Social Policy Legitimacy and Active Citizenship. The social Model of the European Union: national and supranational aspects

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Abstract

In recent years we have been witnessing a growing interest in social policy at the supranational level and in the process of creating a "European Social Model". This paper analyses the dilemma between supranational wishes for a European social policy and nation state willingness to transfer national capacities. National social protection has been exposed to regime competition between European Union Member States with different levels of incomes, taxes, wages and social security contributions and a supranational response need to find viable solutions in this direction. But every social policy finds its legitimacy in citizen's attitude towards the social interventions.

Key words: European Union, supranationalism, social policy, active citizenship

Introduction

SOCIAL POLICY IS at the cross roads of the different dimensions of reality: political, economic, institutional and of values. In other words, the model is a clear embodiment of the interdisciplinary academic practice which had become a vital condition in the past decades. Current professional literature devoted to social policy was marked by a series of specific debates such as the role of the state in individual and collective welfare, social policy legitimacy, their sources of legitimacy and, more recently, the national and supranational social policy, and whether or not we can speak about a social model of the European Union (EU).

This approach aims to analyse the changes that occur at national and European levels in order to address social policy in the context of profound social change: migration, discrimination, social exclusion. The social dimension of the EU lies in the social harmonization (this concept was gradually replaced by other concepts such as cohesion, convergence, cooperation etc.) of the integral parts of social policy, such as: security, aid

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and universal transfers, improving working conditions, equal opportunities for men and women, the implementation of freedom of movement, promoting education and training etc. Also, this study aims to investigate a series of theoretical dimensions which define social policy at macro level and is based on a series of interrogations: What role does or should the state have in ensuring individual and collective wellbeing? How does globalization affect social policies? What is the role of active citizenship in the EU social model?

The vastness of the phenomena involved in social policy is that much of the specialised literature focuses mainly on the social policy sector and not on social policy in general. Since the purpose of this paper is to determine the national and European dimensions of social systems, we will be referring to the general concept of *social policies/ politics*. The concept of social policy legitimacy is relatively new among the scientific approaches in the social sciences, often started from the premise that social policy must exist in order to ensure social and collective welfare. This was widely accepted as a final goal and social policy was represented at the public opinion level as a precondition for the existence of the state.

The literature on EU social policy is generally a fragmented one, starting with the focus and conclusions only on a particular theme, but emphasizing mostly on the field and the theoretical approach it belongs to (Leibfried, 1993; Pierson, 1996). These writings can be grouped into three areas: The first one suggests that there is at least one social dimension in the EU and that the social policy is discontinuous and limited. These assumptions are based primarily on a series of harsh judgments in relation to EU's failure in achieving systemic changes in national social policies and the convergence towards a supranational social policy model. A second such perspective is the starting point of a lack of institutional coherence in EU social policy. It is either missing a clear social policy institution or it gets the recognition only in particular sectors (e.g. worker's protection, workplace health and safety, equal opportunities for women). A third direction consists of the sociological literature which argues that we should look beyond what specifically social policy is, paying particular attention to issues such as social identity, institutions and social relations in the Member States and the social sphere that transcends national borders. But each time it came to the conclusion that the EU social model is different, if not unique. There is a clear distinction between national and supranational social policy: social policy is almost absent in some areas recognized as being the preservation of national policy, such as social protection and the redistribution of incomes.

National, supranational and active citizenship in social policy

Social policy confronts itself today with a series of challenges older or newer, but which produce a series of negative effects: demographic aging, the high rate of unemployment amongst youth, the rise of costs in the medical domain, the defrauding attempts of the benefits system etc. At a supra-national level, the EU comes to meet those needs, supporting states in their recovery measures. Some states have tightened the conditions of giving social benefits, for some services more and more the private system is called upon and from time to time new forms of requalification and professional reconversion are introduced. A new concept has been initiated to mark the fact that the relationship between the state and citizen is starting to change – active citizenship. This term signifies a high degree of implication of the citizen in the measures regarding individual and collective welfare. The citizen is no longer in an expectative state regarding social services, but is actively involving in taking the decisions that concern him.

The welfare states which have reached maturity are permanently receptive to social needs and modify strategy in front of social risks not by reducing expenses, but by means of an efficient and adequate administration of funds and by restructuring some of these funds through public-private partnerships. One of the differentiating criteria of welfare states is the support of the citizens for social policies, expressed through their attitudes and values. It is an essential legitimization criterion of social policies.

Given these particular debates among national and supranational regulations in social policy, sometimes kept in academic fields or in European bureaucracy, we can ask ourselves what about the European citizens? How do they legitimate these policies? From the point of view of citizen perceptions of public policies, many of these depend on potential individual risks. In short, the advocates of these policies are either the direct beneficiaries of some social programs, or either the individual perceives a future major risk where there is the possibility of needing social services (Arts and Gelissen, 2002; Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003). On the other side, there are the adepts of the rational choice theory who state that man is preoccupied with personal gain. But from a sociological perspective, the individual can have a series of options which don't necessarily raise personal gains, but have as basis the social dimension of inter-human relationships. When an individual is better positioned on the social scale, his adhesion to social policy advocacy diminishes exponentially, preferring that the state be less or not at all involved in redistributing social services (Gelissen, 2000; Kangas, 1997). In other words, the position of contributor or beneficiary determines a positive or negative attitude regarding social policies.

