

RE-MAKING SOCIAL EUROPE AFTER THE GREAT RECESSION:
Actors, Networks, and Social Fields

Dissertation

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ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Zu Beginn des Jahres 2012 lag das Soziale Europa am Boden. Zwei Jahre Austeritätspolitik in den peripheren Mitgliedsstaaten, vor allem in Südeuropa, und die Einführung neuer strenger fiskalpolitischer Maßnahmen in der Eurozone hatten zu massiven sozialen Verwerfungen, zu hoher Arbeitslosigkeit und Armut, geführt. Vielen erschien die Europäische Union – und besonders die Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion (WWU) – als ein neoliberales Projekt, in dem Banken und Finanzmärkte auf Kosten von Bürgern und Wohlfahrtsstaaten gerettet wurden. Die Mitgliedsstaaten befanden sich auf einem unrettbaren Weg in den Abgrund. Doch bereits fünfeinhalb Jahre später – im November 2017 – verabschiedeten die Europäische Kommission, der Rat und das Parlament einen sozialpolitischen Meilenstein: die Europäische Säule Sozialer Rechte (ESSR). Wie war das möglich?

Diese Dissertation analysiert die Wiederherstellung des Sozialen Europa nach der Großen Rezession, in den Jahren 2012-2019. Dabei nimmt sie Politikinhalt, ihre rechtliche und institutionelle Ausgestaltung und Umsetzung und im Besonderen politische Akteure und ihre Netzwerke in den Blick. In Anlehnung an die Feldtheorie von Pierre Bourdieu untersucht sie das Soziale Europa als ein soziales Feld, in dem Akteure Konflikte austragen, wobei ihre Relationen bestimmt werden von spezifischen Ausprägungen ihres sozialen, kulturellen, und ökonomischen Kapitals. Weitere theoretische Bezugspunkte sind akteurszentrierte Perspektiven, die sich sowohl ab- wie auch zustimmend auf Bourdieu beziehen, sowie die Soziale Netzwerkanalyse. Die zentrale, die ganze Dissertation leitende Frage lautet: Warum und wie führte die Erneuerung des Sozialen Europas zur konkreten Form der ESSR?

Zu diesem Zweck untersucht die Dissertation drei Fallstudien, in deren Zentrum jeweils der Konflikt steht, ob eine Erneuerung des Sozialen Europa notwendig sei und in welcher Beziehung diese zu makroökonomischen und fiskalpolitischen Vorgaben der EU-Krisenbewältigung stehen solle. Die Auseinandersetzung um die soziale Dimension der WWU wurde 2012 von EU-Beschäftigungskommissar László Andor als Gegenentwurf zur Austeritätspolitik in Gang gesetzt. Die Debatte um eine Europäische Arbeitslosenversicherung begleitete die EU seit den ersten Entwürfen zur Währungsunion und wurde nach der Finanzkrise insbesondere von keynesianischen Ökonomen wiederbelebt und als sowohl sozial- wie auch fiskalpolitisch und makroökonomisch vorteilhafte Reform beworben. Der Aufschlag zur ESSR schließlich entstammte dem Versprechen des neuen

Präsidenten der EU-Kommission, Jean-Claude Juncker, die Sozialpolitik in den gleichen Rang wie die makroökonomische Krisenpolitik zu erheben.

Im Ergebnis unterscheidet sich das Soziale Europa nach der Großen Rezession von seinen Vorläufern, da es geprägt wurde durch die Polykrise von Kapitalismus, Demokratie und Europäischer Integration. Es verbindet den Ansatz des Ausgleichs sozialer und ökonomischer Politikinhalt mit einer moralischen und symbolischen Proklamation sozialer Rechte. Das Paradigma sozialer Investitionen tritt dahinter zurück und Versuche, fiskalische Solidarität in der EU zu verankern, sind weitestgehend gescheitert. Die parteipolitische Seite der Erneuerung ist entsprechend geprägt vom Aufstieg extrem rechter und populistischer Parteien sowie dem Niedergang der Sozial- und Christdemokratie. Auf dem Höhepunkt dieser Krisen, erschufen dieselben Akteure, die das Soziale Europa bereits in den späten 1990ern dominiert hatten, unter Einsatz ihrer politischen Macht und Netzwerke, einen Referenzpunkt für die Zukunft des Sozialen Europa: die Europäische Säule Sozialer Rechte. Die Frage, ob die ESSR als ein wichtiger Schritt auf unserem Weg zum Sozialen Europa oder als bloße Verschleierung eines neoliberalen europäischen Projektes gesehen wird, wird der offensichtliche umkämpfte Sachverhalt, der zentrale Konflikt im sozialen Feld des Sozialen Europas während der 2020er Jahre sein.

ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the year 2012, Social Europe was in ruins. Austerity in peripheral member states, especially in Southern Europe, and the adoption of new and strict fiscal consolidation policies in the euro area had led to massive social turmoil, to high rates of unemployment and poverty. Many viewed the EU – and the EMU specifically – as a neoliberal project which saved banks and financial markets at the cost of citizens and welfare states. Member states were on an unstoppable road-to-the-bottom. However only five and a half years later – in November 2017 – the European Commission, Council, and Parliament adopted a social policy milestone: the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). How was this possible?

This dissertation analyses the re-making of Social Europe after the Great Recession, in the years 2012-2019. It captures policies, their legal and institutional forms, and implementations, and in particular actors and their networks. Following Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields, the dissertation conceptualizes Social Europe as a social field of action, where actors fight over contested issues and where their relations are defined by specific configurations of social, cultural, and economic capital. Further points of reference are actor-centred perspectives, both in agreement and rejection to Bourdieu, and Social Network Analysis. The central guiding question is: Why and how did the social policy response to the Great Financial Crisis, the euro crisis, and the Great Recession culminate in the EPSR?

The dissertation investigates three case studies which are dominated by the conflict, how – if at all necessary – European social policy should relate to the European macroeconomic and fiscal governance regime. The debate on the social dimension of the EMU was started by European Employment Commissioner László Andor in 2012 to counter the dominant austerity policies. Proposals for a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme (EUBS) accompanied the EU since early designs for a monetary union in the 1970s and had been revived by Keynesian economists who argued that an EUBS would bring social, fiscal, and macroeconomic benefits. Finally, the EPSR built on Commission President Juncker's promise that social policy should equally be important as macroeconomic crisis management.

As a result, Social Europe after the Great Recession differs from its pre-crisis framework as it was informed by the polycrisis of capitalism, democracy, and European integration. Policy-wise, it is built on an approach of reconciling social and economic policies as well as

a moral and symbolic proclamation of social rights. The social investment paradigm is less important and the attempts to create a fiscal solidarity element have largely failed. Correspondingly, the politics of its renewal are informed by the rise of far right and populist parties and the decline of social and Christian democracy. At the height of these crises, actors who had already shaped Social Europe during the late 1990s used their political power and networks to create a new point of reference for Social Europe in the future: the European Pillar of Social Rights. The question, whether the EPSR will turn out as a crucial step on our road to Social Europe or as mere window-dressing of a neoliberal European project will be the manifest contested issue, the central conflict, of the social field of Social Europe during the 2020s.

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I INTRODUCTION: STUDYING SOCIAL EUROPE THROUGH MULTIPLE LENSES

Almost ten years after the Great Financial Crisis (GFC) hit European economies and societies, European Union (EU) leaders from the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament, in alliance with stakeholders and social partners, proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at the Social Summit in Gothenburg 2017. The EPSR proscribes social rights and principles to all EU citizens in three dimensions: (1) equal opportunities and access to the labour market, (2) fair working conditions, and (3) adequate and sustainable social protection. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proclaimed that this was a “landmark moment” and that the EPSR was suited to surmount the “biggest social crisis [Europe] has known for generations” (Juncker 2017). However, the EPSR was neither a logical or even a probable solution to the GFC, the Great Recession and the respective socio-economic consequences. Going back to the 2010, 2012 or even 2014, hardly anyone raised the need for a codification of social rights on a European level. Instead, policy debates in the field of Social Europe focussed on aspects such as the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) via an added social dimension or automatic fiscal stabilizers. Critics of the euro area crisis management claimed that European integration in the form of forced fiscal consolidation and austerity was in itself an obstacle to social welfare and cohesion and thus advocated for fiscal, monetary, and social disintegration. The institutional integrity of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) was put into doubt at various points and from multiple actors.

Additionally, the legal form of the EPSR has shed doubt on its effectiveness in combating social inequality and fulfilling its goals. The Presidents of Council, Commission and Parliament made an “inter-institutional proclamation” – a legal act that has no expression in EU law. Hence, legal scholars still debate whether the European Court of Justice (ECJ) is going to refer to the EPSR in future rulings and whether this will in fact impact the Court’s decisions. While the legal framework was innovative, the policy messages were not. Within the EPSR, one finds elements of labour market standards, social dialogue, social protection, and social investment (SI), expressed in the form of social rights. These issues ring familiar to insiders since social policy actors had addressed them since the late 1990s. The SI paradigm has been popular in EU social policy making for over twenty years. Notwithstanding the debates, if it has been implemented successfully in the member states,

key programmes as the European Employment Strategy (EES) feature SI language. Social rights were guaranteed by the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (Community Charter) or EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (EUCFR).

The dissertation will put the EPSR into context as one possible policy outcome for Social Europe after the GFC, which stood among other possibilities. It will answer the question, whether the crisis triggered change in the idea of Social Europe and how the Great Recession shaped debates in the field of European social policy by advancing these questions from an actor-centred perspective. Two other high-profile cases of Social Europe are discussed: the social dimension of the EMU and the European Unemployment Benefit Schemes (EUBS). The former debate took place between 2012 and 2015 and was the imminent reaction of European actors to the austerity-related social problems in countries such as Greece, Portugal, and Spain. Here, actors focussed on the imperfect institutional design of the euro area. Monetary integration was not accompanied by fiscal and social integration which resulted in macro-economic imbalances and socio-economic divergence between the member states.

The first possible path for the renewal of Social Europe emerged from the debate on the social dimension of the EMU which was started after a period of ad-hoc crisis management between 2010 and 2012. During this time, the prevention of sovereign debt default in affected member states was of the highest priority and took precedence over any concerns for Social Europe. This changed somewhat after European Central Bank (ECB) President Mario Draghi declared that he would do ‘whatever it takes’ to save the euro area on 26 July 2012 (ECB 2012). The ECB’s decision to buy state assets via the introduction of the Outright Monetary Transactions’ (OMT) framework protected EMU countries from financial market speculations and bought EU policymakers time to engage in mid-term planning (Hodson 2013). However, the reality of crisis management was still dominated by EU-imposed fiscal consolidation, such as the two-pack, six-pack and Fiscal Compact (de la Porte and Heins 2015, Verdun 2015). This European policy response prolonged the crisis, slowed the recovery, worsened social problems in many countries, and contradicted attempts to remake Social Europe. Philipp Heimberger (2017) showed that the double dip recession, i.e. the

return to negative growth rates in Southern Europe 2011-2013, was caused by a too early return to fiscal consolidation.¹

A second possible pathway for Social Europe consisted in the introduction of an EU- or EMU-wide unemployment insurance. The idea of a European unemployment insurance can be traced to the first proposals for the currency union during the 1970s, yet it has never become reality. During the Great Recession, many actors retrieved this concept and argued it would satisfy both the desire for fiscal sustainability and a recovery of Social Europe because of its double-function as a fiscal stabilizer for the euro area and as social policy which would create a direct link between European citizens and the EU.

With those possible, but in the end untaken, pathways in mind, the dissertation advances three questions: Why was the EPSR chosen over its alternatives and why did it not focus on the euro area thus neglecting the link between Social Europe and the euro crisis? Why were structural policies, specifically designed to target the imbalances in the euro area, such as the EUBS, side-lined in favour of a declaration of social rights? Why did Social Europe take the legal form of an inter-institutional proclamation, how do legal arguments feature in the debate on Social Europe, and what are the consequences for the policy outcome?

