

**Social policy in the
European Union 1999-2019:
the long and winding road**

Edited by
Bart Vanhercke, Dalila Ghailani and Slavina Spasova,
with Philippe Pochet

 Ose | etui.

Social policy in the European Union 1999-2019: the long and winding road

Brussels, 12 March 2020

Conclusions: the twists and turns of two decades of EU social policymaking

Slavina Spasova and Bart Vanhercke

European Social Observatory

 **#SPEU20y**

www.ose.be

 **Ose**
European
Social
Observatory

Outline of the talk

- 1. The EU's social dimension: twenty years of trials and tribulations (1999 – 2019)**
- 2. What place for the EU's social dimension in the light of the 'three transitions' ?**
- 3. Some recommendations**

1. The EU's social dimension: twenty years of trials and tribulations (1999 – 2019)

I. The 'social period' (1997–2005): from the Treaty of Amsterdam to the revised Lisbon Strategy

- ❖ **A particular context favourable to the development of the EU social dimension in the continuation of the 'Delors era'**
 - ✓ Social democratic governments in most of the Member States
 - ✓ 1995 enlargement to 3 affluent & strong welfare models

- ❖ **Main social achievements**
 - ✓ **Overarching policy directions**
 - The Employment Chapter in the Amsterdam Treaty and the European Employment Strategy (1997)
 - The Cologne process on wage coordination (1999)
 - Lisbon Strategy (2000)
 - EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000)

I. The 'social period' (1997–2005): from the Treaty of Amsterdam to the revised Lisbon Strategy

✓ **Several regulatory initiatives**

- Extension of the European social security legislation to pre-retirement and paternity benefits
- Equal treatment directives
- Gender mainstreaming: the Treaty of Amsterdam and the EES
- Safety and health at Work: directives on specific hazards
- Working Time Directive

✓ **European social dialogue**

- Expansion of various technical or political concertation meetings
- 'Laeken Declaration' (2001) and the institutionalisation of the 'Tripartite Social Summit'

II. A period of tribulations for the EU's social dimension (2005–2015)?

- ❖ **A reversal of context...and of social achievements and rights?**
- ✓ **2004, 2007 and 2013 EU Enlargements :**
 - Thirteen new Member States, with no additional budget to ensure economic, social and territorial convergence, constrained Welfare States
 - Limited role of social policy issues during the enlargement negotiations
- ✓ **Political shift towards centre-right or right-leaning national governments (2004 European elections)**

II. A period of tribulation for the EU's social dimension (2005–2015)?

- ✓ **The financial, economic and social 2007 crisis**
- National fiscal policies under increased scrutiny in the EU's new forms of economic governance – cuts in public spending, especially social policies



II. A period of tribulation for the EU's social dimension (2005–2015)?

- ✓ **European Social Dialogue: 'dialogue of the deaf' under the Barroso Commission (2004–2014)**

- ✓ **The European Central Bank**
 - ECB a key role to promote structural reforms: financial austerity considerations in stark opposition with domestic needs for higher levels of public spending on social programmes

- ✓ **The role of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) : challenging fundamental principles underlying European social policy**
 - Precedence to market freedoms over social objectives

- ✓ **The OMC**
 - The re-launched Lisbon II Strategy from 2005 on jobs and growth
 - Marginalisation of the 'Social OMC'

II. A period of tribulation for the EU's social dimension (2005–2015)?

- ❖ **However 'Social Europe' was not completely 'sacrificed' on the altar of economic and monetary policies, even in this period of tribulation**
- ✓ The Coordination of social security was extended to third-country nationals in 2010
- ✓ European Equality Agenda: four directives
- ✓ The Youth Guarantee
- ✓ The Social Investment Package
- ✓ First-ever numerical EU poverty and social exclusion target
- ✓ Cohesion policy was aligned with the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Semester
- ✓ Progressive 'socialisation' of the Semester



III. The Juncker Commission: a social policy revival, with some caveats (2015–2019)

❖ **Social Triple A: in the wake of the recovery from the Great Recession**

✓ **European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**

- Saving face in the context of mounting discontentment and populism
- Directives on work-life balance and on transparent and predictable working conditions
- Establishment of a European Labour Authority (ELA)
- A Council Recommendation on access to social protection
- Principles promptly implemented into the Semester
- 2018 (new) Social Scoreboard for monitoring Member States' performance

