

# IMPULSE

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## A Vision for the Social Dimension in the EU in 2030

### What European Citizens Want

#### Abstract

Both politicians and academics discuss a wide variety of possible measures aimed at improving the “social dimension” within the EU. We believe this discussion should be guided to a stronger degree by what European citizens want out of this social dimension, beyond short-term options and taking a medium-term approach. Hence, this paper presents a basis for a shared vision of the social dimension in the EU in 2030 that is based on empirical evidence of citizens’ revealed current preferences. This paper aims at highlighting those elements of the social dimension that enjoy the greatest support among the population and should, therefore, help prioritize political action. We found this vision to contain five core components which distinguish themselves from other potential objectives in that they do mobilize a quasi-consensus or strong support across the whole of the EU: (i) EU-wide fight against poverty and social exclusion, (ii) keeping the respective retirement ages and the levels of retirement provision, (iii) inter-state cohesion including through Eurobonds, (iv) high employment rates throughout the EU, (v) EU-wide universal basic primary and secondary education as shown through near to zero school-drop-out rates. Despite the markedly different social realities and differing welfare traditions in the EU member states, this basic consensus is robust and valid across national boundaries. We hope that thus this paper will help to move the public discourse away from the immediate, away from the focus on limitations and lacking alternatives, and towards both the positive and the desired outcomes.

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## Introduction

Both politicians and academics discuss a wide variety of possible measures aimed at improving the “social dimension” within the EU. We believe this discussion should be guided to a stronger degree by what European citizens want out of this social dimension, beyond short-term options and taking a medium-term approach. Hence, this paper presents a basis for a shared vision of the social dimension in the EU in 2030 that is based on empirical evidence of citizens’ revealed current preferences, and in doing so, is the first of its kind. The elements of the vision are derived from three kinds of sources: pan-European survey data, positions of political parties in all member states mainly derived from EU-election manifestos, as well as primary EU law. With the limited data available for the intended analysis, we believe these sources provide today the best available proxies. We considered the methodological challenges that each of these sources poses, factored them in, and combined the sources in order to cross-check findings in either one of them and balance specific biases.

This paper aims at highlighting those elements of the social dimension that enjoy the greatest support among the population and should, therefore, help prioritize political action on the social dimension. We do not imply that outlining a vision already provides answers on how to get there. But those measures that are in the public debate should be judged among others on how far they contribute to the elements of the vision of the social dimension held by the public. By shedding light on citizens’ expectations we intend to help bridge the gap between the political discourse at an expert level on the one hand and public opinion on the other in order to identify priority fields of action within the social dimension.

We found this vision to contain five core components which distinguish themselves from other potential objectives in that they do mobilize a quasi-consensus or strong support across the whole of the EU: (1) *EU-wide inclusion*, (2) *secure pensions for employees*; (3) *cohesion and solidarity between EU member states*; (4) *high employment rates throughout the EU*, and (5) *EU-wide basic education*. Other objectives, such as an increased percentage of higher education or workers’ protection did not gather sufficient levels of support to be included as part of the commonly shared vision of EU citizens.

In the following sections we describe our definition of the European social dimension (I) and briefly outline our methodological approach in order to identify European citizens’ preferences regarding the social dimension (II). Subsequently we illustrate the derived basis for a vision of the social dimension in more detail (III) and conclude by summarizing our main findings (IV).

### I. How We Define the Social Dimension in the EU

There is no undisputed and/or scientifically based definition of the social dimension in the EU. Furthermore the term “social dimension” in itself is to some degree already politically occupied and could be considered biased, as are potential alternatives such as “social Europe”. By using the term ‘social dimension’ we do not intend to align ourselves with one or the other of the existing coalitions behind those terms. In the scope of our project we rather understand the social dimension in the EU to include the nine following elements:

- *protection against social risk*
- *poverty reduction and inclusion of the socially excluded*
- *social and economic living conditions*
- *distribution of and access to opportunities*
- *relationship between social partners*
- *employment promotion and labour market policy*
- *working conditions and health and safety at the workplace*
- *inter-state cohesion*
- *intergenerational justice*

This definition is based on (i) the core inventory identified by the literature on national social policy and the welfare state, as well as (ii) the responsibilities of national-level ministries for social affairs and the respective directorates general and committees at the EU level, and (iii) earlier research and policy papers on the European Social Model. Additionally, this definition considers the specific social challenges that result (iv) from European integration and (v) a medium-term strategic perspective, both at the core of this European foresight project at *stiftung neue verantwortung (snv)*.