Positive reference is in its turn divided, taking into consideration the risks and is likely combined with the personal interest thesis. The first risk that enjoys the highest trust rate is aging, also being one with a high rate of probability (Blekesaune and Quadagno, 2003). It is followed by childhood risks and the risks of the persons with disabilities which have the compassion of their co-citizens. On the other side of the barricade there are the risks associated with immigrants and unemployed persons that are considered to be either defrauding the system or not encouraging activity on the job market (Van Oorschot, 2006).

Another criterion of reference for the citizen concerning the national or European social policy is the ideological orientation and the way in which the individual perceives his relationship with the state and other institutions. The theory of economic individualism states that you will live well only if you work and if you are not sustained by social transfers. But those who accept the redistributive role of the state are those who start from the premise that it is the only actor who can support equality and social solidarity. Overcoming the stage of extreme positions and accepting the fact that the motivations of people carry a complexity of factors, in the cases of an economically aggravated context and difficult conditions, the capacity of the individuals to accept high fiscal and redistributive policies is very low. But in circumstances in which the individuals benefit from constant and high levels of welfare, their openness towards the generosity of the social systems is high (Mareş, 2005). Here a nuanced representation is necessary. The economic criterion is not decisive in formulating these personal options, since it is in most cases correlated to sectorial policies (unemployment, education, pension system etc.), to their institutional implementation, to their efficiency. The motivation is not just an altruistic or egocentric one, but it is often generated by unpleasant experiences with the institutions that are meant to implement sectorial policies, e.g. moments in which the respective individual needed social support facing an imminent risk and never had any help despite his/her social contributions or the state's inefficiency in administrating funds (Rothstein, 2002).

The *Comparative Political Studies* magazine published in 2005 the article „*Social Protection around the World: External Insecurity, State Capacity and Domestic Political Cleavages*" (Mareş, 2005) in which social policy was connected to economic insecurity. If within a state a group that is marked by a series of high risks comes to power, it has the tendency of extending social risks. But if those in power are enjoying a high degree of economic security, social policies are minimal. In other words, a highly distributive welfare state may be valid in the case of developed states. The analysis of the way in which social policies are implemented at European level and their legitimation may constitute the elements of future research. A current debate in the domain of social policies is the crisis of legitimacy of the welfare state. A series of causes weaken the support of the citizen for these extended social services: higher taxes without having an equal correspondent in the received benefits, decrease in the share of workers, the spread of an individualistic conception stating that the individual searches to satisfy his needs etc. On the other hand, the legitimacy of welfare institutions is dependent on and directly proportional to well-structured social policies that are well organized and have public support.

Social policy and welfare state

In many cases the concepts of *social policy* and *welfare state* are considered to be equivalent, but often this can be considered a forced equivalence, as will be noted throughout this endeavour[1*]. Social policies are based on two key arguments. One of them points to the social risks theory according to which based on a social contract the state intervenes to meet the needs and to prevent the uncertainty of existence, and the second one is based on social solidarity and social development as the central factor of the welfare state[2**]. Social policy as a factor in social development is a relatively recent perspective which has appeared especially in the current interdependence and globalization context (Deacon, 1999).

With the advent of the "crisis of the welfare state" in the 1970s a number of arguments against social policies were issued in order to unravel the myth of the concealed support that the state had a duty to provide. The first counterargument appeared amid a dependency of the social system that no longer encourages active participation in the labour market and the second one referred to the social costs which have not increased proportionally with the increase of the available resources (e.g. economic growth). The criticism of social policy continued, the social contract theory itself has been questioned given that the risks which were the basis of this policy have undergone major changes, some have disappeared or got reduced, others have arisen recently. In particular, increased European mobility and the opening of borders sparked major population movements and required the revision of national social policies.

There is now a tendency to find common ground on social policy in all EU countries. A number of international organizations are trying to identify a common European and international language on this issue. In 1975 was created the European Institute of Education and Social Policy based on the initiative of the European Cultural Foundation, in 1991 in the UK was issued for the first time the *Journal of European Social Policy*, and was

[*] The premise here is that the welfare state implies the state's responsability to ensure a basic level of welfare/well-being of its citizens: healthcare, education, living conditions, social services. The concepts of welfare and social policies are extended to include all the actors involved in ensuring the well-being of citizens such as: the state, family and comunity, as well as NGOs and international/transnational stakeholders. (Gough, 2004; Briggs, 2006).

