

## **Learning from Romania about NGOs involvement in SDGs implementation**



**Samuel Elzinga and former Minister of the Environment of Romania, László Borbély.**

In the evening of July 17, 2018, our second day attending the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development, my peer, Damon Ashcraft and I attended a side event hosted by the Ministry of Environment of Romania titled “Involving the civil society in the monitoring of SDGs.” I found this event to be of particular relevance to my ambitions at Utah Valley University (UVU), where I hope to establish the Utah International Mountain Forum (UIMF), currently a coalition of clubs at UVU, as a nongovernmental organization that emphasizes sustainability and sustainable mountain development. Learning how civil society functions in conjunction with the United Nations was extremely informative and a great way to better understand how the UIMF will participate at this level. This event showed me a lot about how our future NGO can play an important role in monitoring and advocating for the sustainable

development goals and the mountain targets in particular, and I am looking forward to furthering this mission with our own NGO at the UN.

The first speaker at the side event was László Borbély, a former minister of the environment in Romania. He had special insight into Romania's progress in sustainable development. He highlighted some of their achievements in recent years, the most recent of which was the Romanian parliament's declaration of support for the 2030 sustainable development goals. Mr. Borbély also noted how Romania has a multi-layered approach to engaging civil society and governments at local, regional, and national levels. He then concluded his remarks by outlining suggestions for the future integration of a more robust institutional framework where every actor has a clearly defined role in the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). I thought this was an interesting point to make, and I wonder if this could be applied at inter-governmental agencies because they seem to be lacking in coordination.

We were able also to hear remarks from Mr. Guido Schmidt-Traub, the Executive Director of the UN Sustainable Developments Network. He had some great insight into the relationship between civil society and inter-governmental organizations. He applauded Romania as a successful model of the integration of civil society and lamented about how IGOs in Europe needed to better coordinate the implementation of the SDGs across all member states. He also expressed some dismay about lack of innovation in countries of South and Southeast Europe but hopes in the future this can change. These previous two statements were echoed later by an EU parliamentarian, Linda McAvan.

Ms. McAvan is an EU parliamentarian from the UK, and she had nothing but kind words to say to the Romanian Ministry of Environment surrounding their integration of civil society into their implementation of the SDGs. She also commented how the EU can still improve

further on ensuring all of its member states equally implement the SDGs, and asked Romania to work towards this as it will be the President of the EU starting in 2019.

Overall, I really enjoyed this side event. It showcased a successful model of civil society integration in the monitoring of SDGs, and I think we can learn a lot as a budding NGO about what frameworks are out there that we can learn from. Though it may be more difficult to advocate for this type of integration at the national level, it might be possible to do so at the state level in Utah. Perhaps I will strive to achieve this once we officially found our NGO because it seems to be the most effective way of promoting sustainable mountain development. The more we can promote sustainable mountain development, whether it's at the local, state, or federal level, the better.

*Samuel Elzinga, President, Foreign Affairs Club at UVU*