SDS and Europe 2020 Strategy

This chapter provides an overview of the EU SDS and Europe 2020 Strategy and shows how SD is included in these major EU policy strategies; moreover, we provide an analysis on similarities and differences of the governance processes of both strategies.

The renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) of 2006

In June 2006, the European Council adopted an ambitious and comprehensive renewed [EU SDS for an enlarged EU](#). The renewed EU SDS is a single and coherent strategy that recognises the need to gradually change our current unsustainable consumption and production patterns and to move towards a better-integrated approach to policy-making. It reaffirms the need for global solidarity and recognises the importance of strengthening our work with partners outside the EU. The overall aim of the EU SDS is to identify and develop actions to enable the EU to achieve a **continuous long-term improvement of quality of life**.

Although having a focus on environmental issues, **the EU SDS tries to balance economic, social and environmental objectives more evenly**. However, the strategy does not clarify the relationship between economic growth and SD (see also [ESDN QR, December 2008](#)). The EU SDS has been developed as a strategy for the whole EU. It, therefore, proposes **governance mechanisms** for improving the coordination with other levels of governments (vertical integration) and calls upon business, NGOs and citizens to become more involved in working for sustainable development (stakeholder participation). Since monitoring and follow-ups are crucial for effective implementation, the EU SDS includes a **governance cycle**: every two years, the European Commission writes progress/review reports on the state of implementation of the strategy at the EU and Member States level (the [first progress report](#) was issued in 2007; and in 2009, the [review of EU SDS](#) was published). The 2009 review underlines that in recent years, the EU has mainstreamed SD into a broad range of its policies (e.g. the EU has taken the lead in the fight against climate change and the promotion of a low-carbon economy), but also points out that unsustainable trends persist in many areas (European Commission, 2009). As mentioned in the EU SDS, the Council at the latest in 2011 will decide whether a **comprehensive review** of the strategy is necessary.

Table 1: The EU SDS in brief

Strategy	Renewed in 2006 based on the first EU SDS (Gothenburg, 2001)
Aim	Achieve SD, quality of life and well-being in Europe in the long-term
Objectives	7 key challenges: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate change and clean energy 2. Sustainable transport 3. Sustainable consumption & production 4. Conservation and management of natural resources 5. Public Health 6. Social inclusion, demography and migration 7. Global poverty and sustainable development challenges 2 cross-cutting policies: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. education and training; b. research and development
Governance cycle	Every two years
Main documents for implementation at the national level	National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs)
Ministries responsible at the national level	Ministries of the Environment (in most cases)

The Europe 2020 Strategy

The Europe 2020 Strategy was published by the [European Commission in March 2010](#) and adopted by the [European Council in June 2010](#) with the sub-heading ‘**A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth**’:

- *Smart* growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation;
- *Sustainable* growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy;
- *Inclusive* growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

Five EU headline targets are to be achieved by 2020 which “are representative of the three priorities of [the strategy] (...) but they are not exhaustive” (European Commission, 2010):

- 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed;
- 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D;
- the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right);
- the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree;
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty.

To reach these targets, seven Flagship Initiatives have already been put in place:

Table 2: The 7 Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives

Flagship Initiatives documents	Date of publication
A Digital Agenda for Europe	August 2010
Youth on the Move	September 2010
An industrial policy for the globalisation era	October 2010
Innovation Union	October 2010
Agenda for new skills and jobs	November 2010
European platform against poverty and social exclusion	December 2010
Resource-efficient Europe	January 2011

Governance of the Europe 2020 Strategy

The Europe 2020 Strategy is organised around a thematic approach and more focused country reporting that has been the case in the Lisbon Strategy process: (a) the **thematic approach** focuses on the identified priorities and headline targets in the Europe 2020 Strategy and its seven Flagship Initiatives; (b) **country reporting** aims to help Member States to define and implement strategies, restore macroeconomic stability, identify national bottlenecks and return their economies to sustainable growth and public finances. The reporting of Europe 2020 and the Stability and Growth Pact evaluation has to be done *simultaneously*, while keeping the instruments separate and maintaining the integrity of the Pact. This means proposing the annual stability or convergence programmes and streamlined reform programmes simultaneously:

- **National Reform Programmes (NRPs)** are the key delivery tool for Europe 2020 and are developed by national governments in April of each year (usually coordinated and prepared by Economic and Finance Ministries), along with stability/convergence programmes. NRPs contain national targets relating to the Europe 2020 headline targets and explain how governments intend to meet them and overcome obstacles to growth. They also set out what measures will be taken, when, by whom and with what budget implications. The [“Europe 2020 Integrated Guidelines”](#), 10 in total, provide

precise guidance to the Member States on defining their NRPs. The guidelines will also form the basis for any country-specific recommendations. An overview of the NRPs of all 27 EU Member States can be found in the [respective chapter of the ESDN Quarterly Report of September 2011](#).

- **Stability/convergence programmes**¹ aim to ensure more rigorous budgetary discipline through surveillance and coordination of budgetary policies. In line with the *European Semester*, they are designed to coordinate economic policy-making in EU Member States. The programmes are submitted simultaneously with the National Reform Programmes (NRPs) in April of each year, before governments adopt their national budgets for the following year. They contain important information on public finances and fiscal policy.

Monitoring and the European Semester

Monitoring of the Europe 2020 Strategy is integrated into the “[European Semester](#)”, which is the new European governance architecture that was approved by the Member States on [7 September 2010](#). The European Semester means that the EU and the Eurozone countries will coordinate ex-ante their budgetary and economic policies in line with both the Stability and Growth Pact and the Europe 2020 Strategy. The six month cycle of the European Semester starts in January of each year, when the Commission presents its **Annual Growth Survey**, including a review and a forecast, integrating macroeconomic, thematic and fiscal surveillance. The spring meeting of the European Council, based on the annual growth survey, takes stock of (a) the overall macroeconomic situation; (b) progress towards the five EU-level headline targets; and (c) progress under the Flagship Initiatives.

Table 3: The Europe 2020 Strategy in brief

Strategy published & adopted	Published March 2010; adopted June 2010
Aim	Achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth
Objectives	<p>5 headline targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment: 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed • R&D / innovation: 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D • Climate change / energy: the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right) • Education: the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree • Poverty / social exclusion: 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty <p>To reach these targets, 7 flagship initiatives are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Innovation Union</i> • <i>Youth on the move</i> • <i>A digital agenda for Europe</i> • <i>Resource efficient Europe</i> • <i>An industrial policy for the globalisation era</i> • <i>An agenda for new skills and jobs</i> • <i>European platform against poverty</i>
Governance cycle	Annual
Main documents for implementation at the national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability / convergence programmes • National reform programmes
Ministries responsible at the national level	Ministries of Economic Affairs and/or Ministries of Finance (in most cases)

¹ Under the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), *stability programmes* are produced annually by Eurozone countries; other EU countries produce *convergence programmes*.

More detailed information on both strategies, as well as the recent Roadmap on a resource efficient Europe, can be found in the respective chapter in the [ESDN Quarterly Report September 2011](#).

Comparing Europe 2020 and the EU SDS

The following table shows a comparison on similarities and differences between the Europe 2020 Strategy and the EU SDS:

Table 4: Comparison between the Europe 2020 Strategy and the EU SDS

	Europe 2020	EU SDS
Main EU strategy	Europe 2020 (2010)	EU SDS (2006)
European Council discussion	Spring Council	December Council
Responsible unit at European Commission	Secretariat-General	Secretariat-General
Orientation	Aims to develop strategic solution to bring the EU out of the crisis situation and to deliver high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. It mainly focuses on economic growth and employment, but includes environmental issues (e.g. climate change, energy, resource efficiency)	Aims to achieve SD, quality of life and well-being in Europe in the long-term.
Governance Architecture	The strategy is organised around a thematic approach and more focused country surveillance. More specifically: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic approach: deliver headline targets agreed at EU level combining concrete actions at EU and national levels; • Country reporting: help Member States define and implement exit strategies to restore macroeconomic stability, identify national bottlenecks and return their economies to sustainable growth and public finances. The monitoring of the strategy is integrated into the "European semester" (approved in September 2010).	There are bi-annual progress reports by the European Commission that reflect on the progress towards the objectives of the EU SDS. The 2007 progress report was based on Member States reports and the Eurostat Monitoring Report; the 2009 progress report was mainly based on the Eurostat Monitoring report and not Member States reporting was undertaken. The coordination with Member States is rather weak: on the one hand, NSDS objectives are not always linked to the EU SDS and, on the other hand, no institutionalised coordination with national SD coordinators – the SDS Coordinators groups has not been called since 2007.
National strategy documents	EU governments must produce two reports each year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability / convergence programmes: submitted before governments adopt their national budgets for the following year; • National reform programmes: simultaneously with the stability/convergence programmes, contain the elements necessary for monitoring progress towards the Europe 2020 national targets. 	National SD Strategies (NSDSs), long-term strategies – weak link to renewed EU SDS (most NSDSs were developed before the EU SDS)
Objectives	The objectives are formulated in 3 priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation. • Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy. • Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion. 	7 key challenges (2006): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change and clean energy • Sustainable transport • Sustainable production and consumption • Conservation and management of natural resources • Public health • Social inclusion, demography and migration • Global poverty and SD challenges

	<p>This is then translated in 5 headline targets:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment: 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed • R&D / innovation: 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D • Climate change / energy: the "20/20/20" climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right) • Education: the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree • Poverty / social exclusion: 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty <p>To reach these goals, 7 flagship initiatives are in place:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Innovation Union</i> • <i>Youth on the move</i> • <i>A digital agenda for Europe</i> • <i>Resource efficient Europe</i> • <i>An industrial policy for the globalisation era</i> • <i>An agenda for new skills and jobs</i> • <i>European platform against poverty</i> 	<p>2 cross-cutting policies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. education and training; b. research and development
Horizontal policy integration	Focuses mainly on economic growth and employment trajectories and policies. SD issues are integrated in the strategy.	Aims to balance economic, social and environmental objectives, with an emphasis on the latter two. No clarification of relationship between economic growth and SD.
Vertical policy integration – genesis of process	Top-down genesis: Europe 2020 was adopted first. NRPs in Member States followed based on the 'integrated guidelines' that give a clear framework for the national level for the implementation of Europe 2020.	Bottom-up genesis: most NSDSs preceded the renewed EU SDS of 2006; revised NSDSs from 2006 onwards will be brought in line with EU SDS objectives.
Coordination between EU & member States	Each year, in June, the Commission assesses the Stability (or Convergence) Programmes and the National Reform Programmes providing country-specific recommendations as appropriate, which are then discussed and formally adopted by the Council at the end of June or in early July.	Group of Member States coordinators (SDS Coordinators Group) chaired by Secretariat-General met only twice in 2007. No institutionalised or structured coordination since then.
Governance cycle	1 year	2 years
Monitoring	Europe 2020 Indicator Set	EU SDS Indicators Set
Progress reporting period on EU and Member States level	Annual	Bi-annual
Responsible ministry at the national level (most often)	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance	Ministry of Environment
Update/review of strategy	Annual Growth Survey – Annex I "Progress Report on Europe 2020	2009 (review) & 2011 (possibly comprehensive review)

Cross-check of EU SDS objectives with Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives

Based on the analysis of the 7 Flagship Initiatives of Europe 2020, we developed a table that shows how the Flagship Initiatives include the key challenges of the EU SDS and thus take up SD issues. It is important to note that this exploration does *not claim to be exhaustive but is only a first step of a more thorough analysis* that is needed and can only be undertaken when all the ‘roadmaps’, policies and actions that operationalize the objectives the Europe 2020 Strategy will be published.