Our focus with regard to the social dimension is geared towards the territory of the European Union (not merely the Eurozone), yet not necessarily towards the EU as a political actor. Accordingly, this definition does not suggest which specific level of European governance should be addressed to deal with which parts of the social dimension. That question should be decided on the basis of the principle of

subsidiarity, which implies that solutions should be sought at the level most suited to attain the desired goal.

## II. Distilling What Citizens Really Want

Much of the political discussion around the EU focuses on the differences and conflicting interests between member states, on institutional and legal limits of political action and the economic necessities claimed to be without alternative. In this context the sensitivity for what unites us in Europe and what the people want is easily lost. The current focus of discussion also lies like a veil over the answers Europeans have already provided to the questions about what our shared objectives are, and what we should strive to achieve. If we focus too much on the limitations of political decision-making rather than on its priorities and potentials, we work towards stagnation. However, in a rapidly changing world and in view of the current social challenges in Europe, stagnation amounts to a serious threat to economic growth, social peace, the European governance model, as well as to the overall European Project as such.

As a contribution to a more positive and constructive discussion about the future of the European Union, we attempt to distil what can serve as a common denominator of social objectives in the EU. We derive our conclusions from European citizens' preferences as expressed in surveys, elections and already ratified agreements:

In particular, we rely on (1) survey data (Eurobarometer and International Social Survey Programme Data, ISSP since both provide the most complete and recent data that covers all EU member states); (2) positions of 242 national political parties in all member states as coded for the election

of the European Parliament in 2014 in scope of the “euandi” election preference monitor of the European University Institute in Florence<sup>1</sup>; and finally (3) on the goals and objectives contained in EU primary law. The logic of using surveys is obvious. Using coded party positions in combination with the related election results ensures a strong link of our question about key objectives or elements within the social dimension to democratically legitimized positions as does the analysis of EU primary law. The latter, in addition, is a valuable source for this analysis because it encompasses explicit formulations on objectives of the EU and by definition describes the intention of how things should be. Given the democratic nature of and processes in the member states having ratified the EU primary law it can furthermore be seen as incorporating the views of the European public. More details regarding our approach can be found in the appendix.

We combine these three sources, as they complement each other and help to balance each other’s biases. Hence, our vision for the social dimension in the EU includes those aspects for which data is available and focuses on those for which we could as a minimum criteria derive clear, unambiguous majorities and/or clear support in at least two of the three sources considered while not being contradicted by the remaining third source. With regard to survey data we applied as a minimum criteria for clear and unambiguous support approval rates of at least 2/3 (or 66 per cent) in at least 2/3 of the member states. Focusing on quasi-consensual aspects and those that enjoy supermajorities is a means to ensure that they represent objectives with relatively

stable support. This does imply that we might be ignoring niche aspects that could or should according to some be considered part of such a vision. The potential effect of such ignorance (if any) should, however, be small: it can be assumed that particularly relevant or important issues and those receiving very broad support should appear in a sufficiently visible way in either primary law, party manifesto analysis and/or surveys.

Although some clear conclusions can be drawn, it is striking how little data is available to undertake such an analysis of voters’ preferences on policy objectives. While most surveys focus on specific policy initiatives or measures (the “how” and not the “where to”) or the opinion about the welfare state and/or institutions’ performance and/or credibility as such, the coding of election manifestos is focused on identifying differences rather than shared objectives. Given the continuous soul-searching within the European Union to identify what binds this diverse community of nation-states and societies together, more efforts should be undertaken to generate data that enables us to identify those views we do share within the EU and not simply those we do not. This is especially important so that politicians on all levels of European governance can work together with the aim of overcoming the social crisis. They could do this more effectively if they started out from a shared basic understanding of what the people really want.

