The sixteenth edition of Social policy in the European Union: state of play has a triple ambition. First, it provides easily accessible information to a wide audience about the most recent developments in both EU and domestic social policymaking. Second, the volume provides a more analytical reading, embedding the key initiatives and developments of the year 2014 in the most recent academic discourses. Third, the forward-looking perspective of the book aims to provide stakeholders and policymakers with specific tools that allow them to discern new opportunities to influence the policymaking agenda.

In contrast to recent years, 2014 started off with a distinct atmosphere of hope in the European Union, with a renewed emphasis on the need for investments to grow. However, more recent developments have starkly reminded us that these ‘results’ are in fact only possibilities today and not yet realities. Increased social and economic divergence and rising tensions between the North and South of the EU imply that a strengthening of the status quo, a partial retreat, or even a fatal blow resulting from unresolved conflict are also distinct possibilities for the future of the European project.

In this 2015 edition of Social policy in the European Union: state of play, the contributors tackle the topics of the state of EU politics after the parliamentary elections, the steady socialisation of the European Semester, methods of political protest (especially against austerity), the Juncker social investment plan, the EU’s contradictory education investment, the EU’s contested influence on national healthcare reforms, and the neoliberal Trojan Horse of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). All of these chapters focus on the new efforts being made by the European Union’s top policymakers to begin the process of change. For the first time in many years, 2014 opened a genuine window of opportunity; what remains to be seen is whether or not the EU will capitalise on it in 2015 and beyond.

The ETUI receives financial support from the European Union. The European Union cannot be held responsible for any use made of the information contained in this publication.