Starting from a breakdown of the EU SDS key challenges, we checked if the respective Flagship Initiative mentioned them. More specifically, since each EU SDS key challenge is compounded by several ‘operational objectives’, we tried to understand if and how many of these were mentioned in the documents of the Flagship Initiatives:

- when *less than 25%* of operational objectives of a key challenge were mentioned in a Flagship Initiative, we marked the cell of the respective Flagship Initiative with one tick (✓);
- if *between 25% and 75%*, of operational objectives were included, we assigned two ticks (✓✓);
- if *over 75%* of operational objectives were stated in a Flagship Initiative, then we assigned three ticks (✓✓✓);
- when no mentions of operational objectives were found in a Flagship Initiative, the table shows a **red cell** signifying that the particular key challenge is not covered at all by the respective Europe 2020 flagship initiative.

Table 5: Cross check of EU SDS objectives with Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives

Cross check of EU SDS objectives with Europe 2020	A digital agenda for Europe	Innovation Union	Youth on the Move	A Resource-Efficient Europe	An Integrated Industrial Policy for the Globalisation Era	An Agenda for new skills and jobs	The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion
Climate Change and clean energy	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓✓		
Sustainable transport	✓✓	✓✓		✓✓	✓✓		
Sustainable consumption and production	✓	✓		✓✓✓	✓✓		
Conservation and management of natural resources		✓✓		✓✓✓	✓✓		
Public Health	✓✓	✓✓				✓	✓✓
Social inclusion, demography and migration	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓			✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Global poverty & sustainable development challenges				✓✓			✓✓

As can be seen in the table above, looking at the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives as an overarching framework might suggest that almost all EU SDS key challenges seem to be somehow included, with the notable exception of “global poverty & SD challenges” (which is not addressed in 5 of the 7 Flagship Initiatives). However, it is not so straightforward as to discuss the **quality of this inclusion**: Firstly, **a good number of operational objectives are very poorly addressed**. In the documents of the Europe 2020 Flagship Initiatives, these are mentioned only in one Flagship Initiative. For example, under the key challenge *Sustainable Transport*, the operational objective “Achieving a balanced shift towards environment friendly transport modes to bring about a sustainable transport and mobility system” is mentioned only in the Flagship Initiative *A resource efficient Europe*. Secondly, **some other operational objectives are not addressed at all in the flagship initiatives**. Only the first EU SDS key challenge - *Climate Change and clean energy* - seems to be comprehensively addressed by Europe 2020’s Flagship Initiatives.

For a more detailed analysis of how the Flagship Initiatives include EU SDS key challenges, please go to the respective chapter in the [ESDN Quarterly Report September 2011](#).

Preparation for Rio+20

In 2012, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) will be hosted again in Rio de Janeiro, 20 years after the first Earth Summit in 1992. The conference, commonly referred to as 'Rio+20', will have **three objectives**:

1. to secure renewed political commitment for SD,
2. to assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on SD, and
3. to address new and emerging challenges

The Conference will address **two themes**:

1. *Green economy* in the context of SD and poverty eradication;
2. *Institutional framework for SD*.

Promoting SD governance at the national and sub-national levels

Recently, the High Level Dialogue on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development (IFSD) was held in Solo (Indonesia) on 19-21 July 2011 with the objective of supporting the preparatory process for Rio+20. A key issue addressed by the [High Level Dialogue Discussion Paper](#) was to **promote SD governance at the national and local levels**. With this objective, several suggestions were offered for discussion. With respect to '*strategies to improve cross-sectoral coordination and coherence in implementation of the sustainable development agenda*', special attention is given to **NSDSs which are regarded as a good and flexible way to develop a national approach to SD** together with stakeholders, and in so doing, ensuring that not only policy sectors are dealt with effectively but also that a **cross-sectoral integration** is achieved.