The dissertation answers these questions from the perspective of Social Europe as a social field of action, governed by social capital and its relations. Success and failure of policy proposals can be explained by the actor-relations within this particular field. While the debate on the social dimension of the EMU was advanced by various institutional actors in the EU such as the Council and the Commission, leading politicians never endorsed specific elements of the social dimension beyond the (relatively uncontroversial) introduction of non-enforceable social benchmarks. Unlike other similar vague terms as “completing banking union”, it was never translated into concrete legislative proposals. Vague terminology can be an advantage, because it may help to unite different views, but it is foremost an opportunity for various actors to add specific meaning to it, i.e., to define it. The question, whether actors can enforce their meaning and definitions depends on their field-position and their field-specific relations.

Additionally, powerful political networks allow for more successful political strategies. While the social-dimension-debate and the debate on the EUBS were started by actors on

¹ A positive assessment of austerity policies on the other hand can be found in Hans-Werner Sinn (2014).

the fringes of the social field , the EPSR was promoted by a powerful network with Commission President Juncker at the centre. He coordinated the policy (among others) with fellow long-term proponents of Social Europe Allan Larsson as special adviser and Maria Rodrigues as parliamentary rapporteur. They share many characteristics, which essentially define European capital, having held positions in national governments, parliaments, and European institutions as well as international and academic institutions as the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) or the International Labour Organisation (ILO). This power triangle shares a common history in building Social Europe: They have worked together on EU social policy for decades and had already occupied central policymaking positions during the late 1990s, when the EU adopted two of its landmark social policy tools: the European Employment Strategy (EES) and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC). Juncker, Rodrigues, and Larsson made sure to gather support for the EPSR before the first Commission communication was ever published. They used their central positions within the field of Social Europe to do two things: First, they gathered support and overcame opposition by offering a paradigm shift in EU policy and policy ownership and second, they made sure to define the EPSR in a way that was acceptable to critics, especially member state governments who feared an attack on their sovereignty. The social-dimension-debate, in turn, was started by an isolated outsider, Employment Commissioner László Andor, without institutional support or power structure. Thus, this dissertation offers an innovative theoretical perspective on Social Europe and European social and economic policy making in general: Social networks within a social field of action can explain policy outcomes better than theories of European integration or institutionalist theories. Liberal intergovernmentalist explanations of European integration through government preferences, which are either taken for granted or seen as a stand-in for national business-interests, deny the role of individual actors, relations, and discourses, while neo-functional theorising would have expected spill-over from monetary to fiscal and social integration. Finally, the emergence of the EPSR cannot be explained by established theoretical models for historical institutional change. The research on Social Europe in a framework of social capital and power in a contested field can show when, how, and why different sets of actors can successfully shape European policy and the outlook of Social Europe.

What is the story of this dissertation in one paragraph? Essentially this: The renewal of Social Europe in the form of the EPSR was the surprising product of an old network of similar-

mindful actors who had already shaped the politics, policy, and polity of Social Europe in the late 1990s. Other paths were possible and became more or less advanced yet have never gained centrality in the social field. In 2015, no-one would have thought that the EU would soon proclaim a pillar of social rights nor least whatever this would entail or mean in the long-term. The proponents of the EPSR did not simply react to a window of opportunity which presented itself, but used their immense social capital, their credibility, networks, and knowledge to create such a window themselves. The main purpose was not to adopt one or two specific legislative acts or to fix certain institutional problems but to create a new, long-lasting compromise which nested on two beliefs: For one, Social Europe was reality, the European social model was alive and the EU had always been as social union and for two, social policy in the EU needed to do better to fulfil its purpose and legislative actions on social integration were needed in the future.

This introduction will outline the conditions for social policy and the renewal of Social Europe from an inter-EU perspective. It will highlight the multiple crises at the heart of the European integration project and how they relate to Social Europe (Chapter I.1) before it provides a short overview over the last thirty years of European social policy (Chapter I.2). While by no means fully-fledged, this shall provide a rough understanding of the policies of social investment (SI), the politics of the Third-Way and the polity of soft law – all of which contribute to a specific ideational understanding of what Social Europe is – and what it is not.

I.1 OUTLINE: THE POLYCRISIS OF EUROPE: GREAT RECESSION, POPULISM, DISINTEGRATION

The GFC and its consequences have dominated European politics and European societies during the 2010s. Far from being a singular economic recession, a normal event within the ups and downs of the business cycle, it has instead changed the fundamental understandings and workings of the global economy (Tooze 2018). Before 2007, most European economies were growing and many decisionmakers and experts, including in the European Union and its member states, believed that rapid growth would lead to a catch-up process, where economically weaker countries would converge towards the economic powerhouses of the EU (Kok 2004). Likewise, the European integration process itself was not at doubt, despite some disintegration features.² The creation of the single market and the EMU as well as the subsequent development of the European social model and the enlargement process were all seen as developments towards progressive European unification. The European project rested on the pillars of peace, continued integration, economic prosperity, and liberal democracy. Market economies achieved and secured economic prosperity and provided the basis for strong welfare states. Leaving all varieties and diversities aside, the European economic and social model preferred markets to state intervention and saw the main trigger for social welfare in economic growth and supply-side economics. The orthodox “Washington consensus” (Williamson 1993) was the guideline for economic policymaking (Fitoussi and Saraceno 2004; 2013, Lütz and Kranke 2014).³ The economic system was stabilized by a model of representative democracy featuring both the strong rule of law and a stable and sustainable (Western) European party system. Before 2007, almost all (Western) European societies were dominated by two main political parties on the centre-left and centre-right respectively, which aligned with either the Party of European Socialists (PES) or the European People Party (EPP). Those parties and political alliances had exclusively nominated the heads of governments in major European countries such as France, Germany,

² Majorities in France and the Netherlands voted against the proposed Constitution for Europe in 2005 which brought the ratification process to an end. The modified Treaty of Lisbon was subsequently ratified without popular vote in all countries but Ireland. Here, the ratification failed in June 2008 and only passed, when a second referendum was held in October 2009.

³ Many critics refer to these set of supply-side and market-making policies as “neoliberal”. I will refrain from using the term neoliberalism as an analytical tool since it has become so normalized in the public debate that its meaning and explanatory value from the perspective of the social sciences can be doubted. Often, unfortunately, the term is used to describe policies that the authors disagree with.

Italy, or Spain in the post-war era. Taken together, the respective parliamentary groups had had a majority in every European Parliament election prior to 2019 (Hobolt 2019).

Since 2007 however, the stable pillars of the European project have undergone significant, some might say dramatic, changes. The term ‘Great Recession’ has come to use to merge the various yet interconnected developments that can be observed not only in Europe, but also in the United States of America (USA) and distinct parts of the world. Obviously, the terminology refers to the Great Depression of 1929, which had the greatest possible impact on politics and societies in Europe and the USA (Eichengreen 2014). The rise of National Socialism or the politics and policies of the New Deal are only the two most well-known results, for which the Great Depression was a catalyst. In short, the Great Depression changed the political landscapes, the economic order and long-term voter alignments around the globe. It turned peace into war and created the political landscape for international co-operation after 1945. Institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the Bretton-Woods-System, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) etc. are some of the long-term consequences (Cesarano 2006, Ghosh and Qureshi 2017). Meanwhile, the Great Depression changed economic thinking both from an academic standpoint and from a government perspective. The failure of market liberalism, the necessity of an interventionist and welfare state, and the competitive advantage of mixed economies had become common knowledge in the decades after World War II (White 2012). The reference to a Great Recession must therefore go beyond economic definitions of an economic recession⁴ and must imply a much broader change in society. Many authors have adopted Jean-Claude Juncker’s narrative of a “polycrisis” (Juncker 2016) to analyse the state of the European project (Ágh 2017, Meissner and Schoeller 2019, Zeitlin, Nicoli and Laffan 2019). The perception that the EU is in a permanent state of multiple crises, however, is not new: A recent study portrayed the EU to be stumbling from crisis to crisis of its own making. Time and time again, EU leaders would use real problems to create narratives of existential crisis (Cross 2017:5-9). The novel aspect of the polycrisis can be found in the high degree of politicization across policy fields which can result in political deadlocks in the consensus- and compromise-orientated EU institutional framework (Zeitlin, Nicoli and Laffan 2019: 964-966). The Great Recession has featured at least three major crises: economic, political and consequently a crisis of European

⁴ A single definition of an economic recession does not exist but a frequently used rule of thumb defines it by the occurrence of two successive quarters with negative GDP growth (Abberger and Nierhaus 2008).

integration itself or to put it more directly a crisis of capitalism, a crisis of democracy and a crisis of the EU as a constitutional project and a European state in the making, defined by a move towards an ever closer union (Mertens 2018:82, Offe 2015, Wissel 2015).

Correspondingly, there are three important policy documents which outline the European response to this polycrisis: The Four Presidents' Report (van Rompuy et al. 2012), the Five Presidents' Report (Juncker et al. 2015), and the White Paper on the Future of Europe (European Commission 2017). Each of these documents was produced by actors on the highest level of EU politics and consist of both reflection on the current state and past developments as well as policy visions for the future which should go beyond day-to-day politics. They include timelines for the future development of the EU and EMU which outline steps towards further EMU integration. All three initiatives were meant to engage European institutions, social partners, and civil society on the future of EMU and can serve as guidelines, organizing tools, and points of reference towards the debate on Social Europe. The Four Presidents' Report was published as an interim report in June (van Rompuy 2012) and as a final report in December 2012 (van Rompuy et al. 2012)⁵ after the completion of crisis consolidation policies including the EFSF and ESM, the Fiscal Compact, the two-pack and six-pack. It is a roadbook towards a genuine Economic and Monetary Union and reflects on the difficulty to align national and European politics on financial, fiscal, monetary, and economic policy and the EMU's need for a stronger democratic legitimacy. The strengthening of EMU and the achievement of high levels of global competitiveness are seen as a prerequisite for social welfare and the European social model, yet a social dimension for EMU is not a building bloc in itself. Meanwhile, concepts such as the pooling of common-debt, fiscal integration and "different forms of fiscal solidarity" speak to social policy issues (van Rompuy 2012).

The Four Presidents' Report was prepared by Council President Herman van Rompuy who consulted with the respective presidents of the European Commission, José Barroso, the ECB's President Mario Draghi, and the head of the Eurogroup, Jean-Claude Juncker. The Five Presidents' Report meanwhile differed insofar that it included Martin Schulz to represent the European Parliament and was prepared by new Commission President Juncker. Juncker's ascent to the Presidency of the Commission following the *Spitzenkandidaten*

⁵ Both reports are titled "Towards a genuine economic and monetary union", leading to some confusion.

process and the return of “economic growth and confidence” (Juncker et al. 2015:4) to the EU mark the background of this report. While the chapters still headline economic, financial, fiscal, and political integration, social policy issues have become more prominent following Juncker’s commitment towards the EP to build an EU with a “triple-A on social issues” (European Commission 2014). The corresponding chapter mentions the need for shock-absorption mechanisms as well as a social protection floor.

Finally, the EU White Paper on the future of Europe took a different approach. In the wake of Brexit, the rise of the far-right and Eurosceptic parties and populist challenges to the status quo, it outlined five different scenarios for the future of Europe and the euro area – from further integration via muddling through as before to planned disintegration. However, the outline makes it clear that the authors do not believe the latter to be realistic or desirable. Instead, the White Paper follows the same integrationist policy vision and continues to outline policy steps towards completing EMU by 2025. It deviated from the two previous reports, since it focussed on the EU-proper, and not only the EMU, and thus covered a wider array of policy fields including foreign policy, defence, and migration (European Commission 2017d). Taken together, these three documents provide a guide for manoeuvring the social field of Social Europe during the Great Recession. They provide all actors with a reference point for their own positioning and are often cited as a reason to get engaged in policy debates. For researchers interested in reconstructing the social field of Social Europe, they are consequential yard sticks as they structure the field as time progresses.