[**] Esping-Andersen brings to the discussion the social pressure factor according to which the social policies have as a basis the pressure to ensure well-being based on popular values. (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 34; Taylor-Gooby, 2004).

set up the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) which has been working since 1928 with representatives from over 90 countries and which in 2012 launched a global agenda on Social Work and Social Development. In the social area, as opposed to the economic one, was promoted and emphasized the complementary role of the EU and the accountability of the Member States, hence the subsidiarity principle found an increasingly wider application in this area. Therefore, it is important to determine to what extent the EU's social dimension is configured, on the one hand, as an effect of the application of the treaties and other documents and programs at EU level and, on the other hand, as a result of the efforts and actions in every Member State. (Borrás and Jacobsson, 2010)

One of the most important moments in the evolution of the EU social model was in 2000, when there was a switch from an approach based on minimizing the negative social consequences of structural change to the modernization of the European social system through investment in human capital. It goes from a quantitative approach (minimizing consequences) to a qualitative one (investing in people) (Borrás and Radaelli, 2011) [3***]

The political and scholarly debate on national and supranational regulations in social policy has remained one of the most intensely discussed issues in European integration policy research in recent years. Two main directions have been the major concern for the intellectual efforts to analyse this area: the first is the relation between the liberalized Internal Market and the necessity of keeping a sustainable social protection with national and supranational regulations, and the second one is about how to distribute the specific social policy capacities between the national and supranational organisms.

The development of a global economy brings a number of changes in the formulation and implementation of national social policy. The nation-state begins to concede some of its attributions to transnational bodies and its sectorial powers are in some cases directed towards regional structures, independent organizations or supranational bodies. The book "*Globalization and the Welfare State*" published in 2000 created a major debate on the fact that globalization limits the ability of the nation-state to work for the welfare of its citizens (Mishra, 1999). On the other hand, the EU was established based on economic and political reasons: the establishment of free economic markets and maintaining peace. Social programs were not a clear objective from the beginning; they have subsequently appeared under the pressure of the economic policy. The concern in the 1970s for the working conditions of workers has brought recognition of the legitimacy of the Europe-

[***] Social policy was an early endeavour within EU, strating from 1957-1958 with the Treaty of Rome and the creation of the European Social Fund. In programmatic terms, social policy is outlined in the 1989 Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (Social Charter). It was followed by two instruments aimed at bringing the debate on social policy at the EU level (Green Paper & White Paper). In 2000 the Social Policy Agenda outlined the direction of European social policy until 2005.

an Community's involvement in social systems. Once accepted that the EU will have a range of social objectives in addition to economic ones, the social policy of the EU has expanded significantly.

How is social policy divided between the national and the supranational? As pointed out in the introduction, there are a number of debates about the decline of the welfare state. When discussing welfare in ideological terms, we often speak about left wing policies, defined by generous social benefits, and the right wing policies involving reduced social spending. In Europe, the variety of models is much bigger. Differentiating left from right exclusively based on the volume of financial allocations simplifies outrageously the public discussion, knowing that countries such as Germany and Austria have high social expenditure and centre-right policies. The concept of welfare state has many facets and its components have been analysed extensively starting with the Beveridge Report (1942) onwards, yet many authors have concluded that the theory cannot be accurately classified given that it mutates and changes from one period to another (Pierson, 1991: 14). Exploring and analysing historical variations of this concept is not the subject of this endeavour. Shortly, the welfare state can be considered as an instrument of policy and administration which seeks production of beneficial social change into three components: a guaranteed minimum income, reduction of the insecurity factors and offering the best standards for a set number of social services for all citizens.

The states have built their own strategies for planning and implementing social policies often tailored to a specific national context. In 1990, *Social Welfare Policy Ethics* examined a number of countries with their own social models and concluded that there is no good or less good social policy, but there are ways of achieving the objectives of welfare states by methods appropriate to each situation (Goodin, 1990). Technically, how can we analyse these functional adaptive strategies? How can they be understood in debates at the supranational level? The comparative method is acknowledged in the literature as the basis of any scientific approach studying macro-social aspects (Clarke, 2007; Rueschmeyer and Stephens, 1997). Besides the purpose of placing the social reality in order, the comparative method in social policies may subsume a number of objectives, such as to identify general patterns, to anticipate social phenomena or to interpret cultural and historical events in the context in which they took place.

Beyond all the challenges and limitations that such an approach brings about, the multiplication and accessibility of statistical data caused a major increase in comparative social policy analysis (Øyen, 2004). But transnational comparative research that could form the basis for global and European strategies and report any needs to which social policies should respond is often difficult to achieve in an objective and scientifically correct manner. Far from having embraced a nihilistic approach, the qualitative versus quantitative dispute imposed a serious debate. When the reference unit is the individual, the quantitative criterion is obvious, but when it is the state – the number of variables exceeds the number of countries analysed and it is virtually impossible to make decisive explanations. The second criticism brought to the qualitative analysis was called "Galton's problem" or the issue of interdependency (Clarke, 2007). With the increasing interdependence between state and non-state actors, it is difficult or even impossible to analyse them as an autonomous, non-influenced and resilient unit, thus deeply affecting the credibility of transnational studies.

