

Preface

This volume is the 20th anniversary edition of *Social policy in the EU: state of play*,¹ or *Bilan social*, its shorter name in French. Coordinated by Cécile Barbier and Philippe Pochet, the first edition covered the year 1999 and was published as a collaborative project between the European Social Observatory (OSE) and the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) in 2000. Christophe Degryse took over as the lead editor of the *Bilan social* in 2000, mostly in tandem with Philippe Pochet. During the decade of his editorship, Christophe was always responsible for the book's annual chronology of key events. Cécile Barbier authored the chronology between 2010 and 2017, when Denis Bouget took over. Christophe was succeeded in 2010 by two co-editors: David Natali and Bart Vanhercke. Bart has been the lead editor since 2016, while Denis Bouget, Dalila Ghailani and Sebastiano Sabato were more occasional co-editors in the more recent period. For many years, Birgit Buggel-Asmus, Valérie Cotulelli, Eric Van Heymbeeck and Françoise Verri were in charge of formatting and producing the text, while Janet Altman (who died in 2012, before her time), Rachel Cowler, Richard Lomax and Edgar Szoc took care of editing and translations. We are grateful to these colleagues who have contributed with their wisdom, ideas and perseverance to making this anniversary edition possible. It has been a long and exciting trip.

Right from its inception, the aim of the *Bilan social* was to contribute to the debate on important developments in EU social policymaking between policymakers, social stakeholders and the research community, while providing accessible information and analysis for practitioners and, more largely, audiences interested in European integration from a social perspective. This anniversary edition looks back at the main developments in EU social policymaking over the past two decades. Key questions addressed in this volume include: *what was the place of the social dimension during the financial and economic crisis? Who has driven, and who has braked, EU social policymaking? Which instruments does the EU have at its disposal for 'market correcting' policies? And last but not least, what are the next steps in the further implementation of the EU's social dimension, especially in the context of the European Pillar of Social Rights?*

The first part of the book discusses some of the broader developments of the past decades, a) disentangling the main stages in the evolution of European social policy over the past 20 years; b) assessing the place of social policy within the institutional architecture

1. The book was called *Social development in the European Union* until the 2014 edition, covering the year 2013.

and political regime of the EU; and c) analysing whether the Court of Justice of the EU has been able to balance social and economic rights. The book's second part analyses long-term developments in key EU social policy areas, including industrial relations, social protection and social inclusion, social security coordination and gender equality. It describes how key EU social policies have been handled by the EU through a variety of policy instruments: EU law, social dialogue, policy coordination and EU funding. The chronology by Boris Fronteddu and Denis Bouget summarises the key events of the past twenty years in the area of social, economic and – for the first time in this series of books – environmental policies. A separate chronology covering the year 2018 has been produced by the same authors and is available online.

In Chapter 1, Philippe Pochet analyses the contents of twenty editions of the *Bilan social*, providing an overview of two decades of EU social policymaking. He identifies three main periods in the evolution of European social policy in that period. The 'social period' (1997–2005) is characterised by a new approach to social issues, based on convergence towards best practices and no longer pushing for legislative harmonisation. The second period (2005–2015) is described as that in which the social dimension of the EU is put to question. The third period (2015–present) is characterised by the relaunch of the EU social dimension under the Juncker Commission and the introduction of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Amy Verdun and Valerie D'Erman argue, in Chapter 2, that two decades of Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) have both helped and hindered social policymaking, an area overshadowed by the dominant economic paradigm of European integration. The sovereign debt crisis, which quickly developed into an economic and social crisis, reinforced the tensions between social and economic policymaking, even while raising the profile of social policies. The chapter goes on to discuss how recent trends – including the rise of nationalism, Brexit and the migrant crisis – are impacting the renewed discussion on 'Social Europe'. The chapter's conclusions look at future challenges and opportunities for the EU's social dimension.

The most important conflicts between social and economic rights (or the 'fundamental economic freedoms') in the case law of the Court of Justice of the EU are considered in Chapter 3 by Sacha Garben. While sympathetic to the argument that the case law in this area does not give sufficient protection to social rights and instead favours economic interests, the chapter ultimately proposes an alternative approach to conceptualizing and balancing economic and social interests in legal terms. At a fundamental level, it argues for a greater role to be assigned to the democratic decision-making process at EU and Member State levels in determining socio-economic issues, rather than for the (judicial) imposition of either more social or more economic outcomes as such.

