

ESDN Joint Understanding

prepared by the [ESDN Office Team](#),
discussed with the participants of the ESDN Conference 2006 in Salzburg,
adopted by the [ESDN Steering Group](#) on 11 September 2006,
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ESDN Mission Statement

Mission

The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is active in promoting sustainable development and facilitating the exchange of good practices in Europe and gives advice to policy-makers at the EU and national level.

ESDN Members

- Government officials of European countries who are responsible for sustainable development strategies and policy

ESDN associated partners

- Representatives of institutions of the European Union (i.e. European Commission, Council of the European Union, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions)
- International organizations (e.g. UN, OECD)
- Members of National Sustainable Development Councils
- Experts from other networks (e.g. EEAC, SD Observatory of the EESC, AMSDE, etc.)
- Sustainable development experts (e.g. academia, research institutions).

Other target groups

- Other sustainable development networks in Europe and elsewhere
- Stakeholders outside the traditional SD community with a strong interest in SD (e.g. businesses, trade unions, etc.)

Strategic targets

1. Advancing sustainable development at the EU and Member States level.
2. Facilitating the exchange of good practices and experiences on sustainable development across Europe.
3. Providing added-value for policy-makers of the EU, its Member States and other European countries.

4. Mainstreaming sustainable development issues into vertical and horizontal integration of the EU, national and sub-national levels of policy-making, especially integration of the EU SDS in the executive and steering-cycle of the EU

Activities:

- Organizing structured discussions and providing expertise on priority issues and good practices through annual conferences, workshops, policy briefs, quarterly reports, and case studies;
- Supporting methodological, content and communication skills and competencies of the ESDN members;
- Outreach activities to other SD networks and other exchange mechanisms in Europe and elsewhere (e.g. European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils-EEAC, SD Observatory of the EESC, SDplanNet Asia-Pacific, etc).

ESDN Joint Understanding

About the ESDN Joint Understanding

- (1) The ESDN Joint Understanding clarifies some important issues of network governance and it sketches possibilities of developing the ESDN further.
- (2) The ESDN met for the first time in The Hague in 2001. The Joint Understanding builds on what was discussed with the participants at the 5th ESDN Conference in Salzburg in 2006. It was adopted by the ESDN Steering Group in September 2006 and updated in 2008. The latest version of the Joint Understanding was adopted by the ESDN Steering Group in June 2011 at the ESDN Conference 2011.

Governance of the ESDN

- (3) The ESDN Steering Group facilitates the activities of the ESDN and provides guidance for the network's future development. The ESDN Steering Group is currently composed of representatives from Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the UK. Representatives from the European Commission (DG Environment, Secretarial General) have an observer status.
- (4) The ESDN Office supports the ESDN and its Steering Group on an individual basis and through internet-based services. It facilitates the exchange of good practices and experiences throughout the year. The Research Institute for Managing Sustainability at the Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration has been running the ESDN Office since 2006.
- (5) The ESDN Office team launched the website of the ESDN at www.sd-network.eu in May 2006. The website is continuously updated and serves as a "one-stop-shop" for information on sustainable development strategies and policies in Europe.
- (6) The renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy (EU SDS) was adopted by the European Council on 15-16 June 2006. Paragraph 42 of the EU SDS relates to the roles and functions of the ESDN as follows:

“Member States could make use of the existing European Sustainable Development Network with the aim of facilitating the exchange of good practices and experiences. It could gather views on specific priority themes and issues to be discussed by Member States in order to exemplify and document good policies and practices. This network could also be used to enhance the mainstreaming of sustainable development issues, vertical integration and coherence between the EU, national and sub-national levels of policy-making.”

Main activities of the ESDN

(7) The ESDN undertakes the following main activities:

- ✓ *ESDN website* as “one-stop-shop” for information on sustainable development strategies and policies in Europe
- ✓ *Annual ESDN conferences* which focus on current sustainable development issues and bring together policy-makers and experts from all over Europe
- ✓ *ESDN workshops* which foster informal and in-depth exchange among policy-makers and experts
- ✓ *Quarterly Reports* which provide an overview of important sustainable development topics
- ✓ *Policy briefs* which provide expert advice on selected sustainable development policy issues
- ✓ *Case studies* which describe specific or outstanding development in relation to sustainable development strategies and policies in European countries.
- ✓ *Individual ESDN member support desk* at the ESDN Office.

Membership Issues of the ESDN

(8) The ESDN is a network of government authority representatives mainly from Europe. It has close ties to other networks, institutions or experts working in the field of sustainable development. Thus, we distinguish between ESDN members, associated partners and others.

(9) *Members of the ESDN* are government officials responsible for sustainable development policy formulation and implementation that indicate their interest in joining the network. Although the focus of the ESDN is on Europe, the network is also open to non-European government officials. The membership status implies taking actively part in the exchange of information and experience among ESDN members and gives access to targeted individual support by the ESDN Office. The only obligation that comes with the ESDN membership is not to distribute information provided in the membership section of the ESDN website among non-members. Being a member of the ESDN is free of charge. Those who join the ESDN as members agree to share the ESDN Joint Understanding.