The findings of this paper are meant to serve as a basis for a shared vision for the social dimension in the EU in 2030 and as a goalpost for the design of policy measures aimed at realizing this vision. A clear vision is necessary to formulate policy for the medium term. Accordingly, the work of snv’s societal foresight project in relation to concrete policy will be based on these

<sup>1</sup> In most cases the coding of any given statement was based on a shared judgement of the scientists and the respective party officials.

findings as well. Whether such measures should be undertaken at EU or member state level is independent of the vision itself.

### III. Elements of an Empirically-Derived Vision for the European Social Dimension in 2030

Our research has identified the following five areas of the social dimension in which there is quasi-consensus or strong support across the EU.

#### 1. Inclusion: Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion

Inclusion means emancipating socially excluded groups by granting them access to participation in political, cultural and social life. It means becoming part of an ongoing societal conversation about the state and the future of the nation, which is why access to it is usually a constitutional right in Europe. Effectively granting inclusion to as many people as possible, however, remains a challenge for society as a whole – especially for those who cannot partake in the political, cultural and social life on their own, such as the poor and other marginalized groups.

*The inclusion of the socially excluded and the fight against poverty are endorsed by vast majorities across Europe. This is supported by a broad set of norms on inclusion in primary EU law.*

A full 80 per cent of Europeans polled regard the inclusion of the poor and socially excluded as important. In the context of the EU Strategy 2020 they deem this initiative as the second most important and hence even more important than the initiatives on a resource-efficient economy and on the strengthening of international competitiveness (Eurobarometer Autumn 2012). The fight against poverty and social

exclusion is also seen by a majority of 53 per cent of Europeans (in the period of 2007-2013) as the most important policy challenge to be tackled by the European Parliament, far ahead of other policy issues like economic, budgetary and fiscal policies, agriculture or climate change (Zalc 2013). In terms of a more specific question, 73 per cent of those polled agree to the target of reducing poverty by 25 per cent or even find this target to be too modest and in 23 member states more than 2/3 of those polled hold this opinion (with the exception of Cyprus [50 per cent], Finland [65 per cent] and Greece, Malta and Slovakia [each 63 per cent]) (Eurobarometer Autumn 2012).

In 22 EU member states respondents hold the opinion that their societies should emphasize social equality and solidarity as the top policy priority to meet major global challenges. It is the second-highest priority in the remaining six member states, namely Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Romania, and Sweden (Eurobarometer 2014).

These strongly favourable views on inclusion and the social and welfare state seem to change very little over time: comparing this data from 2012/2014 and the analysis of party positions from 2014 (see below) with data from 1992 and 2000 shows that majorities in the populations within the EU want to keep the range and scope of the social state unchanged (Eurobarometer 1992, Boeri/Börsch-Supan/Tabellini 2000).

There were no direct analogies for the survey questions in the coded data of the party manifestos. Still, the results of two related questions support the main results of the surveys: a clear, though relative, majority of votes cast (44.7 per cent over 35.9 per cent) and MEPs (301 over 285) are linked to parties that support the position that *member states should pay higher financial benefits to the*

*unemployed*. Checking for potential regional discrepancies it must be stated, however, that while in the ‘old’ member states the relative majority is equally clear as in the EU average, in the ‘new’ member states<sup>2</sup> parties that share this position are at a tie with those that disagree if measured in terms of votes cast for each camp (44,5 per cent for those in favour and 44,3 per cent for those against). An obvious signal is sent by the fact that *making it more difficult for EU nationals to accede to basic welfare benefits in EU member states other than their country of citizenship* is a clear minority position: only 26.3 per cent of all voters in the EU parliamentary elections 2014 voted for parties in favour of this position and these parties hold only 28.2 per cent of all seats in the European Parliament. Even if only looking at the net contributing countries<sup>3</sup>, parties in favour of this position received merely 35.8 per cent of the vote in the elections. In the old member states they gathered 30.9 per cent and in the new member states only 11.6 per cent in the elections to the European Parliament. This shows that inclusion in the sense of reducing poverty and social exclusion is indeed an important social concern and a policy aim shared across the EU.

