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9th ESDN Workshop

“The Future of the EU SDS – Expectations and Possible Contributions from the ESDN”

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Workshop Report



ESDN

European Sustainable Development Network

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The **European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)** is an informal network of public administrators and other experts who deal with sustainable development strategies and policies. The network covers all 27 EU Member States, plus other European countries. The ESDN is active in promoting sustainable development and facilitating the exchange of good practices in Europe and gives advice to policy-makers at the European and national level.

Table of contents

Introduction.....	5
Opening and orientation	6
Session 1: The Rio+20 follow-up	6
Session 2: The review of the EU SDS	8
Session 3: Rio+20 results and their consequences for the EU SDS review	10

Introduction

The 9th ESDN Workshop, entitled “**The Future of the EU SDS – Expectations and Possible Contributions from the ESDN**”, took place in Brussels on 21-22 February 2013. In total, 50 participants from 11 European countries attended the workshop. The workshop had the following objectives: (a) to reflect upon the Rio+20 outcomes document and identify which of its objectives and targets are particularly important to be addressed in the EU; (b) on the basis of this, which topics should be addressed in a EU SDS review and how could a future governance structure for the EU SDS look like; and (c) to identify the potential role and services the ESDN could fulfill for the EU SDS review and in the post-review EU SDS process.

The workshop’s objectives were explored in the following 4 sessions:

- Session 1: The Rio+20 follow-up**
- Session 2: The review of the EU SDS**
- Session 3: Rio+20 results and their consequences for the EU SDS review**
- Session 4: Potential role and services of the ESDN for the EU SDS**

The outcomes of the workshop aim to provide an orientation for SD policy-makers in the debate around the future of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) in light of Rio+20 and the Europe 2020 Strategy. In addition, the workshop brought together actors from different fields to discuss and learn from their respective experiences.

Similar to previous ESDN workshops, this event dealt with the themes in different formats: keynote presentations highlighted general issues and key aspects of the workshop theme; interactive group work specified aspects of the workshop theme more in-depth; summaries of the results of the group work were used for immediate reactions and further discussions during the workshop; and interactive discussion formats throughout the workshop allowed participants to reflect upon issues raised and to develop recommendations.

The full documentation of the 9th ESDN Workshop 2012 can be found at the [ESDN homepage](#) and includes:

- Workshop Agenda;
- Workshop Discussion Paper;
- PowerPoint slides of all keynote and other presentations;
- Participant list;
- Photo documentation.

Opening and orientation

In the opening, the ESDN co-chairs, **ELISABETH FREYTAG & WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG** (*Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria*) welcomed the workshop participants on behalf of the ESDN Steering Group. Elisabeth Freytag highlighted Austria's important role in the development of the current EU SDS and the crucial role of Rio+20 for the continuation of SD strategies at the European and Member States levels. She referred to the process of reviewing the EU SDS by the EU Commission, included in [the Environmental Council Conclusions of 25 October 2012](#) (para 3), which affirms the need for an EU SDS to comprehensively cover SD in Europe. In terms of governance for SD, she pointed to the 'European Semester' and the importance of including here SD comprehensively. Wolfram Tertschnig outlined the objectives of the 9th ESDN Workshop, which in his view should help finding reasons on how to continue with the EU SDS. He further argued that the workshop should reflect upon how to implement the Rio+20 outcomes in Europe coherently and a comprehensively. In addition, he touched upon the role of the ESDN as an informal network and soft-governance mechanism: in principle, the ESDN could have a role in the review process of EU SDS (e.g. through support services), but also in defining ways how key objectives in Rio+20 are implemented in the current SD architecture in Europe. In his opinion, policy integration is key for SD implementation and the Europe 2020 Strategy is not sufficient for steering SD policy in Europe.

Session 1: The Rio+20 follow-up

After the welcome address and the overview on the workshop's objectives in the opening session, the three **keynotes in Session 1** had the aim to provide a broad framing and different points of view on the workshop topic. The PPT slides of the keynote presentations can be found in the [9th ESDN workshop section](#) of the ESDN homepage.