On the other hand, the maximum credibility of the quantitative analysis was also impaired by a number of critics. The failure of a probabilistic sampling with the state as a reference unit has been often debated when the intention was to achieve transnational comparative quantitative research. The aggregated indicators presented in many international statistics are historically and economically heavily distorted and often include states that have fair opportunities to collect such data, arbitrarily excluding less developed ones. Then, the issue of the stratified sample showed large differences between countries in terms of size, population, territory and the inability to achieve a higher degree of homogeneity of the social strata. Although this has been suggested prior to dividing these countries and their grouping into categories, but this could mean a distortion of dependent and independent variables. In 2003 and 2005 Ebbinghaus and Manow argued that, given all the limitations and challenges, qualitative analysis is the most appropriate to consider the historical and political contingencies of macro-social units, and suggested analyses conducted in the framework of case-studies (Ebbingaus and Manow, 2001).

Regarding social welfare regimes, Gosta Esping-Andersen's classification realised in 1991 soon became "classic" in the study of comparative social policy (Esping-Andersen, 1992). This says that there are three major perspectives on welfare: the social-democrat, the conservative and the liberal model. Regardless of the fact that the criteria for classification generated by Esping-Andersen proved imperfect and that these perspectives have been subject over the years to several amendment attempts, they still remain a useful tool for understanding the types of large political and socio-cultural options based on national welfare.

The social-democratic model is best represented by the administrative structure of social policy in countries such as: Sweden, Norway and Denmark, the so-called Scandinavian model (according to Stephan Liebfried's classification), and embraces a Keynesian view of economic and social policies (Liebfried, 1993). Sweden was a pure form of welfare state during 1960-1970, but in recent years, given the financial crisis, adopted a series of reform measures with a tendency towards liberalism. Denmark, however, seems to overtake Sweden in this regard (Schludi, 2005: 34-38). The social democratic model requires high levels of social spending, high taxation, an extended public sector and social protection focused on multiple population groups. All this is backed by a massive bureaucracy and costly policies.

The size of the social democratic welfare tax is based on a system of flat and progressive taxation and not on employees' and employers' contributions to social security. Consequently, the funding of social services is, in principle, public and is made through the state or local communities, with a strong redistributive and equalizing trend, unlike the situation of the German social insurance, where benefits are proportional to contributions. The social dimension refers to the richness of the "welfare" system provided by public authorities which through the diversity and generous character (inclusive) of the bid covers large segments of population, from children to the elderly. Whilst in other developed European countries, care for elderly family or children is delegated to the family, the voluntary and/or private sector, in the Scandinavian countries the public sector is the one which assumes responsibility for this range of services (Schludi, 2005: 43-45).

The employment strategy is achieved through active labour market policy and a constant concern of the authorities for full employment. This special interest was maintained with good results even during the economic crisis of the 70s and 80s, being one of the strengths of the Scandinavian system (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 47-56). One specific aspect of the Swedish and Danish systems is maintaining incomes or social security as such (according to British terminology) as the central element of the welfare programs in all Scandinavian countries. Similarly, the pension system for the elderly is one of the most generous in the world. Denmark, for example, introduced the old age pension in 1891 (Norldund, 1997). But unlike Germany (the first to introduce this system), where the pensions are paid by the insurance fund, contributions in Denmark have been recognized as social constitutional rights, so they are granted to all Danish citizens who reach a certain age (variable depending on parliamentary decisions), independent of their contributions to the social security system.

Among all types of pensions granted in Denmark, the most famous is the *People's Pension* (Esping-Andersen, 1993: 123-134). Public non-contributory pension is based on the principle of universality, solidarity and equality and is given without discrimination to all Danish citizens aged over 67, provided they have been residents of this country in the last 40 years. Age limit and absolute value are variable and may be changed by the government, with the consent of the parliament. Besides the universal state pension, there are occupational and private pensions, which are subject to contributions paid during the active life (Andress and Heien, 2001).

Trying to introduce a pension scheme linked to income, as in most European countries, had different effects in the Scandinavian countries. In 1959, Sweden introduced a scheme differentiating the first state pension based on the revenues earned during lifetime. In 1960 Denmark tried the same thing, but this experiment failed in 1967 due to lack of political support within the Social Democratic Party and extended public hostility (Anderson, 2005). While in Sweden and Norway the pension policies had a continental direction, gradually approaching the German model, Denmark's situation remained largely unchanged in terms of public pensions. In compensation, an additional private pension system began to develop in response to the rigidity of the equalizing state system and to the desire of people with over the average income to enjoy differentiated rights when they are old (Andersen, 1997).

For the unemployed, income maintenance works on two levels, a "higher level" which provides benefits to the insured (the funds are administered by trade unions) and a "lower level" for uninsured people still receiving social assistance provided by the state. In order to be qualified at the higher level, an unemployed person must be a member of an insurance fund of employed persons and earn income at least 52 weeks in the last 3 years. In this way, every Danish citizen becoming unemployed is entitled to receive benefits for 5 consecutive years, with the obligation to act in a professional or educational programme for 2 years after becoming unemployed, otherwise the person ends up losing specific rights. Note that although the benefits amount to 90% of the last income earned through work, they may not exceed a pre-established maximum limit. Given these important reasons, some specific issues of social policy are and will be subject to the national social system.