EU primary law also supports inclusion as one of the central objectives of the EU, stating in Article 3 (3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) that the EU “shall combat

social exclusion and discrimination, and shall promote social justice and protection.” Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) binds the EU to “take into account requirements linked to the guarantee of adequate social protection” and “the fight against social exclusion” when “defining and implementing its policies and activities.” In the sense of non-discrimination, the inclusion objective also holds for the freedom of movement which “shall entail the abolition of any discrimination based on nationality between workers of the Member States as regards employment, remuneration and other conditions of work and employment” (Art. 45 (2) TFEU).

## **2. Intergenerational Justice: Retirement Provision and Consolidation of National Budgets**

Across Europe, retirement is accepted as a right. It is also supposed to guarantee the pensioners a minimum quality of life and continued access to the political, cultural and social life in their respective societies. This is to reward decades of personal contributions to society, and thus usually includes some sort of state support. Accordingly, retirement issues touch on questions of intergenerational justice, as does the question of the consolidation of national budgets, given the burden public debt implies for future generations.

*Combined, the data send a rather clear message that the level of retirement benefits or provision for retirement as well as the retirement age should stay as they are in the respective countries and be guaranteed, while there is an understanding amongst the respondents that this will imply cost. However, the message is equally clear that this cost may not burden retirees.*

<sup>2</sup> The new member states encompass all countries that joined the EU through and after the first eastward enlargement of 2004 (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Romania).

<sup>3</sup> As measured as the balance of contributions to and use of the cohesion funds, the following countries were net contributors in 2012: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom. In 2014 Ireland and Spain had already entered again the group of net contributors while Cyprus moved to the group of net beneficiaries.

*With regard to consolidating national budgets in order to reduce the debt burden, the findings are contradictory. This might be the result of the different contexts of the respective questions analyzed.*

Governments should save more today in order to prepare the national budgets for future higher levels of expenditure, due to the ageing of society. 76 per cent of those polled in the Eurozone are in favor of this kind of austerity, while 20 per cent are against it. In all but one member state (Greece with still 62 per cent approval) within the Eurozone, more than 2/3 of those polled were in agreement with this statement. At the same time there is an equally clear majority of 71% in the Eurozone against an increase of the retirement age, even if this aims at ensuring the sustainability of the pension system (both data: Flash Eurobarometer 386, 2013). Further studies, although more limited in the country samples, fit well into this picture: retirement benefits have become in relative terms more important since the Euro Crisis in an interesting, though small sample of countries (France, UK, Denmark – Diamond/Lodge 2013). And according to a study conducted well before the crisis in Germany, France, Italy and Spain in the year 2000, majorities in those countries had rejected a shrinking in range and scope of the social state, particularly in terms of retirement provisions (Boeri 2001). The study found, however, that there was an openness of majorities in this indicative group of studied countries for embarking upon different ways to provide and receive support for retirement.

Only a clear minority of European voters in the 2014 EU elections voted for parties in favor of cutting retirement benefits to consolidate national budgets (9.7 per cent) and these parties are represented by an

absolute minority of MEPs (13 per cent). Political parties against this position were able to garner 82.9 per cent of all votes cast in the last European election. In total those parties hold 563 seats in the European Parliament, 75 per cent of the total. Even though these parties received a smaller majority of votes in new member states (66,2 per cent) as compared to the old ones (84,7 per cent), the majorities are overwhelming EU-wide.

With regard to consolidating national budgets, 127 parties (having obtained 56.8 per cent of the vote in the EU 2014 elections) agree that the *EU should relax its austerity policy in order to foster economic growth* with only 67 parties in disagreement (that received a mere 28.1 per cent of the votes). This translates into 379 MEPs from parties in favor of more debt and 209 from parties against it. Parties supporting this position from EU member states that are net contributors (57.6 per cent) and net beneficiaries (54.8 per cent) obtained similar percentages of the vote in the EU 2014 elections.

In its Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR), the EU itself acknowledges the *right of the elderly to a life of dignity and autonomy*, and to participate in the social and cultural life of Europe (art. 25 CFR). Article 3 (3) TEU reinforces the objective of intergenerational justice, declaring that the EU should “promote [...] solidarity between generations.”

On the question of *consolidating the budget* EU primary law states that public deficits are to be avoided, and creates a system of oversight run by the Commission (Art. 126 (1) and (2) TFEU), as well as the Stability and Growth Pact (even though that treaty is not primary EU law).