IRENE GARCIA (*UN/UNDP, Brussels Office*), in her keynote on the "**Follow-up to Rio+20**", firstly addressed a few important outcomes of Rio+20, namely: (1) Renewed commitment and recognition of sustainable development; (2) centrality of poverty eradication; (3) sustainable development goals (SDGs); (4) steps for modification of in institutional SD set-up: HLPF; (5) recognition of the importance of measuring beyond GDP; and (6) Green Economy principles. Another important point for reflection that she mentioned was the *convergence to one single global development agenda with sustainable development at its core*, recognising how Rio+20 set up an inclusive process to start developing SDGs. After outlining the upcoming 2013 timetable for the UN, she concluded by reflecting upon the EU's role both internally (within the European Union and its Member States) and externally as a global player in fostering SD.

In her view, the EU should internally (i) undertake a revision of EU SDS and SD policies in the light of the commitments acquired in Rio+20; (ii) protect social advances that have been achieved so far

(e.g. health, education, social protection) and apply a balanced SD lens to the Green Economy approach; (iii) address the increase of inequalities and ensure that sustainable and inclusive growth is promoted; (iv) actively promote sustainable consumption and production; and, (v) play an important role in the consultations for the post-2015 framework. She then mentioned two crucial aspects for the EU as a global player in SD: on the one hand, the EU should have a key role in keeping a strong support for global SD (including the SDGs) and in ensuring coordination with other processes (i.e. post-2015, climate change negotiations, etc.); on the other hand, the EU should particularly take care of the ‘means of Implementation’ of Rio+20 (i.e. finance for development, technology support, capacity development and trade, policy coherence).

JAKUB WEJCHERT (*European Commission, DG Environment*) in his presentation reflected on the “**Rio+20 Implementation**” in the EU. He pointed out that the Rio+20 outcome document contains a number of actions and commitments as well as a number of areas for follow-up for the European Union, both internally and internationally. He then made the participants aware of a public consultation that has recently been carried out by the European Commission to contribute to plan the future work on the Rio+20 follow-up. In his view, this consultation was very successful and received over 125 responses from public authorities at all levels, business associations, NGOs, trade unions, consumer protection groups etc.

As part of this reflection, he showed the main outcomes of Rio+20, pointing out the EU aims to work on all of these outcomes: (1) the inclusive Green Economy; (2) action in priority areas (i.e. sustainable agriculture, sustainable energy, oceans and fisheries, and sustainable consumption and production); (3) the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (4) financing for SD; and (5) the institutional framework for SD. Finally, he then pointed to the road ahead by stating, firstly, that a [new Communication from the Commission](#) will be adopted at the end of February 2013 that addresses the Green Economy, SDGs, experience with MDGs, and outlines the post-2015 framework from the EU’s perspective. Secondly, he argued that the Environment Council Conclusions for June 2013 will be coordinated with other council formations. He also affirmed that the EU intends to continue to play an active role on institutional reform (i.e. strengthening UNEP, High Level Forum of Sustainable Development). He informed the participants that a Communication from the Commission on financing and means of implementation of Rio+20 is expected in autumn 2013. In addition, he highlighted the importance of an EU input on the upcoming UN events. Finally, he reflected on the Green Economy and on the role of the EU in cooperating with all countries in this matter.

Q&A

After Mr. Wejchert’s keynote, a participant pointed out that the goals for the next 30 years were necessary, and therefore asked if 2050 objectives, besides climate roadmap, were already taken in consideration. Mr. Wejchert replied that the mentioned upcoming EC Communication of February 2013 will include a timescale for goals with a vision towards 2050 and specific timelines towards 2030. He stressed that a general view towards 2050 was crucial but that having intermediary objectives was necessity to lead the way towards achieving the long-term goals and that both would

have impacts on current EU strategies. Another participant asked what role was foreseen for the EU SDS in the future. Mr. Wejchert replied that SD in the EU is addressed by the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester. Again another participant asked about the concept of “inclusive Green Economy” and how the Commission was working towards inclusiveness and whether (and how) consultation inputs would be included in the forthcoming Communication of February 2013. Mr. Wejchert replied that the term “inclusive Green Economy” would be used in the Communication. He then added that many aspects, in this context, have been discussed with other DGs, in particular issues like equity, inclusivity, and security as they need to be approached with an integrated manner. Finally, he concluded by arguing that the new Communication would include, as an Annex, a list of current and future actions undertaken by the EU Commission.