Social policy reform in the last decade has reached Scandinavia as well. In 1994 the labour market reform and the 1998 Welfare Reform measures were introduced to restructure the social security system in Denmark, focused on two main steps (Kvist, 1999). Regarding the unemployed, unskilled or holding sporadic jobs, the overriding concern is to ensure proper preparations for obtaining professional qualifications so that the individual is able to find a stable job. Regarding the employed, the emphasis is on continuous training and professional development in the workplace or on short training courses funded by the employing institution, since the Nordic economy is structured around activities that require high levels of professional qualification.

The conservative, Bismarckian, continental system differs from other models by focusing on the mechanism of social security. Mainly financed by contributions from employers and employees to the insurance funds, the German model of welfare has therefore an occupational basis, is directly participatory and the social benefits are differentiated (proportional to contributions), unlike the social democratic model of universal and egalitarian practice in the Scandinavian countries. This pattern of social welfare has a well-defined concept ("The German Middle Way") characterised by historical coherence and stability, strong economic and political pressures, social efficiency and long-term financial profitability (Fabricant and Burghardt, 1992: 45-49). Over the twentieth century, the German model was the most stable system of social welfare organization in the world and has undergone minimal changes (technical ones, not at the level of principles), withstanding shocks and periods of great historic political transformation (the Weimar Republic National-Socialism and its disastrous implications during and after the wartime, the post-war reconstruction under the aegis of the American Marshall plan, the unification in 1990). Given the philosophy of the social security system in Germany, cited above, it can be inferred that "*the main German social policy objective is to maintain the status or – expressed in a positive manner – to protect revenues rather than to reduce or prevent poverty – as in the case of liberal regimes – or to guarantee redistribution, as in the case of social democratic regimes*" (Esping-Andersen, 2002: 98-10). Therefore the provisions of welfare programs are directed with priority towards the preservation of the social status owned during the active life and towards maintaining benefits at a level as close as possible to the income earned from labour, also representing a specific subject of national social policy.

Subsidiarity is the second major milestone of the German model arising from the social doctrine of Catholicism and came to be imposed not only in Germany but also in the EU Treaties, being raised to official policy status in the EU. According to this governing principle, "*larger social units cannot assume decision-making responsibilities which belong to subordinated smaller units but in exceptional circumstances where small social units are unable to meet their own needs*" (Hinrichs, 2005).

The conservative social policy is in fact a continental model, being present (with nuanced variations) in many European countries around Germany: Austria, France, Italy, Belgium, Holland and more recently in Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia. One of the most important dimensions of German social policy is social security. After 1945, the only viable project for West Germany remained the Bismarck one, based on the principle of social insurance financed by contributions and the principle of subsidiarity. Contributions were dependent on income, as were - as a result - the social benefits, and the state has been given a minimal role in the management of insurance funds. Basically, keeping multiple insurance funds (administered separately) - which provide benefits commensurate with individual economic performance during the active life – has remained the strength of social policy in Germany. It should be known that the specialized insurance schemes which reduce risks have broadened considerably in the last century as follows: a) sickness insurance in 1883 ; b) accident insurance in 1884; c) old age insurance (pensions) in 1889; d) unemployment insurance in 1920; e) compulsory long-term care since 1995 (Schludi, 2005: 43-45).

The liberal welfare state is centered on the United States and Great Britain. This is the classification of Esping - Andersen (1991); other authors are of the opinion that Britain is a mixed model of welfare (Taylor-Gooby et al., 2004). As for the notion of "liberalism", the fact remains that the term is used here in the sense of a right-wing policy that promotes the private sector and the free market and individual responsibility, corresponding to American "republicanism" and British "conservatism". So the meaning of "liberalism" (same as that of neo-liberalism) is the anti-Keynesian one, outlined by Hayek and Friedman and promoted in the 80s by the British Conservative and the US Republican government administrations - Thatcher and Reagan (Clayton and Thompson, 1988). This model is based on the minimal state, selective social and economic demands, fostering individual performance and the acceptance of differences resulting from free competition in the market. The British Labour Party government passed several short key measures in the social security system: the establishment of family allowances in 1945, the establishment of national unemployment insurance and pension in 1946 and the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948, which was intended to provide medical services to all British citizens on the basis of equal access (indiscriminatory) and open (free).

The irrefutable victory of the Conservative Party in the 1979 elections and the advent of Prime Minister M. Thatcher marked the second point of inflexion in the post-war evolution of Great Britain. With the slogan "rolling back the frontiers of the Welfare State", the new conservative administration started an energetic process to restrain the competences and social-economic attributes of the state, gradually transferring the responsibility of the welfare to the private and non-governmental sectors (Taylor-Gooby, 2005). This transfer (including the budget) was associated with a package of stimulating measures to grow performance in the private sector. For example, the lowering of fiscal pressure allowed recovery of the medium and small private investments, going down to the level of "family" company, of small businesses that grew overnight, contributing to the consolidatation of the market offer. This favourable climate in the business sector, added upon the dissolution of the minimum wage, made the unemployment rate go down in a few years from 12% to 3-4% on the basis of what was called "the British Job Miracle" (Robertson, 1986; Healey, 1992).