In Chapter 4, Jean-Paul Tricart starts by describing the context in which the European Social Dialogue was established under the Delors Commissions (1985–1995). It goes on to examine how this dialogue has evolved over the last two decades, arguing that this happened in very uneven and often contradictory ways: progress has been made, but there have also been setbacks, and overall the dialogue has slowly deteriorated. This was very much the case under the Barroso Commissions (2005–2014), especially with

the onset of the Eurozone crisis in 2009. While the Juncker Commission (2015–2019) undoubtedly enabled social concertation to take place again at European level, the effects of this concertation and of the reorientation of EU policies are, to date, uncertain.

The Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion (Social OMC) is at the heart of Chapter 5. Bart Vanhercke distinguishes six stages in the development of this constantly metamorphosing policy instrument, starting with *experimenting* (the proliferation of OMCs, after the method was coined by the Lisbon European Council in 2000) and ending with *maturity*: the further ‘socialisation’ of the Semester under the Juncker Commission. The chapter concludes that whether the OMC will continue to play a significant role in the EU’s post-2020 socio-economic governance will ultimately depend not on its hardness or softness, but on whether key domestic and EU players continue to use it strategically to further their ambitions.

In Chapter 6, Roberta Guerrina explains that the introduction of gender mainstreaming (GM) in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) offered a space for ensuring that gender, equality and diversity were integrated into all policy fields. However, the failure of policymakers to deploy the most basic tools associated with this approach (e.g. gender impact assessments) in times of crisis highlights some of the limitations of GM. Nevertheless, the principle of gender equality has been incorporated into the EU’s public communication narrative and is now part of how the organisation presents itself. More than twenty years since the inclusion of this principle in the EU *acquis*, there is still little evidence that the EU has moved beyond the ‘add women and stir’ approach to equality.

The time horizon of Chapter 7 by Rob Cornelissen and Frederic De Wispelaere goes well beyond the temporal scope of this book: the authors discuss the achievements, controversies and challenges of 60 years of European social security coordination. The figures on the number of people benefiting from the European coordination regulations reveal a hidden ‘European welfare state’. Interestingly, in some aspects, the Coordination Regulations provide social protection going beyond mere coordination, creating certain rights which citizens would not otherwise have. However, over the past 20 years, and especially since the 2008 crisis, some of these provisions have been called into question due to fears of ‘welfare tourism’ and ‘social dumping’.

Paolo Graziano and Laura Polverari provide a critical review of the overall significance, economic impact and (direct) employment and social impact of the EU’s cohesion policy in Chapter 8. This policy can be considered the closest thing the Union has to an active employment and social policy. The authors argue that cohesion funds should become an important financial factor in the reorientation of EU policies towards a more ‘Social Europe’. For this purpose, more resources should be directed at social inclusion and poverty alleviation measures, further support should be provided to the administrative capacities of national and regional institutions, and more systematic efforts should be made to evaluate the policy’s social impacts.

In the concluding chapter, the editors provide an analytical chronology of the main developments of the EU’s social dimension over the past twenty years and summarise

the key messages put across by the authors of the book's chapters regarding key EU social policy areas. The chapter also discusses some of the recent debates on the EU's social agenda under the new von der Leyen European Commission, while providing policy recommendations drawing on the analyses presented in this book.

When Paul McCartney wrote his hit 'The long and winding road' in 1969, he obviously had other thoughts than European social policy in mind. But the metaphor is an appropriate description of the development of European social policy over the last twenty years, the subject of this 20th anniversary edition. It accurately reflects the twists and turns of a social policy paradigm permanently overshadowed by market and financial considerations. Despite many optimistic statements by the EU leaders, social policy remains a 'nice to have' (if and when the economic and political context allows for it), not a 'must have'.

At the mercy of changing player coalitions, the development of social policy happens through a variety of policy instruments discussed in this book. It is also shaped by ever-changing challenges: digitalisation, demographic change and, increasingly, climate change. Nevertheless, as charted by this book, progress and political struggles towards a genuine 'Social Europe' have been and continue to be on the agenda of various players. But as a lesson of the past, we should not expect progress to be quick or linear: the road is going to be long and winding. This book takes you on that exciting journey.

Bart Vanhercke, Dalila Ghailani, Slavina Spasova (all three OSE)
and Philippe Pochet (ETUI)