PIETER DE POUS (*European Environmental Bureau*) argued that the EEA, representing environmental NGOs across Europe, invested a lot of efforts on the Rio+20 follow-up in Europe, including the organisation of [their annual conference of 2012](#) on this topic. He argued that, overall, the outcome document of Rio+20 does not include many new issues, but its value is in listing and confirming major SD issues that need to be implemented. Mr. De Pous then addressed the participants by asking if the Europe 2020 Strategy was a fully-fledged SD strategy. In his point of view, it would be a very narrow interpretation of SD when identifying the Europe 2020 Strategy as an SD strategy. However, the fact that the Europe 2020 Strategy will be revised in 2014 opens a window of opportunity for including SD more comprehensively.

Mr. De Pous then listed several issues in the context of Rio+20 where the EU could take action: (i) The Climate and Energy Package: a Green Paper will be prepared on this in which, it can be assumed, that new ambitions will be formulated but no new approach. (ii) The resource efficiency agenda is already ongoing with several initiatives, like the Flagship Initiative, the Roadmap and the European Resource Efficiency Platform (the latter will provide advice until June 2013); (iii) The European Semester would create opportunities for SD as it potentially encourages economic reforms in the right direction (e.g. tax system reform, fading out harmful subsidies), but the European Semester is essentially an economic dialogue that does not equally include social protection issues; (iv) Environmental SD issues are included in the 7th European Environmental Action Program so that the European Commission can take action on certain issues, like chemicals, push forward the climate and energy package. In general, Mr. De Pous argued, the main threats for SD is an increasing push back from the deregulation lobby (e.g. UK Prime Minister Cameron’s speech in Davos) which refers to environmental law as problematic for creating jobs.

Session 2: The review of the EU SDS

The three keynotes in **Session 2** by John Watson, Andreas Versmann and Sylvie Delmotte offered different perspectives and viewpoints with regard to the review of the EU SDS.

JOHN WATSON (*Secretariat-General, European Commission*) in his presentation, firstly, gave a background on the Europe 2020 Strategy. He pointed out that a review of SD policies would take place in a broader review of Europe 2020 Strategy that will take place in 2014. He then mentioned a list of key SD actions undertaken by the European Commission in 2011/12 (i.e. Roadmaps 2050 for climate and energy, and Transport White Paper; Resource efficiency roadmap and associated actions; 7th Environmental Action Programme; Biodiversity Action Plan 2020/2050; etc.) and the priorities of the Commission for the period 2013/2014: (1) social investment for growth and cohesion; (2) preparing to implement the 2014-20 budget; (3) the European Semester 2013; (4) the follow up to Rio+20, especially MDGs and SDGs; and (5) the framework for climate and energy policies up to 2030. Finally, he argued that SD remains firmly anchored in the EU policy framework and that the Commission had proposed a vast array of measures to improve sustainability in Europe. Therefore, he invited all stakeholders to contribute to these processes in order to ensure that the Commission's approach to SD within the Europe 2020 Strategy process is successful.

Q&A

A participant argued that the Commission uses of a bundle of different initiatives where no integration of the different sectors would be taken into account and where no monitoring, no concrete objectives and no integrated reporting systems can be found. Therefore, it was asked whether institutional arrangements were foreseen to guarantee policy coherence for SD. Mr. Watson replied by stressing the high complexity of most policy issues related to SD, but that he was not aware of inconsistencies. Thus he pointed out that because of this complexity, no single and comprehensive strategy could be able to cover all issues. Furthermore, in terms of targets, he described them as being not binding targets for Member States, but as illustrative targets offered to move into the right direction and change the way of thinking.