The social benefit in the case of unemployment, renamed the JSA-Jobseeker's Allowance was diminished, just for the reason of motivating unemployed people to search and accept job offers regardless of the wage, in the context in which we remind that the minimum wage was liquidated. The duration of this benefit was shortened from 12 to 6 months, with a slightly increased value for persons over 25 years old (Clayton and Thompson, 1988). The policy of social housing suffered major transformations after the advent of the Conservative government. Conceived by the laborists as a domain of activity financed exclusively from public sources (the budgets of local councils), the policy of homes came into the attention of the Thatcher cabinet since 1980. Actually, the conservatives made out of the housing policy a veritable "flagship" of the reforms carried out under the doctrine of the New Right. "The right of tenants to buy" in special conditions the social homes on which they owned renting contracts, besides the fact that it meant privatizing the whole activity domain (1.5 million social homes were bought between 1979-1997) and an accumulation of substantial resources at the disposal of local councils, brought a large number of votes to the Conservatives, proving to be also an electoral success (Goodchild and Cole, 2001).

The educational policy of the New Right meant a liberalization of the competition between schools, promoting education in the private system and introducing the selection of students conformed to the statute of the respective school. The program and the measures of the policies of the British educational system were put together in the "Education Reform Act" of 1988 (Barber, 1994: 356-357). The schools were given an obvious liberty in the selection of students and teachers, financial autonomy and the right to compete on the resource market for extra-budgetary financing. Once every 5 years each school underwent an audit from an independent commission of experts, and the results of the evaluation were published in special catalogues, put at the disposal of the parents. Schools that lost students due to their depreciation in the public audit catalogues lost in consequence also a part of the budget financing, thus being sanctioned by the Ministry of Education, and those that were well rated and desired obtained additional funding.

The national regimes of social protection were created in a period when nation-state still had control of cross-border economic activities. As European integration progressed in the direction of a common Internal Market, this situation has changed. The decreasing capacity of the national organisms to control the market could potentially be compensated for by supranational social policies establishing a minimum level of social policy or harmonizing national regulations. Given the fact that the political and economic interests vary too much between EU Member States this does not seem to be a viable strategy.

The supranational level: Social Policy in European Union

Taking into consideration the precedent elements representative for the welfare state models in Europe, it is important to see, at a programmatic level, how the European institutions chose to approach European social politics. An analytical instrument frequently used in recent studies is the multilevel governance approach. This method tries to include the intergovernmental and supranational dimensions of the European decision-making process, as well as transnational interest groups and policy networks, through a multilevel perspective which aims to analyze the complex interactions between national and European regulatory systems. Some authors consider this approach still a metaphor (Ferrera et al., 2001).

The European social measures are generated by policy, financial and legal instruments. The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) is one of the most important policy instruments, based on specific regulations from the Lisbon Agenda and the Social Policy Agenda, and is facilitated by different forms of dialogue and cooperation: social dialogue, civil dialogue and international cooperation. The OMC constitutes the regulatory model for the coordination of employment policies, pensions and health by the EU institutions. The principles that sustain this method are:

- The principle of subsidiarity, which consists in establishing/dividing the responsibilities between the EU and the national level through establishing objectives at the EU level and accountability towards Member States with regards to implementing the action measures they adopted, to enforce them at national level;
- The principle of convergence, which consists in following common objectives through correlated actions;
- Management based on objectives, which refers to monitoring and evaluating progress through establishment of common indicators for all Member States;
- Country monitoring, which consists in the elaboration of reports which register the progress and identify possible good practices at Member State level;
- Integrated approach, which presumes the extension of labor market policy guidelines in the sphere of other policies (social, educational, entrepreneurial, regional and taxation) (Blachs, 2007).

The European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Globalization Adjustment Fund (EGF) represent two of the main financial instruments, which alongside legal instruments (the coordination of social security and mobility of workers, labour law and safety and security at work, gender equality and anti-discrimination etc.) creates a sum of institutionalized measures designed to be an active part of the social policy at European level.

The most important document with social relevance (1957-2000) in the framework of EU social policies is the "European Employment Strategy". It was adopted alongside with the introduction in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) of the chapter referring to employment (Title VIII) (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997: Articles 125-130). The strategy had the purpose of fighting against unemployment at the EU level and it was conceived as a main instrument of harmonization and coordination of the EU priorities in this direction, priorities which will be addressed by each Member State.

The role of this strategy is to coordinate, at EU level, the occupation policies of Member States. Initially elaborated as a five year strategy, it underwent an intermediary evaluation in 2000 and an evaluation of the impact it produced in 2002. Taking into consideration the identified priorities, the strategy was structured on four pillars, each one representing a future action domain (European Commission, November 1997):

- Employment prospects – represents a new culture in the sphere of employment and it refers to the ability to be hired, thus contributing to fighting unemployment amongst the youth and unemployment on a long term basis;
- Entrepreneurship – promotes the creation of new jobs by encouraging local development;
- Adaptability – seeks to modernize the organization of work and to promote flexible work contracts;
- Equal opportunities –refers especially to adopting new measures for women, for the purpose of reconciliation between professional and personal lives.