(10) Experts from other networks, national as well as international SD advisory councils, international organizations and NGOs dealing with SD, and senior experts from research institutes with a long-term record of accomplishment that is relevant for the ESDN are invited to join the ESDN as *associated partners*. All associated partners are listed on the ESDN website, they receive the quarterly newsletter and they are invited to the annual ESDN Conferences. Associated partners are encouraged to provide a link to the ESDN website on their homepage.

(11) Regarding the nomination of ESDN members and associated partners we propose the following procedure:

- Government officials who are responsible for SD policy formulation and implementation, and who agree with the content of this Joint Understanding, are invited to become ESDN members by contacting the ESDN Office (email: esdn-office@sd-network.eu).
- Those interested in becoming an associated partner of the ESDN, and who agree with the content of this Joint Understanding, are also invited to contact the ESDN Office in this regard (email: esdn-office@sd-network.eu).
- Others who are neither ESDN members nor associated partners, but who would like to obtain information about the ESDN on a regular basis, are invited to subscribe to the ESDN newsletter at <http://www.sd-network.eu/?k=resources>.

The ESDN Steering Group

(12) The ESDN Steering Group consists of a chair, members and observers.

(13) Functions of the ESDN Steering Group and its members are:

- To facilitate the exchange of good practices and experiences within the ESDN;
- To advise and support the host countries in preparing the annual ESDN Conferences;
- To finance and oversee the activities of the ESDN Office;
- To provide guidance for future activities of the ESDN and further development of the network.

(14) In order to keep the decision-making process in the Steering Group manageable, the number of Steering Group members must be limited. The decision about a new country joining the Steering Group should be taken by the Steering Group unanimously within half a year after a country's expression of interest.

(15) The ESDN Steering Group members agree on the chair of the Steering Group unanimously. The functions of the chair are (i) to ensure that the Steering Group meets regularly, (ii) to prepare the agenda of the Steering Group meetings in co-operation with the ESDN Office and the other Steering Group members, (iii) to moderate the Steering Group meetings and, (iv), to oversee and manage financial aspects of the ESDN and its Office.

The ESDN Office

(16) The activities of the ESDN Office are financed and overseen by the ESDN Steering Group based on semi-annual work plans that are provided by the ESDN Office Team.

(17) Functions of the ESDN Office are

- To expand and update the ESDN website at www.sd-network.eu so that it serves as an up-to-date "one-stop-shop" on SD strategies in Europe and as communication platform for the ESDN;
- To support the annual ESDN Conferences in cooperation with the host countries which decide, in cooperation with the ESDN about the format of the event;
- To support the ESDN workshops in cooperation with the cost countries;

- To write Quarterly Reports which provide a detailed overview on important sustainable development topics and thus constitute an important knowledge base on sustainable development in Europe;
- To circulate quarterly newsletters that highlight new entries on the ESDN website;
- To write case studies on specific or outstanding developments in relation to sustainable development strategies or policies in European countries;
- To support the Steering Group in preparing initiatives in order to develop the ESDN further;
- To write policy briefs on important sustainable development issues in Europe;
- To help ESDN members in finding information on an individual basis and in exchanging knowledge and experiences at workshops and conferences.

The ESDN and other exchange mechanisms

(18) The ESDN regards close relationships and cooperation with other networks and exchange mechanisms that are concerned with sustainable development issues as important and mutually beneficial. Therefore, the ESDN invites these networks to collaborate and share experiences on the different aspects of sustainable development.

(19) **The ESDN and the EEAC** (the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils) are two networks with similar objectives but different tasks. They both facilitate the exchange of information and experiences in the context of sustainable development policy making. They also seek to review policies and related procedures to promote the implementation of SD in the European Union, its Member States and in other European countries. The EEAC primarily facilitates exchange between Councils for Sustainable Development (most often representing Civil Society Organisations, businesses and academics) that provide policy advice and communicate sustainable development issues to governments and the public. The ESDN, on the other hand, serves primarily public administrators that are concerned with the formulation and implementation of sustainable development policies. As the two networks are perfectly complementary, we regard a regular exchange of knowledge, experience and views with the EEAC as highly desirable.

(20) **The ESDN and the SDS Coordinators Group** (the EU Sustainable Development Strategy Coordinators Group) both aim at exchanging information, good practices and experiences among public administrators in the context of sustainable development strategies. Because the ESDN is a more open and informal body, it could support the SDS Coordinators Group in various ways. Therefore, we regard a close cooperation between the two bodies as desirable.¹



¹ The ESDN is mentioned in the mandate of the SDS Coordinators Group as follows: "Furthermore, the Group can exchange information on the relevant work of other institutions and bodies such as the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee as well as of the European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN)." (emphasis in the original)