Another participant remarked that SD dimensions should be balanced and integrated, and therefore asked whether the Commission was aiming to give the same importance to all three SD dimensions. Mr. Watson emphasised then that most National Reform Programs were including all three SD dimensions; therefore, he invited the SD community to consider the Annual Growth Survey and try to feed SD issues into this process. Moreover, he argued that growth and employment are priority issues and are seen as absolutely central for economic policies, taking the need to achieve them sustainably (i.e. shift from labour to environmental taxation; green innovation and social inclusion). Finally, he noted that the importance of the economic pillar is usually downplayed in ESDN and in the SD community in general.

Again another participant asked how Rio+20 was to be implemented by the Europe 2020 Strategy in terms of, for instance, time horizons, taking into account that long-term views are crucial as well as the consideration of the international dimensions (i.e. effects of national policies on global issues); and it was asked if NRPs had to include SD issues as well. Mr. Watson pointed out that the Europe 2020 Strategy was not to be seen as a short-term strategy, even if a series of short-term actions are necessary for preparing the EU for long-term challenges. Concerning international issues, he noted that the Commission was taking these issues seriously, especially by supporting UN institutional

reforms and also trying to put the EU in the role to lead international SD discussions. However, he wondered whether EU Member States wanted the same.

Finally, a participant asked whether capacity-building for Member States was considered by the Commission in the sense of offering a strategic framework for implementing SD. Mr. Watson argued that due to the fact that domestic processes are at the heart of the principle of subsidiarity, the European Commission was reluctant to give orders to Member States.

ANDREAS VERSMANN (*SD Observatory, European Economic and Social Committee*) in his keynote first briefly assessed the EU SDS's current situation by arguing that, from the first EU SDS in 2001, the EU took a leading role on SD in the world, and then lost this role during the Barroso Commission, when the EU SDS has been gradually weakened. He then pointed out that, in his opinion, the Europe 2020 Strategy and the European Semester could not replace the EU SDS and its governance architecture for SD in Europe: in fact, he argued, that the Europe 2020 Strategy includes no overarching framework for SD in Europe in order to provide coherence among policies and actions. He then commented on Rio+20, pointing out that although the civil society was a little disappointed by the results of the conference, the outcome document should be used as much as possible, especially by the EU (i.e. phasing out harmful subsidies) as a strategic document for SD implementation.

SYLVIE DELMOTTE (*Federal Foreign Office, Germany*) presented the German perspective on the review of EUSDS, affirming how important SD was also for the economy. She argued that the German Government would like see a renewed EU SDS and does not agree with the European Commission's view that the Europe 2020 Strategy can replace the EUSDS. Moreover, she affirmed that Germany would suggest extending the EU SDS by including international and SD indicators.

ELISABETH FREYTAG (*Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria*) mentioned that the Europe 2020 Strategy seems to become the overall framework for all policies in Europe. However, perceptions about what constitutes SD are different with Europe 2020 and SD, e.g. education, governance. She also pointed out that, from a political perspective, the Europe 2020 Strategy received more commitment, is discussed at the level of heads of state (compared to the Environmental Council which is not as strong and its influence limited on SD issues), and no SD committee currently exists at Council level.