Particular appreciation is assigned to the approach suggested by the [European Sustainable Development Network \(ESDN\)](#) with regards to NSDSs. We suggested that NSDSs should be built around 7 key aspects:

1. Common vision and strategic objectives;
2. High-level commitment;
3. Horizontal integration;
4. Vertical integration;
5. Participation;
6. Implementation mechanisms and capacity-building;
7. Monitoring, evaluation and strategy renewal.

The High Level Dialogue made several suggestions for the different political levels and institutions to foster SD, such as:

At the national level: (i) Effective national environmental governance supports and complements efforts to improve international mechanisms for SD; (ii) effective national environmental governance helps ensure that parties to international environmental agreements actually enjoy the benefits that those agreements are supposed to provide; (iii) effective national environmental governance also helps advance protection of marginalized and poor communities; (iv) sound national governance contributes to a level playing field for businesses operating globally and helps avoid the emergence of pollution havens in places lacking effective environmental governance.

National Sustainable Development Councils: Over the years, National SD Councils spread around the world and achieved a number of successes for SD:

- they have proven to be a very effective way for governments to consult with stakeholders and sectors of society;
- they have helped to build support for potentially difficult legislation;
- they have also produced important national policies and strategies on sustainable development.

There have also been weaknesses of enabling conditions of NCSs, e.g. they are easily abolished if not created under a legal mandate as governments or priorities change; they need to be adequately funded and most have not been. The most successful ones have been linked to the Office of the Prime Minister (e.g. Finland and Philippines).

Green Ministers: Stemming from the UK experience of the Green Ministers' Committee, which was able to introduce a targeted and coordinated approach to procurement policy and education of officials across government, the High Level Discussion Paper suggests the opportunity "of designating a Green Minister in each government department [in order] to ensure stronger horizontal linkage and accountability".

At the end of the High Level Dialogue, and in order to move the discussion forward the IFSD, the so-called '[Solo Message](#)' was presented by the Chair with the aim of focusing the attention on the following important needs:

1. to renew *political commitment* for sustainable development, with high attention on its *implementation*;
2. to ensure that the economic, social and environmental pillars work together with each pillar *integrating the goals* of the two other pillars;
3. to enhance the *integration* of sustainable development at the international level;
4. to increase *integrated support* for national strategies at the national level;
5. to strengthen *UNEP*;
6. to review, *support and strengthen sustainable development governance* at the local, national and regional level;
7. to provide *adequate and additional financing* in order to enable implementation, capacity building and technology transfer.

EU preparation for Rio+20

In preparation of Rio+20 Conference, the European Commission published a [Communication](#) to put forward the position of the European Union (European Commission, 2011). In this document, the Commission supports the objectives of the Rio+20 Conference to start an accelerated and profound, world-wide transition towards a Green Economy and to launch the needed reform of international SD governance.

While agreeing with the need to **strengthen SD governance**, the European Commission clearly backs the points raised by the Solo Message presented above. With a view on the European situation, the communication briefly presents the initiatives undertaken for SD in the EU over the last years, also by referring to the EU SDS. Special attention is given to the Europe 2020 Strategy, presented as the key policy development in this regard, with the aims to:

- transform the EU into a knowledge-based, resource efficient and low-carbon economy;
- provide a sustainable response to the challenges facing the EU up to 2050;

- mainstream and reinforce the role of sustainability in policy development.

The importance of the Europe 2020 strategy is therefore highlighted by the following paragraph:

“Rio+20 will be a defining moment for sustainable development, both in the EU and globally. Its outcome will inspire the EU's strategy and actions for sustainable development, and in particular help further shape the EU Europe 2020 strategy as an effective tool for delivering on sustainable development.” (European Commission, 2011, p.4)

Survey on SD policy & governance in Europe

As part of the preparation for the 7th ESDN Workshop, the ESDN Office undertook a survey among national SD policy-makers from 34 countries. We distributed an email questionnaire with 5 questions to the SD policy-makers who were asked to answer by replying to the email. We posed the following questions:

1. What would you identify as the most successful initiative(s) and as the biggest challenge(s) for SD governance in your country?
2. Which strengths and weaknesses do you identify in SD governance at EU level? Which consequences do they have for SD strategies at European and at national level?
3. Which are possible options for optimising the SD governance at EU level? And which national initiatives could be part of such optimising strategies/instruments?
4. How would you define the relationship between National Reform Program (NRP) and National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSDS) implementation in your country (linkages, collaboration, objectives, etc.)?
5. What are the most important “new emerging issues” that pose strong political challenges in your country and that are related to SD (e.g. fiscal consolidation, demographic changes, etc)?

The survey took place from mid-September to mid-October 2011 and we received **written answers from representatives of 9 countries**, namely Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Latvia, Spain and Switzerland.

Survey results

In the following section, we present the results of the survey among national SD policy-makers:

The most successful initiative(s) and the biggest challenge(s) for SD governance in Europe

In the majority of the answers, **high-level political commitment** towards SD is considered as the most important factor for an SD strategy to be successful. **Leadership, institutionalisation and steering** are also seen as necessary for the successful implementation of an NSDS as part of the support from the highest political level. In Switzerland, for example, the NSDS since 2009 is an official sub-strategy of the government programme and is regularly reviewed in parallel with Switzerland’s four-year government cycle. Ensuring this kind of commitment is, therefore, one of the biggest challenges of SD governance for most countries.

In addition, it is crucial to support this commitment in terms of human resources for consultation procedures and especially with respect to the necessary **capacity building** at different levels of the administration. Furthermore, the NSDSs should not be considered just as documents: the best results are reached when clear, binding and measurable goals and targets are followed by concrete policy actions.

An interesting success in SD governance has occurred in France: since the establishment of the ‘Grenelle of Environment’ Roundtable in 2007, the so-called **“5-way governance”** (“gouvernance à 5”) – involving representatives of 5 stakeholder groups, i.e. employers, trade unions, NGOs, local authorities and the national level – has been used for the definition and follow-up of SD public policies and the French preparation for the Rio+20 Conference.

In addition, **horizontal integration** across sectoral institutions and **vertical integration** between different levels of governments are considered of great importance. However, it is also the case that horizontal and vertical integration are considered particularly challenging, especially for those countries that have a federal political system in place, such as Belgium or Germany. France also experienced some challenges in terms of inter-ministerial coordination: although the coordination is led by the General Commissioner for SD, the preference of short-term over long-term objectives inside each ministry can prevent comprehensive horizontal integration of SD in public policies. Another challenge, as experienced in Spain, is to establish **effective and binding ex-ante sustainability assessment procedures** of any policy measure at the national, regional and local level.

The establishment of **institutional bodies** such as the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development or the Forum for Sustainable Development in Switzerland are good examples of successful institutionalisation processes in the field of SD governance, especially when continuity of their activities and, again, political commitment is ensured.

Strength and weaknesses of SD governance at the EU level and consequences for the national level

In general, our survey shows that the **EU SDS** played a key role in setting out a **common vision and strategic objectives for the European Union**. Moreover, the EU SDS was an **important and inspiring example for the SD strategies at the national level**, especially in terms of developing indicators and monitoring systems. However, there was also the argument that the initiatives to develop the renewed EU SDS of 2006 and the work of several Friends of Presidency Groups were driven by the Member States rather than the European Commission.

It is interesting to note how most of the answers we received stress the necessity and importance of a **revision** – if not a **new version - of the EU SDS**. In fact, having an unrevised and not updated EU SDS is seen as a challenge for ensuring political commitment at the national, regional and local level. Accordingly, in order to stay relevant in a rapidly changing environment, the EU SDS needs to evolve as well. A decision on when to launch a comprehensive review of the EU-SDS needs to be taken before the end of 2011. Delaying this necessary exercise would considerably weaken SD governance at EU level and send a wrong signal to the EU Member States (and the rest of the world) about the EU's political commitment for sustainable development.