### 3. Cohesion and Solidarity Between Member States

As much as a certain level of societal cohesion – for instance between socioeconomic groups or between generations – guarantees social justice and peace nationally, a similar argument is made in Europe for a minimum level of cohesion between the member states of the EU. This argument is much less ardent, to be sure, and mostly reduced to purely economic indicators. Still, working towards more inter-state cohesion is already today a legal responsibility of the European Union.

*Inter-state and inter-regional cohesion as an important objective is enshrined in EU primary law. The already existing instrument of European Cohesion Funds operationalizing this objective and their routine replenishment, as part of the member states' contributions to the European Union reassures this consensus. Finally, at least one additional and further reaching instrument, the Eurobonds, with the potential to create more inter-state cohesion, is supported by a majority of the European electorate.*

Article 3 (3) TEU establishes that the EU “shall promote economic, social, and territorial cohesion and solidarity between the Member States.” To this end, the EU has created a large Cohesion Fund alongside of the ESF (European Social Fund) and ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) as part of its wider (and explicit) cohesion policy. The freedom of movement for workers can also be interpreted as an embodiment of the idea of alignment of living conditions and inter-state cohesion, as it does not tolerate discrimination against EU citizens in other member states, affording them the same benefits and privileges (art. 45 TFEU). The alignment of living conditions across Europe is also a stated goal in other parts of EU primary law (e.g. art. 151 TFEU).

Just like the cohesion fund, approaches that lead to the sharing of liability amongst member states also stand for an understanding of the Union as a Union of solidarity. With this understanding, it is a rather clear message that those political parties in favour of the introduction of common bonds for the tackling of the sovereign debt crisis (Eurobonds) garnered, with 50.2 per cent of the votes in the 2014 EU election, a thin absolute but clear relative majority compared to parties opposed to this instrument (receiving only 31.2 per cent of the votes). With 40.2 per cent over 32 per cent of all MEPs, these parties also summon a relative majority in the European Parliament. This picture also holds true when checked for discrepancies between net contributors (50.6 per cent of votes cast for parties in favour of Eurobonds versus 37 per cent for those against) and net beneficiaries (49 per cent of votes cast for parties in favour of Eurobonds as compared to only 15.4 per cent for those against it) within the EU member states. However, among the larger and/or richer member states within the group of net contributors there are examples like Germany, where a relative majority (49.9 per cent as opposed to 20 per cent) voted for parties opposed to Euro Bonds while in the UK 2/3 voted for parties favouring Eurobonds.

### 4. Employment and Social Protection

Paid employment is the basis for a self-sustaining and autonomous lifestyle. In Europe today, work is also understood to be a source of self-worth and societal respect. To this end, measures are taken against exploitative or otherwise degrading work and for high levels of employment. These are the two most important rationales for state intervention in the labour markets.

*Employment is nearly unanimously regarded as one of the most important policy objectives, and often as the most important one. This holds true for the providing of sufficient work for those who depend on it for their income, as well as for increasing the employment rate at an EU-wide level. These findings are mirrored by the objectives specified in primary EU law.*

80 per cent of Europeans polled regard employment initiatives as important. In the context of the EU 2020 Strategy, they deem the importance of this initiative to be second to none other. In nearly all member states (with the exception of Germany and Estonia), employment is seen as the most important policy challenge (Eurobarometer 2014, EBS 413).<sup>4</sup> On a more specific level, 77 per cent think that an *employment target of 75 per cent of the population* within working age is too low (Eurobarometer Autumn 2012).

When it comes to the *regulation of workers' protection* as part of social security, however, the picture is inconclusive: from 2006 (71 per cent) through 2009 (equally 71 per cent) to 2011 (72 per cent) an overwhelming majority of Europeans agrees to the statement that work contracts should become more flexible to encourage job creation (Special Eurobarometer 2009 and 2011). However, in 2014 based on the coded election manifestos and election results, a thin absolute and clear relative majority of Europeans (52.3 per cent) without any significant regional discrepancies voted for political parties that reject a lowering of workers' protection regulation even if for the sake of fighting unemployment. Only

28.6 per cent voted for parties in favour of lowering workers' protection regulations.