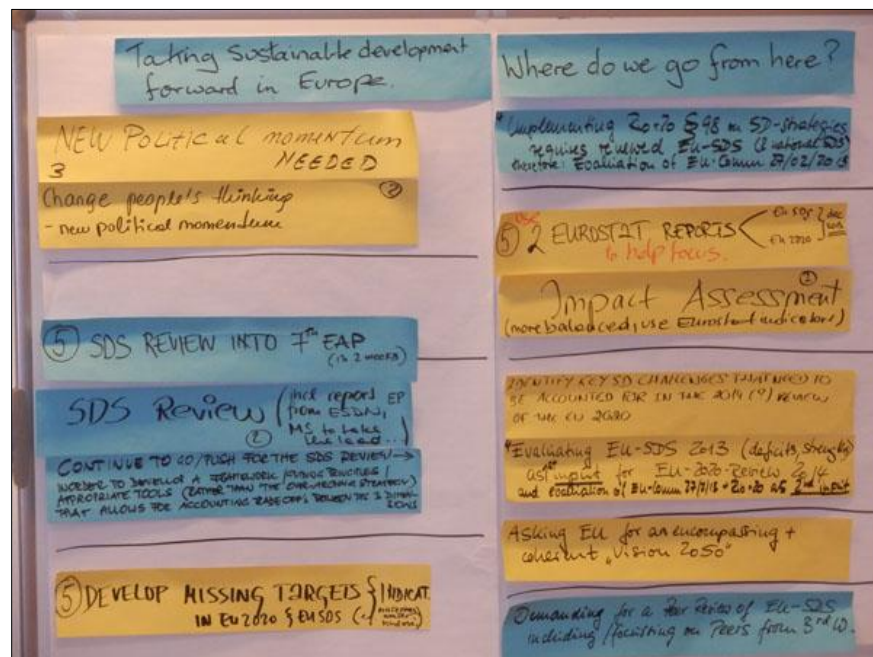
Session 3: Rio+20 results and their consequences for the EU SDS review

A **working group session** followed in which participants had the chance to discuss lessons learnt about SD policy and governance from the topics previously presented by the keynoters. The main topic for discussion was "**Taking SD forward in Europe - Where do we go from here?**"

The working groups were asked to write down their thoughts on bordered paper and then select the two most important ones (written on long moderation cards) to be presented to the plenary for discussion (see also Picture 3.1 below). The following **14 topics were raised**:

- 1) A new political momentum for SD is needed;
- 2) Change peoples' thinking - new political momentum;
- 3) EU SDS review into 7th EAP;
- 4) EU SDS review (incl. report from ESDN, incl. EP, MS to take the lead);
- 5) Continue to push for the EU SDS review in order to develop a framework/guiding principles/appropriate tools (rather than "the overarching strategy") that allow for accounting trade-offs between the 3 dimensions;
- 6) Implementing Rio+20 (para 98) on SD strategies that requires a renewed EU SDS & NSDSs; therefore, implementing European Commission Communication of February 2013;
- 7) Using Eurostat Reports (EU SDS and EU 2020 until Dec 2013) to help focus;
- 8) Impact assessment (more balanced, use Eurostat indicators);
- 9) Do work on more "tracks";
- 10) Develop missing targets/indicators in the Europe 2020 Strategy and EU SDS (e.g. materials, water, land use);
- 11) Identify key SD challenges that need to be accounted for in the 2014 review of the Europe 2020 Strategy;
- 12) Evaluating EU SDS 2013 (deficits, strengths) as 1st input for Europe-2020-Review 2014 and evaluation of EU-Comm 27/2/13 + Rio+20 as 2nd input;
- 13) Asking EU for encompassing coherent "Vision 2050";
- 14) Demanding for a Peer Review of EU SDS including/focusing on peers from 3rd world countries

Picture 3.1



A **voting session** followed in which participants were asked to use three sticky dots on those topics from the list above that they considered as most important. As a result, 4 topics were further explored in **4 new working groups**: each working group worked on a “key emerging message” and defined “next steps from today” for this message. The results of the individual working groups (WG) can be seen in the tables below:

WG1: Political momentum

Key Emerging Message	Next steps from today
Never waste a good crisis	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contacting think tanks for dialogue on momentums 2. Communication-initiative: social media/consultation 3. Lobby at incoming EU Parliament and EU Commission (2014)

WG2: EU SDS review

Key Emerging Message	Next steps from today
ESDN provides political input and support to Commission	ESDN prepares a progress report on EU SDS/NSDSs, taking into account Member States activities