I.1.1 The economic crisis

The 2010s have been characterized by the most devastating economic crisis since the Great Depression. What started as a financial crisis provoked by cheap credit and financial bubbles, especially in real estate markets, transformed into a sovereign debt crisis in many countries, which affected the EMU as a whole. The economic crisis of the European Union has both been ‘long in the making’ and massively delayed in comparison to the economic crisis in the USA. How is that possible? The argument that the euro crisis is a result of long-term trends points to the incomplete institutional architecture of the EMU, into which the EU member states joined at the beginning of the 21st century. While the currency was standardized, the currency union lacked a common economic, fiscal, and social policy as well as a unified

regulatory approach for banking and labour markets (Krugman 2013a, Scharpf 2016, Tooze 2018:93). The only established institutional actor with the clear policy mandate of price stability was the ECB.⁶ According to mainstream economic theory, the ECB's task can be summarized as follows: Interest rates should be cut, when the economy is in a bust period and should be raised, when the economy is booming. However, business and financial cycles among euro area countries were not synchronised, which made it harder for the ECB to decide on the right interest rates (Eichengreen and Bayoumi 2017, Enderlein et al. 2016, Franks et al. 2018). This is the reason why the EU had the crisis coming. The argument that the euro crisis has been delayed on the other hand is informed by the European crisis response in 2007, or better to say: the lack thereof. Many national governments of EU member states reacted as they rescued failing banks and adopted stimulus packages, yet on the European level actors did not regard the GFC as a reason to act beyond the capacity of the nation state. As a whole, Europeans, especially the Germans and then Prime Minister of Luxembourg Jean-Claude Juncker, disposed the crisis as a mainly American phenomenon (Tooze 2018:187).

The former IMF economist Ahskan Mody, who was responsible for Ireland's rescue programme in 2011, has highlighted the different reaction of the ECB and the US central bank Federal Reserve (Fed) in the beginning of the crisis (Mody 2018). While the Fed immediately started to cut interest rates in October 2007, the ECB sustained the relative high income-rate level of 4 percent until June 2008. Then, counter-intuitive to conventional economic wisdom, the interest rate went up, before the ECB finally decided to lower rates by mid-September 2008 – almost a year later than the Fed in the USA. Consequently, the ECB interest rates stayed about 3 percentage points higher, before the Fed hit rock-bottom in December 2008. The European approach can neither be explained by economic performance – inflation rates and industrial production show no significant difference to the USA – nor by the different mandates for the ECB and the Fed. Instead, the different crisis responses were rooted in different perceptions of the nature and depth of the economic crisis at hand. On the one hand, the Fed feared an enormous loss of wealth and a downward spiral of less frequent economic activity, underconsumption and unemployment. The rapid decrease in interest rates should stimulate the economy to its fullest and prevent that

⁶ Recently, Jens van't Klooster and Nik de Boer (2022) have highlighted the second but equally binding ECB mandate to support the general economic policies of the EU. They argue that the ECB has neglected this second objective for much of the 2000s and 2010s.

development. The ECB on the other hand interpreted the crisis in 2007 as temporary and argued it would only affect the euro area economy as far as it led to a lack of liquidity between banks. The far greater economic problem, according to the ECB, was the threat of rising inflation and an upward spiral of rising wages and prices. Consequently, the ECB economic outlook was relatively positive at the end of 2007 – at the very same time the US economy was closing in on collapse (Mody 2018:198-201). Even at later stages, the ECB did not change its perception and its general approach towards the crisis and didn't engage in Quantitative Easing (QE)⁷ unlike the Fed or the Bank of England who kept interest rates at (almost) zero after the beginning of 2009. Still, in the midst of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, the ECB decided to ignore its very existence (Mody 2018:225). The European response to the crisis from 2007 to 2009 has been one of denial. Neither the ECB nor most politicians accepted the fact that they needed to implement a drastic and quick policy response to tackle the crisis and prevent a second Great Depression. Instead, they relied on business as usual and were more afraid of overstimulation and inflation than of a prolonged recession. In October 2008, the European Commission charged a top-level group of economists to evaluate the crisis and propose policy solutions, the Larosière Committee, named after former IMF director and governor of the National Bank of France, Jacques de Larosière. In February 2009, the group delivered its report, which blamed the economic crisis on low interest rates and loose monetary policy (Larosière 2009:7). Consequently, the report emphasised the need for new or enhanced regulatory competences on European and international level to supervise, restrict and sanction national policies that could lead to high levels of private and public deficits. The Larosière group and the European Commission argued that the economic crisis spilled over exogenously to the EU, namely from US housing markets, and identified holes in the regulatory framework of the EU single market, but they did not find a problem with the euro area architecture or the EU economic governance per se. Even as the severe nature of the crisis became all too clear in late 2009, the European policies did little to follow the American example. The incomplete EMU haunted European decision-makers, so that responses to the Greek and Irish default in 2010 were limited to the smallest common denominator. Bailout programmes were put into place, but an accompanying EU stimulus package was out of question. The narrative of national

⁷ QE is a form of monetary policy where the central bank buys sovereign bonds on the secondary market to stabilize refinancing conditions.

responsibilities was still dominant, despite the clear signs of a genuine European recession (Mody 2018).

Yet, starting in 2010, the severeness of the crisis could no more be neglected. Many countries faced severe financing problems and suffered from a double dip recession. The slow growth trend in 2009 and 2010 did not continue but was followed by new periods of GDP decline between 2011 and 2013. This trend was likely caused by the EU's and member states' priority given to fiscal consolidation and austerity (Heimberger 2017). Famously, Vivien Schmidt characterized European Union officials in the years 2010-2012 as 'ayatollahs of austerity' (Schmidt 2015b:41). The later chapters of this thesis will highlight the socio-economic developments of 2012-2017 in greater detail, but it is evident that the effects have been long-term. Many countries have struggled or failed to reproduce pre-crisis levels of economic performance a decade after the Great Recession hit Europe. The euro area as a whole did recover, but much slower and at a lower level than the USA, Asian countries or even the same countries in the years after the Great Depression (Mody 2018:392-93). The most severe and most lasting outcomes of the economic crisis were the divergent socio-economic growth and welfare experiences which relate back to their sectoral composition. In short, countries with strong export-driven growth models such as Germany and the Nordics now experience moderate levels of growth and low levels of unemployment, while countries with demand-driven growth models (more or less all Southern member states) are stuck with high unemployment, high debt, and low growth (Baccaro and Pontusson 2016, Gräbner et al. 2020:665-66).

I.1.2 Political crisis: Populism and the end of the two-party system

The crisis of European politics is often subordinated to a narrative of a 'populist surge' (Mudde 2016:25). In this interpretation, parties outside 'old' (West) European party systems have gained significant number of votes in regional, national, and European elections and have subsequently either entered government or have influenced government policy from the opposition benches. The European party systems are less and less characterized by strong centre-left and centre-right (Social Democratic and Christian Democratic or conservative) parties. Instead, they have become more diverse within countries and across countries. As a consequence, coalition-building has become more complicated, and the stability of a political system has been put into question.

With the rise of populist movements, research output on populism, too, has increased. This makes it relatively complicated to properly define populism and to separate it from similar, but different developments. Long-term populism scholars Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser have provided a common ideational explanation (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). They argue that populists divide society into two homogenous groups: ‘the pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elites’. Populism is defined by challenging who is in power and their legitimate claim to the power more than by what is to be done with that power. Accordingly, the disruptive political style is at the heart of populism, while policies are relegated to second-order problems (Inglehart and Norris 2019:3-5). In this sense, populist parties can emerge on the left or on the right, where most European populist parties are, but can also be situated in the political centre. An example for the latter is the Italian Five Star Movement (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). While the challenge to power and the offer of a political alternative is the essence of democratic politics, populist parties deviate from mainstream politics because they denounce both parties in government and in opposition as members of a secretive and illegitimate political cartel, which holds power against the will of the people. Other long-established institutions as independent courts and public media are often a part of this corrupt elite in populist narratives. This definition implies that some European countries currently have or had majorities of populist parties in parliament and subsequently in government. Examples are the Polish PiS, which came into power in Poland in 2015 (Stanley and Czeński 2019), Syriza in Greece which, too, gained office in 2015 (Mavrozacharakis, Tzagkarakis and Kotroyannos 2017), and the Italian Lega and Five Star Movement, which build a coalition government from 2017 to 2019 (Emanuele, Santana and Rama 2022). Counting the percentage of populists in the European Parliament is more difficult, since some populist parties sit with mainstream non-populist groups. Hungary’s Fidesz party has remained a member of centre right EPP until March 2021, even though its political style has been populist since its return to national government in 2010 (Batory 2016). Nonetheless, the European parliamentary elections of 2014 and 2019 have seen an increase in Eurosceptic and populist parties (Hernández and Kriesi 2016, Hobolt 2015, Hobolt and De Vries 2016, Treib 2014).

Two different explanations exist to explain the electoral success of populist parties. Political scientists debate, whether ‘culture’ or ‘economics’ drives the populist vote. The latter argue that economic factors such as globalization, technological change, trade liberalisation and the flexibilization of labour markets have created a social base for populist politics, while

the former point to secular trends such as the diffusion of progressive values as explanatory conditions for a conservative backlash which expresses itself through populist movements.⁸ With the literature on populism expanding, especially after the Brexit and Trump votes, two works are discussed here as standard bearers of these explanations: Dani Rodrik's widely cited paper makes the case for economic anxiety (Rodrik 2018), while Pippa Norris' and Ronald Inglehart's latest book represents the cultural tradition (Inglehart and Norris 2019). Rodrik (2018:26-27) argues that "hyperglobalization" leads to economic anxiety and insecurity, which can be exploited by populists. The particular narratives and discourses populist parties have available within a specific social context then determine the specific form of populism (left/right/unclear). Hence, Rodrik distinguishes between the demand side of populism, which is rooted in globalization, the Washington consensus, and which is identical around the globe and the supply side of populism, which can take specific forms. Accordingly, he explains the success of left-wing populism in Greece and Spain with the availability to blame outside elites (IMF, European Commission, banks) for economic problems at home. Far right populism in Sweden or Hungary on the other hand is explained by the salience of discourses around immigration.

Inglehart and Norris (2019:32-35) express the opposite view that populism is instead rooted in cultural attitudes. In short, they challenge Rodrik's analysis that economic anxiety is the root cause for populism. Instead, long-term structural changes in society (e.g., the adaption of socially liberal and progressive values) have left behind certain segments of society who react in a conservative backlash. Their explanation puts weight to the fact that gender, education, and age serve as better predictors, whether a person might vote for populist parties than their individual economic position. A shift towards post-materialist and socially liberal values since the 1970s in all Western societies have left behind cohorts and groups who were either born and socialised before these values became dominant or live outside the cultural spaces that (re-)produce those values. Populist parties could then react to that demand for traditional values and could use salient political issues to channel it into votes. While socio-economic factors are far from irrelevant, they are of secondary importance in explaining the

⁸ In a recent study on the German far right vote and anti-pandemic protests, Amlinger and Nachtwey (2022:302-03) find that individual experiences of poverty cannot explain populist vote. Cultural and economic factors are deeply interwoven.

populist success in comparison to variables such as age cohort and relative social status (Inglehart and Norris 2019:166).