Strong weaknesses are, therefore, related to the fact that **SD governance is not among the political priorities at the EU level**. As one SD policy-maker argued, *“at the EU level, SD governance lost its main pillar because of a lack of real weight of the EU SDS.”* Another policy-maker said that *“there is a lack of leadership in the European Commission on SD issues and the Member States are left alone with their NSDS processes without European momentum”*.

Furthermore, the **Europe 2020 Strategy** has gained major attention recently and, at the same time, the importance of the EU SDS has been diminished. Consequently, it seems that the current crises (i.e. economic, financial, etc.) are met only with short-term strategies and, most important, the *“external and inter-generational dimensions of the EU policy strategies are put aside”*. Moreover, one SD policy-maker pointed out that *“the ECOFIN Council is the one in charge of the Europe 2020 governance process, with the*

Environmental Council only having an observer status – this de facto puts the priorities of Europe 2020 on growth and financial issues”.

The respondents to the survey also point to another weakness that relates to the fact that **“SD governance remains too much rooted within the environmental pillar, with too little interaction with the Council formations dealing with the social and economic pillars of socio-economic development”**. A lack of mechanisms for coordinating, monitoring, developing and implementing SD between EU bodies and between EU and Member States are identified as major weaknesses that need to be overcome.

Options for optimizing the SD governance in Europe

Several options are suggested in the direction of optimising SD governance at EU level. Once again, a big role is foreseen for a necessary and imminent **review of the EU SDS**: in particular, it should be done before the Rio+20 conference *“where the political discussions on the SD goals should create an opportunity also for the EU to start a dialogue between the Commission and Member States”*, as one SD policy-maker argued, to strengthen SD governance at EU level and the Member State level. Nevertheless, a major challenge for SD governance would be to communicate the **added value** of a revised EU SDS and to make it more visible and clear. In these efforts, SecGen’s role should be reinforced and National SD Councils, or similar entities, should revitalise their activities. However, some SD policy-makers are rather doubtful as regards the steering of SD governance by the European Commission: no new drive from the European Commission is expected to foster SD governance, *“because they are mainly concerned with the financial problems in the Member States and the Euro situation”*, as one respondent argued.

Some respondents put forward the **possibility of integrating the EU SDS into the Europe 2020 Strategy**, mainly because of *“making the EU SDS goals more politically binding”*, as one policy-maker put it. In the same direction goes the idea of an alignment of the SD agenda towards the current political situation in the EU where the financial crisis is still present. In this case, a suggestion would be to *“encompass the Green Economy/Green Growth agenda in the broader SD context without compromising on the central principles of SD and contributing to the EU policy framework by having a longer time-span perspective”*. However, it should be kept in mind that the EU still requires a commonly shared vision for SD and high-level political commitment for its implementation.

One SD policy-makers suggested a **stronger role of the ESDN in optimising SD governance in Europe**. He argued that the ESDN, which is a best-practice exchange arena and which organises conferences and workshops every year, could evolve, even informally, into a network of coordination and/or of monitoring progress towards SD in general or towards the EU SDS objectives in particular. To achieve this, the European Commission could give mandate to the ESDN to publish every year an informal progress report (based on the Eurostat report and experiences in the Member States) and to discuss progress in the Member States.

The relationship between NRPs and NSDSs

In terms of NRPs and NSDSs, all respondents share the same experiences at the moment: there is the strong impression that **very limited and unclear formal linkages** exist between the National Reform Programs (NRPs) and National Strategies for Sustainable Development (NSDSs). However, and this may explain the weak linkage, no relationships on concrete objectives and targets are recognised between the two types of strategy documents. One SD policy-maker pointed out that NSDS processes are mostly

regarded as voluntary bottom-up processes, involving different stakeholder groups, while the NRP processes are largely top-down and stem from political decisions at the EU level. Generally, the more prominent role of NRPs, compared to NSDSs, is clearly seen in the main objective of NRPs to achieve economic growth at the EU and Member States level.