Working towards full employment and social progress is enshrined in the central aims of the Union in EU primary law (art. 3 (3) TEU and art. 151 TFEU). Furthermore, according to Article 9 TFEU the EU shall "in defining and implementing its policies and activities [...] take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection [...] and a high level of education (and) training," which can also be understood as contributing to a high and durable level of employment.

## 5. Education

Education is key to development on the national as well as individual levels. In an increasingly knowledge- and technology-based economy with also increasingly fast innovation cycles continuous education is crucial for each individual's employability and for achieving high levels of employment on a societal level. Additionally in Europe, attaining high levels of education is seen as both a personal and civilisation-wide achievement and often as condition for upward social mobility.

*Universal basic education enjoys broad support by citizens across Europe. It is a particular interest of European citizens to support access to an effective quality education that leaves no one behind, a sentiment that corresponds with primary EU law.*

A supermajority of those polled believe that basic education should be universal, with a full 78 per cent supporting the position that the number of young people leaving school with no qualification should fall to 10 per cent (51 per cent agreeing) or even less (27

<sup>4</sup> Although not of importance for the definition of the empirically founded vision of the social dimension, it is striking that, additionally, in all but three Member States, more than 50% of the respondents would want to see more European decision-making to help tackle unemployment (Eurobarometer 2014, EBS 413).

per cent agreeing). The two lowest rates of approval for this position can be found among people in Greece and Malta (each 67 per cent agreeing). In all other member states this position is shared by 70 per cent or more of those having been polled. This equals a call for universal primary and secondary education.

When it comes to higher education this strong basis of support weakens among Europeans. While still 48 per cent are of the opinion that at least 40 per cent of the people aged 30 to 34 should have a higher education degree or diploma, nearly the same percentage (37 per cent) finds this target to be too ambitious. Only within eight member states is there an approval rate of 2/3 or higher for such a higher education target among those polled. The highest rates of disapproval (“too ambitious”) can be found in Germany (60 per cent) and the Netherlands (68 per cent; all data from Eurobarometer Autumn 2012).

A high level of universal and vocational education is also a central aim of primary EU law (art. 9 TFEU). The Charter of Fundamental Rights declares a right to education, as well as the right to access vocational training and continuous education (art. 14 CFR).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Our research shows that there is a strong consensus in the European population for a clearly defined group of core elements for the social dimension in the EU:

- The EU-wide fight against poverty and social exclusion is endorsed by overwhelming majorities. This supports the approach to inclusiveness in primary EU law.
- Leaving the respective retirement age

and the level of retirement provision unchanged enjoys solid support. Despite a general understanding that this will imply cost, retirees should not, according to the public preference, bear the burden of such cost. At the same time, support for consolidating national budgets and reducing the debt burden as an element of intergenerational justice is much less clear.

- Inter-state cohesion as an aim is enshrined in EU law. While the instrument of cohesion funds is already well-established and backed, and routinely legitimized by their replenishment, at least one additional instrument with the potential to create more inter-state cohesion is widely supported by the European electorate: Eurobonds.
- High employment rates throughout the EU is regarded as one of the most important objectives within the EU. This supports the general aims specified in primary EU law.
- EU-wide universal basic primary and secondary education as shown through near to zero school-drop-outs enjoys broad support by European citizens. It is a particular interest of European citizens and primary EU law alike to support access to an effective quality education that leaves no one behind.

Despite the markedly different social realities and differing welfare traditions in the EU member states, this basic consensus is robust and valid across national boundaries. Overall, respondents do not only care about the situation in their own

country but also those in others. That is, they are not just concerned about the labour market or poverty situation at home, but also about such situations in their peer countries. Individual characteristics, such as age or respondents' socioeconomic situation are much better predictors of policy preferences than national citizenship. On a nation by nation comparison the respective established types of welfare state in each of the countries seems to be more important than regional belonging or being part of the net contributors or net beneficiaries group within the EU. This broad convergence of preferences points towards a shared core of the social dimension in the EU. Therefore, rather than talking about an aggregation of European national publics, we can speak of a nucleus of a European demos.