This debate on explanations behind the populist phenomenon might seem irrelevant or at least overblown, as this book does not mean to elaborate on populism, but there is an important point to be made. This research – as all research – does not happen in a bubble or an ivory tower. Instead, a variety of political actors in the decision-making field are receptive to research on populist parties and movements. The question, whether populism is presented as a result of economic policies or as a societal and mainly generational development, has effects on the way actors react to it. Politicians at least care for politics. While both explanations for populism vary significantly, they agree that populism is a long-term phenomenon. The GFC is neither responsible for the formation of populist attitudes in the population nor for the emergence of populism as a political force in European politics. Nonetheless, it might serve as a catalyst for the emergence of new populist movements and it is relatively safe to argue that Syriza would not have become the strongest party in the 2015 Greek elections, if not for the GFC and the period of austerity that followed.

Yet, the crisis of European politics goes far beyond the rise of populism and the far right. Electoral politics is a zero-sum game: When someone wins, someone else must lose. Centrist political parties, have significantly lost support during the decade that followed the GFC (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). Most significantly, social democratic parties have lost elections and have come close to irrelevance in some European countries as France, Greece or the Netherlands.⁹ Neither the French Party of Socialists, the Greek PASOK and the Dutch PvdA achieved more than 10% of the vote in the last national election and are currently in government or even the strongest opposition party (Greek Ministry of Interior 2019, Kiesraad 2021, Ministère de l'Intérieur et des Outre-Mer 2017; 2022). This trend has been so wide-spread and undeniable that a new term has been coined to describe it: 'Pasokification' (Cuperus 2018). This term describes a situation, in which social democratic parties are challenged both from the left by populist newcomers and from the right. While the former attracts young professionals in urban areas, the latter targets voters from more rural areas and with lower educational attainment (Cuperus 2018:185-86). It is unclear, how

⁹ This has been written under the impression of the social-democratic experience during the 2010s. As of 2022, a similar chapter could be written about the crisis of the West European mainstream right (esp. Christian Democracy) which finds it increasingly complicated to carve out political space between centrist (socially) liberal parties and the far right

this will affect the future of European democracies, but some scholars fear it to be threat to the democratic order of Europe (Berman 2016, Berman and Snegovaya 2019). Some countries may develop functional equivalents for social-democratic parties, as has been suggested in the cases of La République En Marche (LREM) (Brandal and Bratberg 2021) and Syriza (Katsambekis 2019) but the transformation of the European party system remains a fact. That means that the way of doing politics should not be expected to stay the same.

Finally, the GFC and the aftermath has challenged the political systems of Europe in a few more ways which are only broadly mentioned here. First, a decrease in trust in all public institutions could be observed during the crisis years. Especially, European institutions such as the ECB and the European Commission, but also national governments, were subject to public mistrust (Armingeon and Ceka 2014, Roth, Gros and Nowak-Lehmann D 2014, Schmidt 2015b, Van Erkel and Van Der Meer 2016). The economic adjustment programs have undermined public support for democracy in almost all EU member states (Armingeon, Guthmann and Weisstanner 2015).

Second, the democratic mandate of elected governments was challenged. It is easy to argue this point with reference to countries that were subjected to consolidation measures by the Troika, but it is even more striking that so-called ‘technocratic’ governments took over government business in two other countries at critical points: in the Czech Republic 2009 and in Italy 2014. Technocratic governments have weak, if any, links to political parties and usually lack electoral majorities. Therefore, they need to draw legitimacy from outside sources. Caramani (2017) has argued that technocracy shares some characteristics with populism in its critique of representative democracy. Both define a unitary interest to which legitimate opposition is impossible. The emergence of technocratic styles of government during the crisis in European countries is an often-overlooked feature of a changed political landscape. It is contrasted by a development of politicisation of European politics (Bürgin 2018, Hartlapp 2017, Peterson 2017, Rhinard and Nugent 2019).

While politics is competition, aggregation of plurality and allocation of values, populism and technocracy see society as monolithic with a unitary interest (Carmani 2017:64). While populism and technocracy aim at discovering the common good, parties compete to define it. Both populism and technocracy do not conceive of a legitimate opposition as far as that would involve conceiving of “parts” being opposed to the interest of the whole. In the case of populism, plurality is reduced to the opposition between people and elite. In the case of technocracy, plurality is reduced to the opposition between right and wrong. In the former,

opposition is corrupt; in the latter it is irrational. Accordingly, Jan-Werner Müller has argued that populism and technocracy were mirror images of each other which diminish the room for policy debates as there are only correct and incorrect policies, right or wrong representations of the general will (Müller 2014:490).¹⁰

It is important to acknowledge that this debate matters greatly beyond the academic debate, because it plays out during the populist surge. Politicians and policymakers are not only object, but also subject to the debate who have those two different explanations for populism available and will likely integrate them into their strategic messaging. Parties, NGOs and organisations, which are broadly on the political left, i.e., in favour of redistribution and an extension of social policies, will likely feel more inclined to accept the hypothesis that populism is caused by globalization and deregulation. Many authors implicitly agree with the perception that globalization, economic inequality, and the change in the political landscape are part of the same development.

I.1.3 The crisis of European Integration

The decade since the GFC includes the most obvious sign of European disintegration to date: a member state that decides to leave the EU altogether. However, the decision of UK voters in June 2016 to exit the EU does not stand alone but signals a general unwillingness and mistrust towards further integration, which pre-dates the crisis and extends to different regions. The prolonged and ever-escalating conflicts between the European Commission and the governments of Poland and Hungary over the rule of law embody disintegration patterns (Webber 2018). The European integration in the 21st century can be understood as a double movement between integrationist and dis-integrationist developments. Enlargement in Eastern Europe and the *Lisbon Agenda* and *Europe 2020*, both broadly designed to foster cohesion and a similar economic and social model in the EU, are indicators of attempted integration. The failure to establish a European constitution, referenda, in which majorities of the population voted against further integration, and the very existence and perseverance of Eurosceptic parties present the case for disintegration. The picture looks similar during euro crisis as Zeitlin, Nicoli, and Laffan argue that the phrase “that ‘integration advances

¹⁰ Recently, scholars have discussed whether parties and political movements such as M5S may be characterized as techno-populist as they combine both technocratic and populists features and positions (Bickerton and Accetti 2021).

through crises' appears to be simultaneously confirmed and rejected" (Zeitlin, Nicoli and Laffan 2019:964). Institutional evolution and political fragmentation happen alongside each other.

Hence, European disintegration should be understood as an open-ended process and not as a pre-defined outcome, e.g. the return to nation-state Europe, and has as such always been a (neglected) part of the European integration process (Rosamond 2016:868). Integration and disintegration do not follow each other as historical periods but exist beside each other in a messy reality. The EMU has always featured both dimensions and should not be understood as a tool of either integration or disintegration (Hooghe and Marks 2009). While the creation of a monetary union is without doubt a step towards European integration, the fact that some member states elected not join the EMU hints towards disintegration. The response to the Great Recession which included EMU-exclusive institution-building in the form of the EFSF and the ESM has accelerated this dynamic (Chiti and Teixeira 2013:694). Since the beginning of the crisis, the debates on Grexit have become the most obvious indicator of disintegration tendencies (Scharpf 2015b). The idea that Greece (possibly alongside other South European countries) should leave the EMU has been heavily discussed in countries such as Germany and Greece itself, but it has also been translated into the United Kingdom's discourse on EU membership (Wodak and Angouri 2014:420-21).

In recent years, the term "differentiated integration" has become popular to describe the EU's future development (Leuffen, Rittberger and Schimmelfennig 2013). It postulates that some member states will pursue further integration on their own without the need or duty of every other country to go along. They might make use of existing EU institutions or develop new ones to fulfil additional tasks. Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2019:1175) attribute differentiated integration to economic, cultural, and political heterogeneity and argue that differentiation has been a viable strategy to break deadlock in negotiation and to solve issues by tabling them. Various terms are associated with this concept: Stemming from an institutional economic point of view, it has been argued that various intra-EU groups of member states could pool their resources to create club goods, making the EU essentially a 'club of clubs' (Majone 2014:321), which overlap and change. Theories of multispeed Europe assume that a group of member states decides to integrate in a specific policy field by defining rights and duties. Other member states may join, as soon as they meet certain criteria. The Europe à la carte approach, finally, does not demand member states to participate, but let's them pick certain benefits of membership (Jensen and Slapin 2012:781).

Various scholars have tried to capture the dynamic of European integration and disintegration by turning to historical examples of empires defeated. The focal point of their analyses is the openness of the historical situation in the decade after the GFC and the observation that there is neither an end of history nor an ever-closer European Union (Zielonka 2014). Additionally, they link the crisis of European integration to the crises of democratic capitalism as drafted above. Hauke Brunkhorst attributes the current and past disintegration dynamics to the EU's "double-face" (Brunkhorst 2014:38). The EU struggles from the conflict between a *Kantian* and a *managerial mindset*. The former represents popular self-government of the people, the latter rule of law and new public management by and for the people. Hence, European disintegration in the Euro crisis finds its expression in the discrepancy between the normative promise of equality and the technocratic reality of austerity (Brunkhorst 2014:157). According to Claus Offe, the normative underpinnings of support for European integration have failed to deliver (Offe 2015: 87-102). The European Union has not advanced economic prosperity and social cohesion nor has it been able to be a force for the implementation of democratic governance in the member states. Finally, European politics has gradually been politicized after the Great Recession. Economic and social policies such as the bailouts, the fiscal consolidation packages, but also proposals for social integration have become increasingly salient and polarized, and new political actors have exploited these issues (De Wilde and Zürn 2012, Hutter and Kriesi 2019, Jabko and Luhman 2019, Schmidt 2019).

For all their differences, these explanations universally agree that politico-economic factors and their European institutional and power-relational equivalences explain the disintegration patterns better than references to specific national characteristics or contingent factors as dissatisfaction with the government of the day. While the latter might help to explain isolated cases as referendum or election outcomes, only the former can help understand the interrelation of various cases of disintegration.

I.2 A SHORT HISTORY: DEFINING ‘SOCIAL POLICY’ IN THE CONTEXT OF EU

Little is as uncontested and unclear as the meaning, the history, and the reality of what is called European social policy or Social Europe. Paolo Graziano and Miriam Hartlapp (2019:1491) give two reasons why the study of EU social policy is at times complicated and often confusing, both of which make it almost impossible to give a short overview of its foundations. They state that on the one hand, the decline of Social Europe was a perceived wisdom during the 2000s and on the other hand, the EU social policy was a hardly a policy field. What does that mean? Regarding the thesis of decline, many scholars have argued that social cohesion has almost disappeared as a policy goal. Instead, the EU’s policy was focussed on the single market and the strict budget guidelines for the euro area countries in the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). Therefore, this general line of thought goes back to the 1990s and proponents will often classify EU policies and recommendations and decisions by the European Court of Justice (ECJ) as either market-creating/enhancing or market-regulating/restricting (Copeland and Daly 2018) as well as either economic or social (de la Porte and Heins 2015). Typically, they will identify the EU’s approach as neoliberal and will link it to ‘permanent austerity’ (Busch et al. 2013, Deakin 2017, Jordan 2016, Seikel 2016, Steinebach, Knill and Jordana 2019, Theodoropoulou 2018, Westra, Badeen and Albritton 2015). That explains the narrative of decline or displacement (Kilpatrick 2018). The EU is a driving force that works against national social protection systems and systems of collective bargaining. Flexibilization, labour market liberalisation, deregulation and a race-to-the bottom with the lowest standards are the only game in town.