The operation of the strategy is structured on multiple stages: 1) the establishment of certain directions in the employment policy (Employment Guidelines) through a document elaborated annually and based on a proposal of the European Commission, discussed and approved by the European Council (The Council of Ministers) (Council Decision 2010/707/EU); 2) the elaboration of National Action Plans which describe the way in whichthe elements of the previous document are applied at the level of the respective Member State (European Commission, 2005a); 3) the creation by the Commission and the Council of a Joint Employment Report which is based on the National Action Plans (Council of the European Union, 2013); 4) the issueing of specific recommendations for each Member State (Council recommendations , based on the proposals of the Commission) (European Commission, 2013).

The results of the annual evaluations for 2000 and 2002 showed significant progress in the direction of creating an integrated framework of national policies and a growth in the transparency of occupation policies and the number of involved parties (at the EU level, but also at Member State level) (European Commission, 2000; 2001; 2002; 2003). Therefore, if regarding achievement we can talk about the progress of national policies in this domain and a change in the perception of the occupation concept and its correlation with lifelong learning, about promoting gender equality and the efficiency of the OMC, the identification of priorities and of development directions for the next period was not neglected. The topics identified for the reform of the Employment strategy are: a) establishing clear objectives, b) simplifying the Employment Directions, c) strengthening the role of the social partnership in the implementation of the strategy and d) the increase in coherence and complementarity with other community processes.

A very important element for implementing the European Employment Strategy is the ESF which represents the main financial instrument for structural actions in the EU. The ESF finances those actions of Member State which have as purpose the prevention and combat of unemployment, the developing of human resources and integration on the job market, equality of chances for men and women, sustainable development and economic cohesion. In support of these directions, the Agenda for Social Policy (2000-2005) was written as a document establishing the framework and the development priorities of social policy up to the year 2005 (European Commission, 2000). The challenges faced by the Agenda for Social Policy are the unemployment rate, the rise in importance of the informational technology and the reduced number of people with expertise in this domain, the development of a knowledge-based economy, the social environment, EU enlargement and the internationalization of social policy. In this context, the underlying principle of the reformed social model (with a focus on quality) is the consolidation of the role of social policies as a productive factor, meaning the integration of social policies with economic policies and employment policies.

The Lisbon Strategy presented the ten-year objectives (2000-2010) of the EU aimed at transforming the European economy in the most competitive knowledge-based economy. The central objective of the EU for the decade was the increase in economic performance, the creation of more (and better) jobs and to use to a maximum extent the possibilities offered by a knowledge-based society. The Social Policy Agenda (2006-2010) took over these objectives and strategy elements that are related to social policy and converted them into a 5-year action program that is the framework for the present social policy and has as underlying principle the consolidation of the social policy role as a productive factor (European Commission, 2005b). For the entire decades, the Member States have co-operated through a series of economic, political and social initiatives known as "The Lisbon Agenda". But after a decade, the European economy was in recession, unemployment was blooming and social cohesion was affected by the austerity measures introduced by governments as a response to the global financial crisis. The Lisbon Strategy produced mixed results. Indeed, after a preliminary evaluation, was launched the revised version of the strategy, more focused on policies and with a revised governance architecture aimed at leading towards economic growth and jobs.

The use of European funds to reach a series of social objectives is a powerful expression of European solidarity, but mostly a way to support economic reforms. Prioritizing may vary, but in austerity periods when internal budgets suffer substantial modifications, the absorption of funds is controversial. For this reason, when the new 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework was presented, the European Commission tried to create a balance between, on the one hand, the position of the European Parliament which asked for budgetary increase especially in order to sustain Europe 2020 initiatives and, on the other hand, the Member States which requested the reduction of the EU expenses. Negotiations were finalized in 2013 and on 28 June 2013, the Permanent Representatives Committee approved, on behalf of the Council, the deal reached with the European Parliament on the draft regulation laying down the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2014-2020 and the interinstitutional agreement on budgetary matters (Council of the European Union, 2013b). For the moment, it can point out that the EU budget intends to support an agenda focused on results, but there is a series of tensions between obtaining the objectives of growth and social cohesion policies and the fiscal constraints.

The difficulties associated with using funds in order to reach social goals are illustrated in the proposal of the Commission to extend the operation of the European Globalization Adjustment Fund (EGF). In 2006, this fund was launched to support the restructuring of European industries. Focusing initially on the impact of globalization in enterprises across Europe, the fund gradually became an important instrument in stopping the serious economic and social consequences of the financial crisis. An amendment demanding a temporary derogation and an increase in the level of EU co-financing was introduced (Regulation (EC) No 1927/2006). The derogation proposal of June 2011, based on data concerning development and employment growth taken from the Annual Growth Survey was rejected (European Commission, 2011a). In December 2010, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (*EPSCO*) rejected the derogation referring to the extension of the fund for the next two years, with a minority of eight Member States. This is not just an illustration of the fiscal prudence of the Member States, but also of an approach reflected in the philosophical tension: is it more efficient to have a budgetary organization based on funds with very large resources, such as the European Social Fund, comprising a vision of reaching long term structural reforms and in compliance with the Europe 2020 objectives, or to grant small and fast funds which can approach the immediate social consequences of the financial crisis?