We hope that establishing these elements of a social vision for Europe – derived not “top down” from the amphitheatres of high politics, but rather “bottom up” from the expressed preferences of the European citizenry – will be of use for others from across the political spectrum, think tanks, political actors and policy thinkers alike. We are convinced that this empirically derived nucleus of the vision of the social dimension in the EU provides a good orientation for policy development.

The main elements of the vision are kept at a rather high aggregate level rather than going into specifics. While a more fine-grained approach might be conducive to fine-tuning political measures, the broader objectives presented here help focus limited awareness, attention and resources to the core elements of a shared vision. Moreover, in digging deeper we could no longer rely strictly on the empirical evidence which concentrates on broader themes rather than very specific objectives.

At the same time, it is our hope that this paper might trigger or reinforce more data gathering (i.e. in the scope of the Eurobarometer), research and a discussion about where EU-citizens want to end up with regard to the social dimension in the EU in 2030. We hope that it will help to move the public discourse away from the immediate, away from the focus on limitations and lacking alternatives, and towards both the positive and the desired outcomes. This basis for a vision thereby provides a counterpoint to the common focus on the immediate cost and benefits of individual policy measures for individual member states. Short-sighted rent-seeking by too many country representatives in the EU could shift the discourse away from a common positive narrative, from ideals and ideas which have the power to unite and make Europe move forward towards a brighter future. The basis for a social vision presented here aims at refocusing attention to these (more long-term) common goals to the benefit of all EU citizens.

The core of a social vision in the EU described above can be understood as a basic consensus of the European citizenry in this policy field. It is profoundly political in nature, but it is not attached to any single worldview or ideology. It is “bipartisan” in that it reproduces most of the political spectrum. It is for this reason perhaps that the common denominator, presented here for a positive vision of the social dimension in the EU, is bound to leave many political actors and interest groups dissatisfied: to some the identified core elements will be too few and too narrow, while others will see it as too broad, given that it claims to be valid across the EU as a whole. Some will fear implicit consequences for handing over more power to the EU. Others again might argue that what the public seems to be

asking for is inconsistent in itself and simply unrealistic.

However, uneasiness and fear of these kinds should not be taken as excuses to fall back into routines and business as usual. The essentials of the vision are straightforward, and it is this clarity that offers a chance. Its aims and elements are few enough to provide the basis for a focused policy, while at the same time being ambitious enough to provide significant challenges and give those in power a great opportunity to exercise the responsibility they have been voted for. Accordingly, this core of a vision for the social dimension in the EU can and should serve as the basis for policy measures in the social field.

## Appendix: Methodological Details and Sources

In trying to distil what can serve as a common denominator of social objectives and elements of a shared vision in the EU, we based our analysis of European citizens' preferences on three types of sources:

1. Survey data (Eurobarometer and International Social Survey Programme Data, ISSP) given that we were looking for data that covers respondents' answers from all EU countries in a systematic and comparable way. Wherever we used Eurobarometer data for the years before the enlargement of the EU by Romania and Bulgaria, opinions from these countries are not taken into consideration. In using Eurobarometer data we checked for significant regional discrepancies in respondents' answers and, where we did find them, we reported them in this study. Otherwise it can be assumed that the vast majorities for a given position do exist not only in the EU-average but also in the vast majority of the member states respectively. We drew upon studies covering smaller samples of EU member states only to calibrate or illustrate our findings; as such, we highlight this accordingly in the study.
2. Positions of 242 national political parties as coded for the election of the European Parliament in 2014 in scope of the "euandi" election preference monitor of the European University Institute in Florence. The data has been generated by a combination of party self-placement and expert judgement on pre-defined political statements and/or questions (quite a few of them posed in trade-offs) in an iterative process of decision making between both sides regarding the coding of the respective party positions in order to generate a voting advice application. In this shared coding endeavour, 55 per cent of the coded 242 parties cooperated. The coding process itself went beyond the exclusive reliance on the current election manifesto and included also other primary party sources, or in cases where these did not exist (17 per cent of the overall sample), interviews or media coverage. The selection of the statements used for coding was explicitly oriented towards allowing for discrimination between parties (Garzia/Trechsel/De Sio 2014). With positions of 242 parties coded in the context of the EU 2014 election, the dataset provides near to complete coverage of parties having run for seats in the European Parliament with (according to repeated opinion polls) chances to win at least one seat. For the purpose of this study we analysed how many of the parties running for parliament were in favour of or opposing the respective statements, potentially implying positions on the vision for the social dimension in the EU. We combined the coded data on party positions from the euandi-Project with the votes and seats gained by each party in the 2014 EU elections, allowing us to understand what share of Europeans having cast their votes did so for parties in favour of or against a given policy statement, and how many MEPs in total could be expected to support a given statement due to their party affiliation. Also with regard to this data we looked systematically for regional and discrepancies in opinions along the lines of net contributors and net beneficiaries within the EU. We are aware that due to the limited voter turnout in the 2014 elections for the European Parliament this source does not provide complete coverage of the current preferences of the EU citizens as a whole. However, due to the fact that within the group of non-voters the most marginalized and poor parts of the