In opposition to this view, a community of scholars argue that specific policy innovations have long-lasting effects on content and procedure of social policymaking in the EU and on national level. The term ‘socialization’ describes the phenomenon, by which specific actors as social NGOs or social partners have successfully implemented themselves and their causes into the wider field of EU and national policymaking (Vanhercke 2016:358, Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018). Accordingly, the EU forces member states to engage with social problems and often new social risks (Bonoli and Natali 2012b, Taylor-Gooby 2005), which otherwise would stay invisible. With these adverse positions in mind, the history of European social policy appears to readers as either a continuous failure of the EU to provide social protection and welfare in the single market or as a possibility to help countries adapt to social risks and challenges through new policies such as social investment, achieved by advocacy elites in the shadow of high politics. A third and final, however less prominent, view on

European social policy consists in the argument that market-making policies are in itself social. Such a productivist social policy¹¹ would be subordinate to economic policies, social and workers' rights were minimal if existent and social policy would not exist in and on itself but as a by-product (Holliday 2000:709). Thus, the social dimension of European integration can neither be found nor missed in specific social or welfare policies, but in policies which create growth.¹²

To the second point of Graziano and Hartlapp: Why does social policy hardly constitute a policy field? National governments have always been the dominant factor in social policymaking. Compared to other policy fields, where European actors have clearly defined competences, e.g. monetary policy or competition policy, European social policy is less-well defined. The question to which degree European actors can influence social settings differ over place and time and EU social policy relies heavily on innovative policy design, i.e. policies which don't replace national competences, but add additional layers to it as Gerda Falkner showed in her seminal analysis on European social policy during the 1990s (Falkner 1998). This is where this section takes its departure to present Social Europe as a normative and analytical concept alongside the three dimensions policy, polity and politics since the late 1990s/ early 2000s. Broadly understood, European social policy is a mixture of the social investment and activation paradigms, modes of soft governance and centrist "Third Way" politics. These three elements have co-evolved since the end of the 1990s to deal with the socio-economic challenges such as globalization, and demographic change,

I.2.1 Policy: The social investment paradigm

Despite its wide-spread use in the international policy discourse for more than 25 years, the social investment policy paradigm until recently lacked a standard definition, as it "has become a buzzword among policymakers and social scientists alike" (Garritzmann, Häusermann and Palier 2022:3). Most commonly, it is described as both a set of policies in policy fields such as education or childcare and as a middle ground between the 'old'

¹¹ This term must not be confused with the term "social policy as a productive factor" which serves as a functional equivalent of social investment (see next chapter).

¹² The European Union often describes its economic model as a 'social market economy' and Ludwig Erhard used the term 'social' in exactly this sense: As an empty signifier for a free market system. Hayek biographer Alan Ebenstein quoted him with the following sentence: "I mean by that that the market economy as such is social not that it needs to be made social." (Ebenstein 2003:242)

redistributive welfare state and the ‘new’ neoliberal critique of the overburdened interventionist state. The welfare state and the Keynesian macro-economic planning regime offered freedom from want through cash benefit systems, but created an overly bureaucratic and expensive state apparatus, to which neoliberals reacted with deregulation and privatisation. SI, meanwhile, gives humans the freedom to act and to overcome social challenges before they occur (Hemerijck 2018:823-24). One of the main issues, which complicates the debate around social investment, is that it is both a scientific paradigm and a policy platform (Vandenbroucke 2017d). Unsurprisingly, authors who write on social investment often switch between their roles of political advisers and scientific observers.¹³ In recent years, some notable books have been published with the aim to put the debate on SI on better theoretical and empirical footing. *The Uses of Social Investment*, edited by Anton Hemerijck and published by Oxford University Press in 2017, combines normative and theoretical perspectives as well as proponents, sceptics and outright critics of the approach (Hemerijck 2017a). Recently, and resulting from a big research project (Garritzmann, Palier and Häusermann 2022a; b) on SI worldwide, Julian Garritzmann, Silja Häusermann, and Bruno Palier have proposed a diversification in the categorization in SI goals and functions which are linked to specific policies and political strategies (Garritzmann, Häusermann and Palier 2022:23).

The history of the SI paradigm, or what future historians might call the founding narrative of SI, has often be told. The OECD kick-started both the academic and the political discourse around SI as a new terminology during the second half of the 1990s, from where it soon transcended to European social policy debates. According to Anton Hemerijck, the Dutch Presidency of the European Union invented the phrase “social policy as a productive factor”, which has served as working-definition of social investment paradigms to this day (Hemerijck 2017b:6), while Caroline de la Porte and David Natali give credit to the Director-General of Employment, Social Issues and Inclusion, Allan Larsson, for the invention and popularization of the term (de la Porte and Natali 2018:833). Gosta Esping-Andersen’s *Why we need a new welfare state* (2002) added an early theoretical dimension to the SI paradigm and remains a focal point for debate to this day. Esping-Andersen argued that the ageing of society and the high and constant levels of unemployment were the most pressing social

¹³ Recently, Anton Hemerijck (2022) wrote an article about his double-role in developing and promoting the SI paradigm.

challenges across Europe and that redistribution alone would not solve these problems. The main goal of SI is to achieve social justice and to fulfil the egalitarian commitment of Western welfare states via equality of opportunity instead of equality of outcome for all citizens during the complete life-cycle (Esping-Andersen 2002:3). Furthermore, the SI paradigm maintains that the primary goal of welfare state action shall be to give humans the tools and knowledge, the intellectual and infrastructural capacity to successfully navigate educational and labour market challenges. The ‘old’ distinction between the state and markets is replaced by an economic and social theory, in which the state must enable market participation.

Critics argue that the term “investment”, which differentiates one form of social spending from other lacks a clear definition in both theoretical and practical terms with regard to preferred social outcomes. Consequently, they argue that proponents of SI refer to it within the use of standard-economics, hide the normative underpinnings and neglect the main use of social policy, which is to meet social needs of all citizens. In doing so, they contribute to an economization of social policies and the welfare state in general and put social policies, which are labelled as non-productive, at risk (Barbier 2012; 2017, Nolan 2013; 2017). Differentiating between productive and unproductive social spending would also neglect one core function of welfare states: to reduce and limit socio-economic inequality. SI strategies have indeed failed to reduce inequality and poverty, even when they lifted employment rates, putting their effectiveness in meeting social needs into question (Cantillon 2011:445). Finally, some critics have disagreed with the general conception that social investment could serve as an alternative to neoliberal welfare retrenchment. Instead, they argue that the key features of social investment are in line with a neoliberal model of citizenship. It depoliticizes social issues into technical and economic issues and detaches social policies from citizens by giving priority to expert fora, unclear and highly artificial calculations of future productivity, means-testing, and inscrutable decision-making processes (Laruffa 2018).

The EU and its approach towards social policy has been central in the creation of SI as a policy paradigm. Looking at this particular history also explains the ambiguity of the concept. Not only were EU actors responsible for coining the term of social policy as productive factor, but the early seminal work *Why we need a new welfare state* resulted from a request by the Belgian Council Presidency in 2001. Policy entrepreneurs shaped Social Europe via the SI paradigm because it had not been in conflict with national welfare state regimes but served as an addition to them. Furthermore, the EU’s Lisbon Agenda (or Lisbon

Strategy), which was developed during the late 1990s and introduced quantitative indicators and targets into European social policy, has been built entirely around the idea of SI (Copeland and Papadimitriou 2012, James 2012, Kok 2004, Natali 2011). The follow-up to the Lisbon Agenda, the Europe 2020 strategy¹⁴, likewise announced social policy targets in the fields of employment, education, and poverty. While the first two fit into the SI paradigm, the inclusion of poverty reduction points to a policy of social protection (Copeland and Daly 2012, Daly 2012:283). The second pillar of SI on EU level has been the EES. While the EES was restricted in two ways – monetary, fiscal, and wage policy were out of scope and the policies focussed largely on the supply-side – it went nonetheless far beyond the aim of traditional social policy. It promoted higher employment participation rates, lifelong learning, flexicurity, and gender equality (Mosher and Trubek 2003:71-72).

Summing up, the EU has been the single most important proponent in pushing SI as a policy paradigm, yet policy outcomes remain contested.

I.2.2 Polity: Soft governance

The cornerstone of the SI paradigm during the 2000s in the EU was the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), a soft law policy tool (Haar and Copeland 2010:278). Soft law as opposed to hard law is non-binding and non-enforceable. In such a framework, actors pursue policy goals via mutual learning, voluntary cooperation, best-practice examples, and information sharing. Besides the EES and its focus on employment, social OMCs have covered policy fields such as inclusion, and social protection, in particular pensions. In short, the OMC generates venues for member states' public servants to discuss policy objections, targets, and methods with social partners, civil society organisations and the European Commission. Social progress is achieved through positive feed-back loops (peer-learning) or negative outcalls ("naming and shaming") without the attachment of enforcement or sanctioning regimes (Barcevičius 2014, Barcevičius, Weishaupt and Zeitlin 2014, Barcevičius, Zeitlin and Weishaupt 2014, Carmel 2005, Curry 2016, de la Porte 2011, Schäfer 2009, Zeitlin 2011).

¹⁴ Both the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 did not focus on social policy issues in particular but were broad ten-year-plans for "smart, sustainable, and inclusive" growth which included among others targets for R&D spending or economic transformation in the wake of climate change.

With the ascent of Europe 2020, the European Semester was developed as the main framework for policy coordination. The Semester combined pre-existing social, macro-economic and fiscal policy surveillance, and coordination tools in an annual cycle of policy reviews and recommendations.¹⁵ The mixture of hard and soft governance and the integration of policy fields into one single framework has led some observers to declare its introduction a “fundamental shift” (Verdun and Zeitlin 2018:139) in EU socio-economic governance. At the same time, the Semester did not deviate in principle from the soft governance approach in social policy and, before its reform in 2015 at least, was more inter-governmental and state-driven and less open for inclusion of supranational civil society and social partners (Frazer et al. 2011:35).

The literature on Social Europe discusses soft governance tools in social policy mainly regarding two aspects: First, the effectiveness and adequacy in reaching self-set goals, and second, the relation of soft social policy and hard economic policy. The SGP as well as its reform packages in 2011 and 2012, the two-pack, six-pack, and the Fiscal Compact, have always been part of European hard law. Member states must fulfil objectives set by the SGP or otherwise are at the risk of sanctions from the European Council (Copeland and Daly 2015, Crespy and Menz 2015b, de la Porte and Heins 2015).¹⁶ While proponents of the ‘socialization thesis’ often argue that both the effectiveness and the visibility *vis a vis* economic policies is understated, because social policy actors have successfully used the soft law tools to ‘mainstream’ social objectives (Bekker and Klosse 2013, Bekker 2018, Vanhercke 2016, Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018), the general divide between soft social and hard economic policy is without question.

The reasons for the dominance of soft law in the social policy field are two-fold: First, member states did not want to transfer core state competences to the EU, especially when it came to providing direct benefits, and second, EU social policy actors hoped build a distinctive EU social policy as an additional layer of social policy in its own right. The SI paradigm was promoted as an additional feature of social policy, which would be identified with the European Union as a social union (Dawson 2018:191). Soft-law measures were

¹⁵ Google Scholar recognizes roughly 12,000 publications on the European Semester since its introduction in 2010, so that a good research summary is hard to get by. Readers unfamiliar with the Semester are pointed to the first four pages in the article by Verdun and Zeitlin (2018:137-141) for a comprehensive overview.

¹⁶ As of 2022, the EU has not imposed sanctions on any member state for noncompliance with the SGP due to exogenous pressure and to avoid implementation problems (Sacher 2021, Van der Veer and Reinout 2022).

deemed most suitable to achieve social goals in the environment of multi-level Europe. Additionally, the inclusion of political and civil society actors on all levels of governance would not only improve policy formulation, but also contribute to implementation and finally results. Typically, soft governance builds on the concept that multiple actors provide intermediation, data, and expert knowledge during all stages. While the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 formulated mid-term policy goals, the OMC and later the European Semester created the political venues to translate quantitative targets into concrete policy recommendations based on unified European data (Åkerman, Auranen and Valkeasuo 2018).

