

After the European Elections & (early) Covid-19 responses: Prospects for EU social policymaking



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Outline

- 2019 European Elections & the von der Leyen Commission
- COVID-19 and the von der Leyen Agenda
- Achievements & Setbacks in 2019/2020
- Prospects for Social Europe



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Key Analytical Points

- The reports of the death of Social Europe are greatly exaggerated.
- The treaty basis for social policy remains weak, **BUT**:
- The **pro-EU majority** in the European Parliament and the **partisan composition & entrepreneurship** of the Commission have the potential to prepare the ground for more social policy activity rooted in the expanded use of both soft coordination and legislation in pursuit of a wider set of social goals, especially **climate justice**.



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The 2019 European Elections

- May 2019
- Brexit in the background

Two 'historic' aspects:

- High turnout (first increase ever)
- End of EPP and S&D dominance

But increased polarisation:

- Greens and (right-wing) populists gained



2019 European Elections

- **Left-right dimension** remains salient but intersects with **pro/anti-EU dimension**
- **Centripetal** forces make it difficult to form stable majorities in the EP
- Unclear what this means for the **green/digital agenda**



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The von der Leyen Commission Agenda

Policies

- European Green Deal/Just Transition
- Jobs-oriented, social market economy
- New Gender Equality Strategy
- Renewed commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights

Institutions

- 3 EVPs and 5 VPs to improve inter-institutional relations



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Achievements (despite Covid-19)

- Covid-19 overshadowed the social policy agenda but led to new pressures/opportunities & policies:
 - EPSR Implementation Action Plan
 - Next Generation European Recovery Plan
 - **SURE**: ‘temporary **S**upport to mitigate **U**nemployment **R**isks in an **E**mergency’
 - Reinvigouration of social partnership (Framework Agreement on Digitalisation)
 - Youth Guarantee



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Achievements (despite Covid-19)

- Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions
- Council Recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed
- Work-life balance Directive entered into force 8/2019
- Establishment of the European Labour Authority
- Mobility Package



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Setbacks

Coordination of social security schemes

- Central element of EU law
- Changes in labour markets ----> regulation needs to be updated (mobility, cross-border workers)
- Key issues: family benefits and cross-border workers



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Prospects for Social Europe

- Considerable progress despite Covid-19
- The partisan composition of the EP and the von der Leyen Commission agenda are preconditions favourable to a ***reinvigouration*** of Social Europe
- The social policy aspects of climate change and digitalisation are central elements of this



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