Important current policy issues in the context of SD

We now list few examples of **pressing current policy issues related to SD** from our survey that seem particularly interesting for further discussions and that pose strong political challenges among European countries. **The SD community will need to find answers to them and/or needs to include them in strategic effort to achieve SD.** From our survey we can see converging opinions on the following issues:

Fiscal consolidation
Reducing unemployment
Ensuring security of supply of essential resources and resource efficiency
Demographic changes (i.e. ageing population)
Energy security and policy

Other important policy issues in the context of SD mentioned are:

Clear pathway towards <i>decoupling of economic growth from resource use</i>	Need of breakthrough for a <i>Green Economy</i>
Need for <i>educational reforms</i>	<i>Structural change</i> in the economy
<i>Financial crisis</i> , roles of banks and speculation	<i>Social and income divide</i>
Reform of <i>social security systems</i>	<i>Expertise driven policy</i>
Phasing out of <i>harmful subsidies</i>	<i>Acceleration</i> of social and political processes
<i>Democracy</i> in times of globalisation	<i>Media dominance</i>
Growing <i>Euro-scepticism</i>	<i>Spatial planning</i> and urban sprawl
Questioning dominant <i>economic model based on growth</i>	Need for <i>decisions with far-reaching implications</i> (i.e. time, space, substance)

A more detailed analysis of the experiences of European countries with NSDS strategies and their implementation can be found in the respective chapter of the [ESDN Quarterly Report September 2011](#).

Discussions and interactive formats

There will be different formats for the exchange of information and for in-depth discussions during the workshop which we outline below.

Panel discussion in Session 1

Instead of a keynote presentation, Session 1 will have two panel discussions on “SD policy & governance in Europe in the context of EU policy strategies” – one is on the stakeholder perspective, the other one on the political perspective. Each panel discussion will have the following format:

- Short, 5-minute statement by each panellist on: (a) the current state of SD governance in Europe, (b) the importance of the EU SDS in SD governance, (c) the importance of other policy strategies for SD (Europe 2020, Resource-efficient Europe Flagship Initiative, etc.), and (d) requirements for the future of SD governance in Europe.
- This is followed by a discussion amongst the panellists with additional questions from the moderators and the workshop participants.

In-between the two panel discussions, there will be a buzz session during which the workshop participants can discuss amongst each other on their tables and formulate questions to the panellists.

Overview of specific national experiences with SD policy & governance in Session 2

The one-hour session on national experiences with SD policy & governance will be loosely based on the World Café interactive format. In total, there will be four “country islands” (Belgium, Finland, France and Germany). The one-hour session will be split into two 30-minute slots which means that each participant can visit two countries. Each 30-minute slot will have the following structure.

- There will be a short presentation (10 min.) by the country representatives on (a) the success factors of SD governance, (b) major challenges lying ahead, and (c) what, from the experiences in the respective country, could be applied at the EU level or in the other Member States.
- The participants are then invited to ask questions and reflect on their own experiences (10 min.)
- The rest of the time (10 minutes), the country representatives and the participants discuss – on the basis of their experiences – which elements of SD governance could be transferred to the EU level and/or could be applied in most EU Member States. Interesting processes, topics, etc. will be documented on the flip chart.

After 30 minutes, the participants can choose the second “country island”. The second round will also include a reflection at each “country island” about what has been discussed in round one. The ideas and suggestions developed during this interactive World Café will be presented and further discussed at the following plenary discussion which closes day 1 of the workshop.

Parallel discussion groups in Session 3

On the basis of the inputs from day 1, the ESDN Steering Group and Office will provide an overview on possible scenarios for SD policy & governance. The participants in the parallel discussion groups are invited to reflect upon these scenarios and discuss necessary governance mechanisms and tools for these scenarios. The results of the parallel discussion groups will then be presented and reflected upon in the plenary discussion that closes the workshop.

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