✓ **Health and Safety legislation**

✓ **'New Start' for the European social dialogue**

✓ **Further socialisation of the Semester**

✓ **ESF+**



III. The Juncker Commission: a social policy revival, with some caveats (2015–2019)

❖ Caveats

- ✓ Critics of the socialization of the Semester: social actors may have been ‘socialised into’ the Semester’s wider logic of competitiveness & market fitness
- ✓ Concerns raised over the high proportion of social and employment policy CSRs ‘*being MIP-ed*’, taking them outside the reach of Social Affairs Ministers
- ✓ European Social Dialogue: still in crisis despite its ‘new start’ in 2015

2. The three transitions and the further strengthening of the EU's social dimension

2. The three transitions and the further strengthening of the EU's social dimension

3. 'A strong social Europe for just transitions': an ambitious agenda

- ❖ Overarching frameworks: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the European Pillar of Social Rights
- ❖ The three transitions: climate neutrality, digitalisation and demographic change
- ✓ On- going consultation first-stage on fair minimum wage: a 'paradigm shift' ? (Commissioner Schmit)
- ✓ Just Transition Fund (as part of the European Green Deal Investment Plan) in order to support economic reconversion
- ✓ A European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme?
- ✓ Child Guarantee
- ✓ Demographic change
- Green Paper to launch a debate on the long-term impacts of ageing, pensions and access to affordable and quality long-term care, active ageing (2020?)



2. The three transitions and the further strengthening of the EU's social dimension

❖ **An ambitious plan... in need of SOLIDARITY**

- ✓ The rest of the EU institutions: von der Leyen plan for a closer work EP/EC/COM
- ✓ Member States in the context of mounting nationalism
- ✓ With and among the social partners: is cooperation still possible?
- ✓ Regulation of coordination of social security systems (stuck in Council)?

❖ **To be closely followed: economic governance review launched by the European Commission (February 2020)**

- ✓ COM acknowledges the complexity and some inefficiencies of the process
- ✓ Draws parallels with the new EU context: the Green Deal and the Communication on a Strong social Europe for just transitions
- ✓ Accompanied for the first time, by a large public debate

The three transitions and the further strengthening of the EU's social dimension



**“Those who don’t study history are doomed to repeat it.
Yet those who *do* study history are doomed to stand by
helplessly while everyone else repeats it.”**

3. Recommendations

3. Some recommendations

❖ Ensuring appropriate resources

- ✓ Continue supporting the capacities of social partners as well as of other social stakeholders
- ✓ More targeted research on the different social impacts of cohesion policy across
- ✓ Fund social inclusion and poverty alleviation measures and foster the administrative capacities of national and regional institutions

❖ The social dimension of EMU

- ✓ The EU needs powerful automatic macroeconomic stabilisers: political priority to a proposal for a European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme
- ✓ Launching a 'Social Imbalances Procedure' (SImp), drawing on existing tools and practices within the European Semester

3. Some recommendations

❖ **Balancing economic and social rights**

- ✓ The approach of the Court of Justice of the EU needs to change: a fundamental discussion within the legal community is needed about the respective places of social and economic rights in the EU Treaties

Gender equality

- ✓ Gender impact assessment: ex-ante analysis of the likelihood of a given decision having negative consequences on gender equality;
- ✓ Gender budgeting: gender-based assessment of budgets and the restructuring of revenues and spending to promote gender equality

3. Some recommendations

❖ Social policy coordination

- ✓ A clear political affirmation of the Social OMC's overall objectives, and its relationship to new initiatives (EPSR and SDG)
- ✓ Push for the launch of OMC-type exchanges on long-term care (dominated by DG ECFIN) and housing & homelessness (long overdue!)

Thank you for your attention!



Ose
European
Social
Observatory

www.ose.be



Bilan social de l'Union européenne 1999 – 2019 : une route longue et sinueuse

Social policy in the European Union 1999 – 2019 : a long and winding road

Vanhercke B., Ghailani D. and Spasova S. with Pochet P. (eds.) (2020)
Social policy in the European Union 1999-2019: the long and winding road,
Brussels, European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and European Social
Observatory (OSE), 230 p.

Free download [here](#)