WG3: Exploit Eurostat reports

Key Emerging Message	Next steps from today
(Re)direct policies based on indicators (results-based)	Use Eurostat reports on EU SDS indicators to review EU SDS and Europe 2020 Strategy

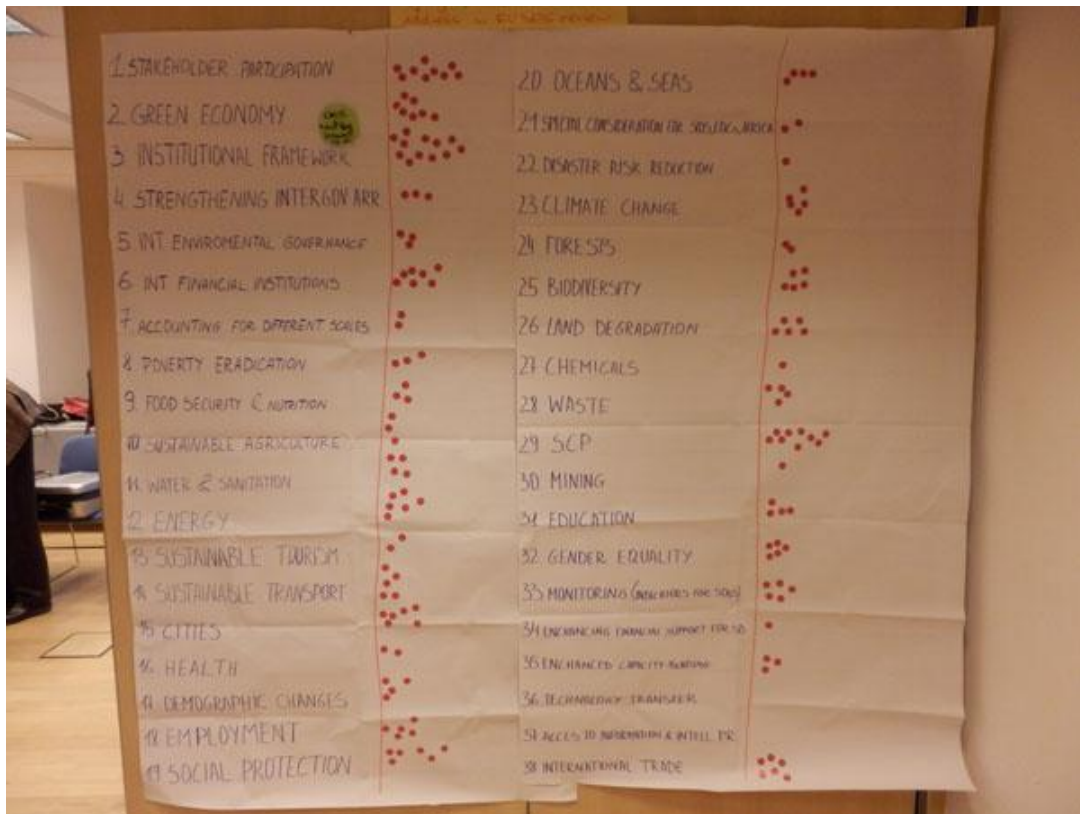
WG4: Peer Review

Key Emerging Message	Next steps from today
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Peer Review of the EU SDS, including peers from the 3rd world countries 2. This should create momentum inside the EU
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kick-off initiative by the EESC 2. Endorsement by the ENV Council 3. Start working

At the end of the workshop, the participants were asked to **vote on the 38 topics from the Rio+20 Outcome Document** in order get an idea on “**topics that should be addressed in the EU SDS review**”. Picture 4.1 below provides a glimpse on the entire voting.

Even though no clear picture on key priority topics emerged, the five top-voted topics were: (i) institutional framework; (ii) stakeholder participation; (iii) sustainable production and consumption; (iv) Green Economy; and (v) international financial institutions.

Picture 4.1





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