Many of the authors cited so far have criticized the soft governance approach in the field of social policy as weak, ineffective, window-dressing and leading to a subordination of social objectives to macro-economic and fiscal ones (Bulmer 2012, Copeland and Daly 2015, Crespy and Menz 2015a, de la Porte and Heins 2015, Haas et al. 2020). The data-heavy approach of soft governance puts the reliability of social indicators front and centre. Only high-quality data is suitable to make informed policy decisions, which often proves problematic (Atkinson, Marlier and Nolan 2004, Atkinson et al. 2002, O’connor 2005). Additionally, social theorists have questioned whether governance by numbers behind closed doors is at all suitable to affect social change or if it sustains an economic and social theory, which imagines individuals with specific attributes, thus neglecting relations, hierarchies, power-imbalances, and non-economic social ties, which shape the social fabric (Desrosières 1990). Finally, the availability of data and expert knowledge does not guarantee that decisionmakers include the expertise into their actions. Often, they rather follow ‘plausible folk theories’ of economic and social realities, which are built on rhetoric, founded in various forms of ignorance and use data selectively to support their worldview (Halliday 2018:956-57). In a new development, the European Semester and the SGP have first been suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic and will likely be replaced by a new governance regime which links up with Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the corresponding national recovery and resilience plans.

Summing up, the EU socio-economic governance in the first two decades of the 21st century has featured two long-term plans with quantitative social objectives and corresponding governance regimes. The Lisbon Agenda, the EES, and the OMC from 2000 to 2010, and Europe 2020 and the European Semester from 2010 to 2020. The single biggest difference between the two governance regimes is the integrated framework of the Semester which combined multiple tools and policy objectives from the fields of social, economic, and fiscal

policies. A key element of both regimes is its exclusionary nature: European social policy is an exercise undertaken by elites with skills and knowledge of the governance architecture in the absence of public discourse or engagement by national parliaments¹⁷ – a fact that remains true, even when the elite become more diverse and inclusionary itself.

I.2.3 Politics: Third Way

Both the policy of SI and the polity of soft law and soft governance in the EU have been informed by a politics of social-democratic “Third Way” centrism. Since the mid-1990s, Anthony Giddens’ famous concept of the Third Way led social-democratic parties across Europe away from a politics based on class and social redistribution to a pursuit of new progressive, centrist alliances (Giddens 1998). While the SI paradigm has been offered as a suitable solution to the deadlock between an old Keynesian welfare state and new neoliberal retrenchment, the Third Way politics, which led social democratic parties into government across Europe in the late 1990s, promised to offer an alternative to the dire prospect of never-ending centre-right rule, caused by diminishing electoral power of the old working-class. Giddens argued that the same forces, which restrained welfare state expansion – globalization, technological and demographic change, and individualism – eroded the electoral base of social-democratic parties. Consequently, the politics of the Third Way evolved around values such as autonomy and efficiency and cut loose terms like social class or redistribution (Giddens 1998:20, 66-68). In a population centred on individual values instead of collective social properties, majoritarian electoral support would come from the “radical centre”, which could not be won by pursuing a certain set policies, let alone by providing a consisting political ideology along cleavages, but instead by positioning a party as the better manager of policy problems (Giddens 1998:77). Social class and social conflicts in general were replaced by "the new democratic state" – a state without enemies. Such a state would focus on openness, transparency, public engagement, consultations, and civil society inclusion. Thus, no group of society is an enemy to the state, and elections would not

¹⁷ A number of articles have studied the involvement of national parliaments in holding the Semester process and the reports and recommendations accountable. Despite some variations between countries, the overall result is that parliamentary involvement in the Semester has remained weak (Kreiling 2018, Rasmussen 2018, Woźniakowski, Maatsch, and Miklin 2021)

be an expression of conflict but a civic choice of the best managerial team (Giddens 1998:69-88).

In an age of globalisation, Giddens argued, confrontation must give way to cooperation. Accordingly, Third Way social democrats put much weight on the inclusion of all societal stakeholders as NGOs or social partners as a means to effective policymaking. Membership organisations such as NGOs are no longer seen as organisations of collective interests, but as informants whose knowledge-input will improve the effectiveness of policy outcome and the efficiency of its implementation. Majoritarian decision-making, based on popular votes and elections, is partly replaced by elite-informed debate and consensus-finding. Citizens do not partake in political decisions via elections alone, but via civil society engagement. While the old welfare state governed by hierarchy and the neoliberal regime governs by markets, the Third Way proposed a governance by networks (Newman 2004:71).

Third Way social democrats dominated the European political landscape in the late 1990s and 2000s and were influential in crafting the Lisbon Agenda, the EES and the OMC. Between 1998 and 2000, ten out of fifteen members of the European Council were members of the Party of European Socialists (PES), while only four belonged to the EPP (Tallberg and Johansson 2008). Jonas Tallberg and Karl Magnus Johansson find a clear link between the social-democratic majority in the Council and the EES, while the relationship between party-politics and the Lisbon Agenda is less clear (Tallberg and Johansson 2008:1231-37). UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, and Commission President and Prime Minister of Italy Romano Prodi are the most well-known figureheads of Third-Wayism.

I.2.4 Social Europe: More than the sum of its parts

That particular understanding of social policy via the lens of elitist Third Way politics had consequences for the way Social Europe “was made”: While loosely connected to the SI paradigm, Social Europe was not a set of clearly defined policies¹⁸, but primarily a governance tool to find suitable and workable solutions for social challenges. Social Europe

¹⁸ There is a long debate in the literature as to which degree social investment has been a coherent policy model or a political marketing tool during the late 1990s and 2000s. Often, policies did change little but were remodeled and renamed to fit into the SI paradigm.

in this sense is not a political project, a utopia, or even a certain set of beliefs, but it is a toolbox and an institutionalised process to identify and engage socio-economic policy problems. The politics of stakeholder and especially NGO involvement trump class-based electoral politics and issue salience meanwhile are largely irrelevant. This focus on seemingly neutral and objective ways to do politics however should not blind the fact that certain beliefs were entrenched in Third Way thinking and made its way into EU social policy.

“[The EES] avoids neo-liberal proposals for a radical reduction in income maintenance programmes. The stress on working, flexibility, and the role of entrepreneurship in creating jobs embodies the third way emphasis on overcoming dependency and shows acceptance of the need to promote risk-taking and adapt social protection to the need of business for flexibility” (Mosher and Trubek 2003:72).

In practice, the policies linked with Social Europe are to some degree compatible with the focus on supply-side reforms, competitiveness and superiority of markets over state to achieve economic prosperity (Green-Pedersen, Kersbergen and Hemerijck 2001:321-22).

Finally, this interdependent cluster of policies, politics, and polity contributes to the emergence of Social Europe as a narrative force and as an anchor point in the European policy discourse. The usage of this term by European elites and in European debates can only be understood through the specific lens of its genesis and transformations since the late 1990s and early 2000s. Social democratic governments in the member states and the Prodi Commission formed a Third Way Hegemony of policy, politics, and governance (Hansen and Hager 2010:102-07). Indeed, meritocracy as social investment, evidence-based policy making as technical tools and social democrats as better managers of capitalist economies with upward convergence in a state without enemies formed a powerful, optimistic and convincing political, economic and social model at the beginning of the 21st century, the “Golden Age” of Social Europe (Barbier 2014:52). In that sense, Social Europe was a form of *visionary Realpolitik* since it combined a strong belief in social progress with a realistic and sober understanding of what was possible in the existing economic and governance structures. Social Europe was seen as a particular European response to the multiple social challenges at the wake of the new millenium. Social Europe should help EU member states in the defence of the European social model(s) and should underline the difference, superiority, and attractiveness of the EU in comparison to other parts of the world – especially the USA (Hemerijck 2002). Figure 1 depicts the three pillars of Social Europe at the beginning of the 21st century.

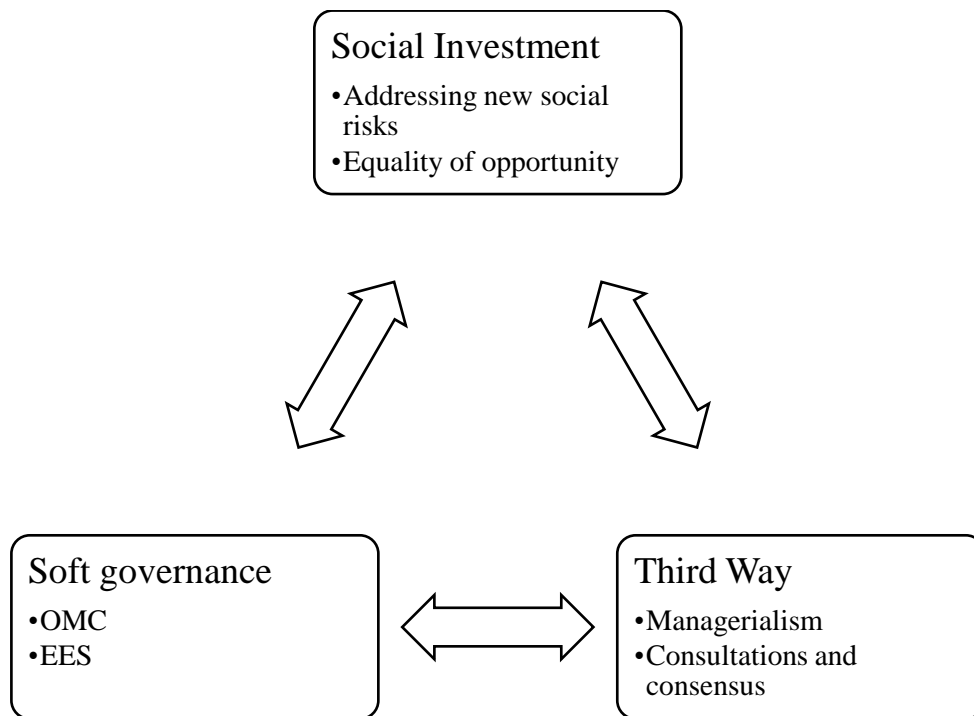


Figure 1: Three elements of Social Europe during the “Golden Age”, own representation

I.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THESIS OUTLINE

The Great Recession and the polycrisis have endangered Social Europe in three perspectives. First, the crisis of capitalism puts the sustainability of the European model of welfare capitalism into question (Shahidi 2015). The austerity approach in Southern Europe and other EU countries has significantly altered the capacity of welfare states to provide social protection and investment for its citizens. While an overall conclusion hints towards welfare retrenchment during austerity (Theodoropoulou 2018), some scholars have argued that retrenchment in some policy fields go hand in hand with expansion in others (Sacchi 2018, van Kersbergen, Vis and Hemerijck 2014). Second, the crisis of democracy undermines the socio-political foundation of the post-war welfare state consensus. The electoral defeats of social democracy reduce party-political support, while the rise of far right and populist parties gives support to the concept of welfare chauvinism, which allocates claimants' rights to social protection and benefits conditional on an ideology of ethno-nationalist belonging (Keskinen, Norocel and Jørgensen 2016). Third, the crisis of European integration threatens the very existence of the EU and the euro area. While European welfare states show a wide variety of internal differences, Social Europe with its common commitment to social investment, and the belief in social justice as productive factor in a market economy sought to present an aspiring model for European unity and social cohesion (Hemerijck 2002, Kittel 2002). The question whether the European social model as an attractive model and aspiration for the whole continent and eventually the globe would survive the Great Recession and how they would be transformed were all but certain during the early 2010s.

While the polycrisis posed multiple threats, Social Europe also offered a resource to overcome the crises since it may offer practical solutions. Good social policy can reduce unemployment, inequality, and poverty which have risen in peripheral countries. It may provide a possible solution to the crisis of democracy because it could link the EU and its citizenry and could provide added value for Europeans in need of social policy. Finally, Social Europe could be a catalyst for more integration. However, it also embodies the threat of disintegration, of giving rise to nationalist, Eurosceptic, and anti-democratic tendencies and of overburdening welfare states and European economies, thereby creating new and, in the worst case, more severe social problems than before. Social Europe after the Great Recession could be both the solution to the crisis of Europe and the crisis itself.