As far as large scale structural funds are concerned, of particular importance is the relation between the Cohesion Policy and the Europe 2020 Agenda. In October 2011 the European Commission launched proposals for the reform of the Cohesion Policy with the explicit purpose of clearly focusing on the resources on several smaller priorities, directly related to the Europe 2020 Agenda (European Commission, 2011b). The proposal included the reform of the ESF in order to reach to 25% of the total budget for cohesion with the purpose of investing directly in people. Within the ESF, 20% of the budget was proposed to be allocated for social inclusion measures. Both the *European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion* and the emblematic initiatives from the *Agenda of New Skills and Jobs* have underlined the importance of using ESF objectives to attain their specific goals. It is a sign of progressively tighter bonds between the Cohesion Policy and the Europe 2020 Agenda which will reflect more explicitly within the National Reform Programs.

From a legislative point of view, the social policy at the EU level does not envisage the explicit creation of a solid legislative EU acquis, but is rather focused on evaluating and revising legal frameworks, such as the controversies concerning the time spent at work and the mobility of workers. Attempts to revise the directive referring to the time spent at the job, which was planned for publishing at the end of 2011, then in February 2012, and eventually in March 2012, have failed due to the lack of political consensus (Monti II Regulation)(European Commission, 2012). These delays in launching these proposals reveal the controversial nature not only of the legislative action in the social domain, but moreover the difficulty of reconciling the social objectives with the economic freedoms. The political and legislative limits of using the community method in the domains of employment, unemployment and salary policies are obvious.

Conclusions

The attempts to implement a social policy at the EU level has given birth to the phrase "Social Europe" aiming at reflecting the whole social dimension of EU integration or at defining the social EU acquis as the sum of EU accumulations at one given moment in the social policy domain. This is not an easy step because as much different and complex are the social models of the European countries, so are the methods. In reality, none of these countries has a purely liberal or a purely conservatory system, and in time there have been many junctions between these models.

Alongside these major differentiations between states ther is also the scepticism of Europeans who consider opportunistic today the reinvention of the European social model, because the current one can barely generate a common voice. The rationalities behind this fact are based firstly on the economic competitiveness of the EU at global level. The rise of states with a high entrepreneurial spirit and more powerful innovation capacity, such as Japan, China or India, determine a part of the social analysts to talk about a need of reorientation in this direction. Many of the reports of the European Commission from the last five years have brought to attention the obvious need for integrated social policies that would stimulate entrepreneurship, productivity and the creation of new jobs and where economic growth alone has proven insufficient.

The year 2010 was called the European year of fighting against poverty and social inclusion, but practically, at the level of the European citizens who are at risk of poverty there was no significant progress. Most of the time, when approaching this problem, Member States appeal to the principle of subsidiarity and consider this aspect to be one of national competence. What are the factors that influence this decision? The first explanation is a regulatory one, since social policy is by definition a redistributive one, which means that it administrates incomes between generations and between funds etc., as argued earlier. These decisions cannot be taken by a supranational organism, but only in a democratic way and by means of negotiations at a national level. Pensions, unemployment aid, allowances, indemnities that come from the state budget, healthcare and the educational system – all presume income transfers between social categories.

Another dimension is the relation between the employer and the employee regulated by the national legislation of the labor market which establishes the level of contributions to the social insurance, the rights of employees, work conditions. All are thoroughly negotiated at national level between different national social groups. From there derive the major differences between EU Member States regarding contributions and the taxing systems or even management models. In this context, the uniformization of redistributive policies at the European level now seems an impossible endeavor. Social assistance, health and education still remain strong symbols of national sovereignty. Without representing a legal constraint, the OMC was born from an initiative of voluntary coordination of the social policies of Member States,, although it hasscored less significant results.

Regarding the EU budget, the fiscal policy still remains in the hands of national governments. How can a Social Europe be possible without collecting taxes or spending public money? Alongside the need of saving the Eurozone because of the financial crisis, the reticence of Member States towards collecting some taxes at a European level was revealed. The new Multiannual Financial Framework brings about some taxes on financial transactions, but it is a small effort. In other words, EU Member States still wish to keep intact their own social policy. The adevent of other interest groups, such as multinational companies, could speed up the process of a European social policy, considering that they can choose to establish on any national market, thus urging the states to reduce taxing levels in order to attract them to their country.

Social policy in Europe will always be achieved simultaneously on two levels, one national and the other supranational, and it will be subjected to complex interactions between the two, but moreover between the ones derived from the national systems integrated in the market economy of the EU. Therefore, it is important not to determine to what extent the EU is able to act like a big welfare state, but rather to identify the types of policies that emerge at each level from the constraints and opportunities of the institutional framework.

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