population tend to be overrepresented and that based on polling results it is exactly this group that tends to hold more favourable views towards social objectives than other parts of the population we consider it safe to assume that the results of the elections with regard to our focus are indeed sufficiently representative to serve as a valuable source. Hence we conclude that the voter turnout does not challenge the findings of this paper.

3. With regard to primary EU law we analysed the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR).

Each of these sources has advantages and in-built biases. By combining them we attempt to benefit from the advantages while balancing the biases:

- Surveys use pre-formulated questions and a limited number of possible answers. Answers are usually given in a spontaneous fashion and tend to reflect the participants' immediate contexts and/or their present situation.
- Political manifestos look further into the future by proposing the visions of the respective political party to voters. Election decisions are taken by the voters in a less spontaneous and more deliberate manner than the answers given in surveys. Also, the "euandi" project poses questions to parties that tend to be framed in ways that stress differences instead of commonalities between their positions and in form of policy trade-offs. This helps potential voters to identify their own election preferences but leads to structurally lower approval rates than in surveys which often ask about the importance of political aims and public goods without evaluating the cost of these decisions.
- EU primary law describes a vision of the state that the EU should be in or strive for, especially when describing goals and objectives of the EU. It is the result of extensive discussions, unanimous decisions and ratifications, which all antecede implementation. At the same time, the described goals and objectives tend to be less specific than issues in election manifestos or surveys.

In using these sources we looked for information, statements and opinions on the elements of the social dimension as described in section I of this paper. In the study, we documented only those elements for which we found support of broad majorities or respectively clear formulations in primary law in at least two of the three types of sources. Hence, whenever there were only thin majorities in merely one of the sources considered, the respective opinion or statement did not enter into the nucleus of the empirically deduced vision of the social dimension in the EU that we attempt to describe in this paper.

We are aware that with exception of EU primary law, the sources do not intend to cover opinions with a time horizon of 2030. However, literature consulted on the volatility of public opinion on the welfare state does not indicate that we can expect major rapid changes in public opinion. In addition we tried to make up for this shortcoming by (i) con-

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sidering surveys and studies from different years and (ii) counting only those issues that enjoy nearly consensual support or overwhelming majorities, which, even if they change, would less likely lead to a majority position becoming a preference of a minority. Again, the methodological challenges we tried to address in our approach underline once more the need for more focussed research and data gathering on where Europeans want their countries and the EU to go with regard to the social dimension.

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## About the project EU Societal Foresight 2030

This is the first in a series of policy papers published by the project “EU Societal Foresight 2030” at stiftung neue verantwortung (snv), which aims at making suggestions for a strategic medium-term approach to the social dimension of the EU that is based on a bottom-up rather than a top-down setting of objectives. The rationale behind this focus lies in the understandable concentration in much of the political debate on the immediate challenges concerning the social dimension and other topics of relevance in the EU. This prevailing short-term approach, however, implies the danger of overlooking risks and opportunities that become clearer when taking a medium-term perspective. The project develops an empirically derived vision of the social dimension of the EU, undertakes an analyses of important trends and developments impacting on the social dimension in the medium term and describes future scenarios of the relevant economic, political, technological and cultural environment. Finally it evaluates the resilience of policy options and measures with regard to these scenarios in order to draw conclusions on what political initiatives should be embarked upon in order to contribute to the vision that has been deducted at the outset of the project becoming reality.

The views expressed in this article belong to the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the institution to which they are affiliated.

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