In light of this, this dissertation asks how and why EU institutions and actors responded with regard to Social Europe in the period from 2012-2019. The starting point of the time-frame is to explain: Before June 2012, the EU was in crisis mode and the ad-hoc management of the sovereign debt crisis was the only game in town. This changed with Mario Draghi's famous "whatever it takes" speech which started period of mid- to long-term planning and a reform agenda to address institutional imbalances in the EMU (Schmidt 2020). Setting the endpoint, however, is more arbitrary and some may argue that the euro crisis has never fully been resolved. Levels of unemployment in countries such as Spain or Greece have remained high (Caporale, Gil-Alana and Trejo 2022) and fluctuations of government bond yields in Italy as a result of the populist surge indicate the persistence of financial risk in the euro area (Balduzzi et al. 2020). The year 2019 is chosen for roughly three reasons: First, in August 2018, Greece was the last country to exit the ESM's macro-economic adjustment programme (ESM 2018); second, in November 2017, the three EU institutions proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) as a new milestone for Social Europe, and third, the elections to the European Parliament in 2019 brought an end to the very activist Juncker Commission.¹⁹ This dissertation studies the EPSR against the background of other possible policy outcomes regarding Social Europe that were debated between 2012-2019. It undertakes three case studies:

- (1) On the social dimension of EMU (Chapter IV)
- (2) On the European Unemployment Benefit Scheme (EUBS) and finally (Chapter V)
- (3) On the EPSR (Chapter VI).

I.3.1 Research Questions

Hence, the central questions of dissertation will approach the social policy response from the three distinct, yet interwoven perspectives discussed in Chapter I.2: Policy content; polity, governance, and legal nature; and the politics of (un-)successful policy adoption. Taken together, all three angles will explain the state of Social Europe at the end of the Great Recession and will answer the overall question that dominates debates to this day: Why and

¹⁹ The beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in February/March 2020 and the development of new social policy tools as European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency (SURE) may also come to mind.

how did the social policy response to the GFC, the euro crisis, and the Great Recession culminate in the EPSR? The three sets of questions are:

Q1: Which core policy elements were discussed, and which were adopted at which stages? How important was the social investment paradigm *vis à vis* other policy elements? How does the EPSR relate to the existing social acquis and where do proposals for different policy elements originate?

Q2: How did legal arguments shape the debates on Social Europe? When and how did actors use legal arguments to propose or oppose certain elements of Social Europe? To what degree does the antagonism between soft and hard law play a role and what is the meaning of the rights-based language in the EPSR and how does it relate to pre-existing declarations of social rights in the EU context?

Q3: Which individual and collective actors can be identified in the field of Social Europe and how do they relate to each other? Who was responsible for a) starting the debate on the social dimension of EMU, b) promoting EUBS and c) drafting and negotiating the EPSR from its beginning to its proclamation? Are they permanent or partial participants in the field and can central actors be identified that link these three cases? How did their social relations and field positions affect which strategies they could employ and how did they try to form networks and coalitions? What are the main characteristics of these actors, and can actor-specifics explain policy outcomes?

I.3.2 Thesis Outline

The dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter II starts with an overview of the theoretical outline of politics as a social field of action and applies it to the field of European social policy and Social Europe. It explains the concept of social, cultural, and economic capital, as well as the specific forms of European and political capital, before it discusses the theoretical antagonisms between structure and agency and reproduction and change. It will especially engage the common criticism that field-theoretical approaches are too deterministic and diminish the role of entrepreneurial and innovative actions. In doing so, it will argue that concepts such as narratives, discourses, interests, ideas, and meaning can play important roles in the context of a social field. It then turns to Social Network Analysis

(SNA) and links key concepts such as centrality and multipositionality to a theory of social fields. Finally, chapter II will point out, how the study of Social Europe as a social field of action can contribute to the explanation of policy outcomes in contrast to theoretical explanations which focus on either interests, ideas, or institutions as root causes for social and political change (or the lack thereof).

Chapter III briefly depicts methodological considerations. Its focus lies on data selection and acquisition as well as on interview interpretation, the usage of textual and interview data for a relational analysis, and data triangulation.

Chapters IV to VI lay out the empirical material in three case studies. Chapter IV investigates the earliest social policy response on a European level to the Great Recession, i.e., the debate on the social dimension of the EMU, which occurred between 2012 and 2014. It traces the origin of the term and displays its early use by the European Council and Commission as an open box for social initiatives. It digests the different policy elements and their respective prominence in the debate. It further explains how various actors picked up the term and tried to tie specific meaning to it, i.e., to establish their understanding of it in the social field, while it also explains the reasons why the social-dimension-debate did not lead to meaningful policy outcomes. Finally, it argues that the Juncker Commission strategically eradicated the term from the debate after 2015 and replaced it with less ‘threatening’ terms. Chapter V looks at a concrete policy proposal, which would have altered the understanding of Social Europe significantly, if implemented: the European Unemployment Benefit Scheme (EUBS). It shows, how actors from within European institutions and academic circles reactivated a decades-old idea during the early years of the Great Recession and made it a prominent point of reference in debates on how to reconcile economic and social policy in the EU. In doing so, the chapter analyses over fifty contributions, which discuss the possibility, advantages, and disadvantages of EUBS. Additionally, the chapter investigates, why proponents of EUBS were not able to bridge the gap from academic and policy-heavy circles to genuine political actors on European and national level. Finally, Chapter VI discusses the European Pillar of Social Rights as a successful policy outcome. It traces the origin of the EPSR and demonstrates, how pivotal coalition-building happened from day one. Central actors were less concerned with detailed wording but made use of their relations to overcome or side-line opposition. The network which invented, supported, and passed the EPSR had already been crucial in shaping the latest version of Social Europe during the 1990s and early 2000s. Henceforth, the chapter shows that the EPSR is not carried by a ‘new’

interest-coalition, dominant ideas or an institutional setting, but can best be explained by a network of actors who have occupied the centre-space in the field of European social policy. Finally, the conclusion draws on the three case studies and reconstructs the social field of Social Europe in the years after the Great Recession. It identifies key actors and their social capital endowment as well as the political networks which make reform possible. Additionally, it answers the question how the renewal of Social Europe compares to its pre-GFC version in the terms of policy, governance, and its politics.

II THEORETICAL APPROACH: RELATIONAL SOCIOLOGY OF EUROPE

The dissertation approaches Social Europe from the theoretical perspective of transnational social fields. According to the seminal work by Pierre Bourdieu, fields are social spaces, which are structured by the allocation and distribution of capital. Different forms of capital are convertible to a certain degree and are more or less important in different social fields. Rules within a social field are set and constantly re-evaluated and re-shaped by the actors who can get involved (Büttner and Mau 2014:147). As such, fields are relatively autonomous and follow their own logics which means that forms of capital acquired in one field might be devalued or even worthless in another. Two general ideas are central to the construction of politics as a social field: First, the field cannot be defined or described in advance, but is discovered by the researchers in the empirical process. Second, power is neither constant nor fixed along legal or institutionalized settings, but instead relational and dependent on actors' capital accumulation. Especially European political fields, a sub-category of transnational social fields, are "fundamentally based on interdependencies and power relationships that are not sectorial or institutional but social" (Kauppi 2018:73).

Research that approaches European politics from the theoretical perspective of transnational fields has become more prominent in the study of EU politics in the recent years. One advantage of this approach over the two mainstream integrationist theories (neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism) is that it aims to overcome the focus on formal institutions and legal decision-making processes by putting all sources of power at the centre of the analysis. Additionally, the relational perspective does not have an inbound pro-integrationist bias. In an overview of recent works, Gengnagel (2014:301) states that construction of 'Europe' as a social field offers an alternative explanation to perceptions of European Union affairs from the perspective of multi-level-governance, which can provide better insights into the specific and unique functionalities of Europe. In general, most of the works that are inspired by the theoretical concept of political fields put themselves in opposition to governance literature, which they find insufficient to explain the complex realities of Europe. Studying the Social Open Method of Coordination, Bernhard (2010:47; 385) argues the public administration and governance literature does not question the use of certain terminologies and is more interested in the description of processes and normative dimensions than in the relations and conflicts, in which they are grounded. Didier Georgakakis and Jay Rowell exemplify this antagonism in the introduction to their edited volume on different actor groups and their relative positions in the field of Eurocracy:

„Decision making in the EU indeed involves a multiplicity of ever-shifting arenas and discussion forums over an average of four or five years, which makes standard methods of tracing decision-making processes particularly difficult to implement. Building a theory of the field of the field of Eurocracy by analogy to Bourdieu’s bureaucratic field could provide valuable tools to unravel the complexities of the European polity.“ (Georgakakis and Rowell 2013a:7)

Bourdieu’s theory of fields which has been used by the authors cited here so far is the main theoretical angle for this study; however, it is not the only one. Neil Fligstein and Doug McAdam (2012) have proposed a theory of strategic action fields which puts collective action at the centre of analysis. They ask how and why collective actors such as social movements, trade unions, administrative units etc. strategically contribute to the construction of fields. Sometimes discussed as an alternative to a theory of fields and social capital, Fligstein and McAdam argue have argued that their concept is rather an advancement.²⁰ Two departures are important: First, they argue that Bourdieu studies only individual actors and their capital formation and field positions, while he largely ignores collective actors, and second, they emphasize that actors can make behavioural choices regarding competition and cooperation in fields – in their own words:

“The focus on individuals is very useful. But it does tend to obscure the all-important collective dynamics of fields. Our focus is on how people cooperate, how groups get things done, and how we are to understand the interaction that goes on between groups. [...] One advantage of our approach is that it views both competition and cooperation as fundamental to field analysis. Thus, collective action, which depends on cooperation, will rely on actors being able to convince others that their view of problems of the field and the identity they provide for others in solving those problems work for everyone.” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:25)

Accordingly, approaching Social Europe from a field-theoretical approach calls for a reconstruction of networks, forms of capital and social relations between actors. The question, why and how actors “get things done” must be put in relation to power as well as agency. This chapter will first outline different forms of capital with specific focus on European and political capital (II.1). It will then explain the theoretical conception of actors and agency, networks, narratives, and other key concepts (II.2), before it synthesizes theoretical developments and formulates theory-guided expectations (II.3).

²⁰ It makes little sense to compare Bourdieu’s and Fligstein/McAdam’s work as two competing theories. This would ignore the simple fact that Fligstein/McAdam contribute to the scholarly debate decades after Bourdieu and have intensively studied and cited his work. As they state very clearly, their theory of strategic action fields has developed significantly from engaging Bourdieu’s work and it is to state the obvious that Bourdieu simply could not have done this vice versa.

II.1 SOCIAL EUROPE AS A SOCIAL FIELD OF ACTION

Social fields are foremost metaphors for conflict. Therefore, the research purpose of field reconstruction must identify a central conflict which organizes the field in pro- and antagonists. The nature of the conflict is the fight over resources, but the appearance can differ and is part of the sociological analysis. Within every field, actors fight for and with power resources which Bourdieu called capital. They accumulate and deploy capital to gain capital and thereby constantly reproduce the social field and their field positions. Resources are both the means and the end of actors' actions in a social field as well as they are the "unit of analysis" for social scientists who study a particular field. The relations between actors, in a strict sense, are thus relations between capital, "objective relations" in Bourdieu's terminology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97). They are objective because they are solely defined by the accumulated field-specific capital which in relation to all actors' capital determines the field position. They are relations neither because actors may be personally related to each other (based on family, friendship, or hostility) nor because actors openly express the conflict (in a panel discussion, a bidding competition or an electoral contest) but because the conflict is expressed in a standardized unit, capital, which makes it possible to compare, rank, and relate actors to each other. If it were possible to quantify every actor's capital accumulation, it would be possible to express the relations in purely numerical terms. These relations, however, become more complicated because power resources exist in different forms which may be convertible, but not completely. Additionally, it can take time to convert one power resource into another and, borrowing more from economic language, marginal utilities of capital investment reduce the possibility to convert one form into another. Running for elected office is expensive and actors with the means to finance an election campaign will have a significant advantage over competitors without any funds. However, there comes a point where additional money cannot buy a bigger advantage because all potential voters have been reached. At this point, investing more money will not help in the fight for the political office. Different power resources are needed in different fields which creates a field-specific logic, and which means that the definition and analysis of specific fields, their conflicts, actors, and power resources must always be empirical. While any theory of fields may seem static and deductive from the outside, the sociological analysis is in fact case specific. It would be false to conclude from the observation of one form of power resource (e.g., money in politics) that all politics is always driven by monetary interests as there are other forms of capital which may impact the political process. Bourdieu

has famously distinguished between three types of capital: economic, cultural, social which he describes as follows:

“capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility” (Bourdieu 1986:243).²¹

II.1.1 Social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital

Bourdieu’s definition of capital nests on the principal Marxist understanding that all capital is accumulated labour and thus, the definition of capital must go beyond its narrow understanding in the sense of economic theory. The latter form of capital – economic capital – is the form of capital which everyone recognizes as such: money. The interactions of economic capital are monetary transactions in the strict sense: wages, profit, credit, payments etc and the relations are the relations between capitalists and workers, creditor and debtors and so on (Bourdieu 1986:242). Cultural capital takes the form of educational and academic achievements and success, i.e., degrees, titles, and certificates which are institutionalized proof of capital accumulation. It is accumulated by attending of elite schools and universities (which also serve as places to obtain social capital through networks) and can be exchanged into economic capital in both directions. Economic capital can pay for an expensive which in turn offers well-paid careers. Additionally, cultural capital may be manifest as symbolic capital, as a habitus, an embodied form, which is expressed as the correct behaviour in a social setting and by acts which may make it not recognizable as capital but as expertise. People who contribute to a discussion with facts and stories about the world, how it is and how it ought to be based on their specific knowledge and experience employ this very personal form of cultural capital. In modern politics, this can be found in direct citations from important documents such as constitutions or references to important ‘men and women of history’ (Bourdieu 1986:243-45).²²

²¹ The article was first published as “Ökonomisches Kapital, kulturelles Kapital, soziales Kapital.” in *Soziale Ungleichheiten* (Soziale Welt, Sonderheft 2), edited by Reinhard Kreckel. Goettingen: Otto Schartz & Co.. 1983. pp. 183-98. The first English translation was published in 1986.

²² A third form of cultural capital, objectified capital, which appears in objectified form, i.e., as books or paintings can be ignored going forward.

Finally, social capital is the form, which is expressed through individuals' networks, group membership, through access to other people. These are resources actors can use to accumulate more capital, i.e., to improve their field position. They can exploit the knowledge about open positions within a hierarchy such as an administrative system, they will hear about changes in political committees and governments before they become public or may gather information about market developments earlier than non-members. As a result, they can apply for jobs before they are posted, can start secret campaigns for political offices before others know these are available, they can organise political alliances, and make greater profits from their investments, thereby using their networks for capital accumulation. Of course, all these actions depend on good and long-lasting networks which are the product of prior accumulation efforts. Accordingly, Bourdieu described the building and growing of social networks as an "investment strategy":

"In other words, the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighbourhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)." (Bourdieu 1986:249-50)

In modern societies and politics, personal social capital can manifest itself through individual memberships in various organisations and clubs as well as friendly circles. The institutionalization of social capital may take the form of regular and repeated meetings, research seminars, panel talks etc (Denord et al. 2011:91).

II.1.2 European and political capital

The forms of capital as explained above are rather abstract concepts. Applied to empirical field studies, Bourdieu often used more field-specific sub-types of capital, such as financial, commercial, and organisational capital in the economic or intellectual, scientific, and educational capital in the scientific field (Witte 2014:160). These field-specific forms of capital which can all be linked to the abstract definitions above are the result of a theoretical concept of the empirical: The reconstruction of a field and its power structure must happen

simultaneously to the reconstruction of the specific forms of capital.²³ Two specific forms of capital can be identified which are exceptionally relevant for the study of the transnational social field of Social Europe: European and political capital. Political capital comes in two forms, as symbolic personal and objectified institutional capital (Bourdieu 2009).²⁴

Symbolic personal capital is embodied in a specific person and cannot be transferred to someone else. Leadership positions within institutions, private enterprises, or NGOs contribute to the accumulation of political capital. Rapporteurs and committee chairs in the European Parliament and in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) accumulate and wield political power, so do leaders within other institutions, expert groups, or NGOs. Individuals who have held leadership positions for a significant amount of time acquire expert knowledge on policy issues and processes but also prestige, political recognition and exposure (Landorff 2019:159-60). Objectified institutionalized political capital meanwhile refers to the legal and institutional powers that come with certain offices, regardless of the specific person who holds these (Landorff 2019:160). It is a power resource of collective actors which depends on their institutional position and their strength within institutions *vis à vis* other actors. Collective actors such as political parties and parliamentary groups assign and remove individuals from these positions in accordance with their political interests and strategies. The power that comes with these positions may be the legal right to consult on policies, electoral power which provides access to political offices or the capacity to fund office spaces, events, and campaigns. Committee members are allowed to table amendments, social partner delegates are invited to social dialogue committees to discuss policymaking, ministers in Council of the European Union and the Eurogroup have voting power and so on.

Specific European capital on the other hand refers to type and duration of engagement with the EU. Some actors may have acquired political, social, and cultural capital to some degree,

²³ This could lead to criticism of eclecticism and lacking scientific rigor as the “invention” of always new forms of capital puts the conceptual differentiation and usefulness in question. It must be said, however, that these forms are broad and that social relations are clearly empirically different in a kindergarten and in the European Commission to give an example. The threat can be avoided, as long as the field-specific terms can be explained with reference to the three original forms of capital.

²⁴ The work on political capital in the EU has been advanced tremendously by Nils Kauppi and David Swartz. This dissertation, however, refers mainly to a new book by Laura Landorff on political capital in the European Parliament since it neither aims nor achieves the same level of theoretical depth as her work. Bourdieu’s decade-long work is scattered in many articles, so that the use of secondary literature makes sense, coming from a practical rather than theoretical point of interest. Readers with a great interest in the development of theory and the multiple and often scattered original contributions are recommended to pick up this book.

yet they do not or at least not permanently participate in the social field of Social Europe. Insider and outsider status in the field depends on specific knowledge of and constant participation in European politics (Georgakakis and Rowell 2013b:229-30). One hypothetical example: A national labour minister from the biggest party with popular support and background in the trade union movement will likely have social capital at home, so that labour market and welfare policies cannot be decided against her, but at the same time, she will not have networks or understanding of EU social policies as her engagement is only temporary.

In European politics, long-standing friendships and personal relations, language skills and more than anything else a shared understanding of the European project beyond day-to-day politics, even beyond short electoral cycles are key to analyse the political networks which lead to policy success (Shore 2006). The accumulation of European capital is not linked to a specific functional role (i.e., government minister, European Commissioner, MEP etc.) nor are party-politics and interest group representation the main arbiters of European politics. It is instead the permanent work on and in the EU and the becoming of a true European in the eyes of others that provides this sort of capital. During this career, actors will pass through different institutional positions within EU and national politics, where they will engage their peers on a regular basis and together, they will become part of the “Brussels bubble” and likely will form political friendships. Frédéric Mérand singles out the relationship between Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Commissioner for Economy and Finance Pierre Moscovici as a typical example of this type of relationship. The grand-coalition²⁵ which defends the project of the European economic and social model is formed through individuals who embody this dream through their lifetime and achievements in European politics (Mérand 2021:37). This grand coalition of European visionaries does not manifest itself in analyses of parliamentary debates or in the rooms of party headquarters, but in the personal networks whose ties are built on strong genuine European capital formations which have strong dimensions of belief systems. The difference between actors with and without specific European capital is exemplified by Didier Georgakakis and Jay Rowell in conclusion of a research project that investigates different European in-groups:

²⁵ The term is used in a socio-political rather than party-political sense describing the broad pro-integrationist forces of the political center which may come from different political parties, think-tanks, interest groups etc.

“As far as permanent actors in the field are concerned, they are endowed with international social capital and, above all, enjoy the authority they have earned through their experience as insiders with responsibilities in institutions, and through capturing EU specific trophies and distinctions (proxied by their prestigious positions within institutions or ‘high level’ groups of experts, a reputation and sometimes even a ‘legendary’ status based on an attested ‘miracle’ performed during a particular European negotiation process).²⁶ They are in a position to embody Europe or at least are perceived to legitimately represent a common European interest. [...] The ‘pure-bred’ outsiders are rare: these could typically be: a new minister who had no previous European experience before participating in negotiations at the Council of Ministers; a business executive who goes to Brussels to plead for a cause without the assistance of a team, or specialized consultants. [...] However, most of the actors in this category [outsiders] possess some European capital (through their training or previous experience) but, globally, in much smaller proportions than the actors in the other category [insiders]. Their trajectories are often marked by the to-and-fro between this space and others, but their European capital is not sufficient to be the primary determinant of what these individuals think and do.” (Georgakakis and Rowell 2013b:230-31)

²⁶ Examples that come to mind from a social policy viewpoint are the statuses of Allan Larsson and Maria Joao Rodrigues as ‘father of the EES’ and ‘mother of the Social OMC’ respectively.

II. 2 ACTORS, INSTITUTIONS, AND NETWORKS IN THE SOCIAL FIELD

II.2.1 Actors and agency

Defining actors in an emerging field can be complicated. The literature widely distinguishes between a broad and a narrow approach to field membership. In a broad sense, everyone who is affected by a certain political outcome, regardless of level and scope of affectedness and active participation is a field participant. A narrow definition of field membership on the other hand postulates that actors have two essential properties. First, they have something at stake in the specific field and second, they orient themselves towards each other and are regular field participants (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:167). I use the second, narrow view on field participation for practical as well as theoretical reasons. Practically because it restricts the empirical research to actors who regularly participate in the field of Social Europe which excludes most national actors. These only become important, if they decide to become active in the European field or if European actors view them as relevant and powerful actors to which they put themselves in relation. They may specifically seek out national support to improve their own field positions or they make arguments specifically referring to certain national actors. From the viewpoint of theoretical clarity, the second definition corresponds with Bourdieu's relational approach: Only actors who have the necessary (social) capital can be active in the social field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

Some critics of Bourdieu's work have argued that the concept of social fields and social capital leads to overly structural, if not deterministic outcomes. According to their reading, the "objective relations" of capital mean that actors' positions are "entirely predefined" and that actors in a field would not be "able to adapt and to change their environment" (Saurugger 2016:75).²⁷ I argue to the contrary, that the relative novelty of Bourdieu's approach could be found in his attempt to overcome the antagonism between structural explanations that deduct everything that happens from economic, political or social macro-structures (e.g. capitalism,

²⁷ This interpretation is similar to vulgar Marxist readings of (economic) capital which simply ask to "follow the money" or "Cui bono?" and which do not need any empirical analysis. The fact that a capitalist economy nests on a profits from investments and leads to unequal outcomes because high investments and high profits determine each other does not mean that every investment will successfully lead to a profit. The fact that the distribution of economic opportunities is skewed towards the upper class does not mean that societal advancement is impossible for individuals. To be perfectly honest, to call Bourdieu's field-theoretical conceptions of the economy, politics, or anything else deterministic is little more than a strawman.

the bourgeois state, patriarchy etc.) and methodological individualism which investigates society only through the lens of individual choices.

“[Bourdieu’s] goal was to overcome the usual opposition between agents and structures and to demonstrate that both mattered if we are to understand what actors do. He was not only one of the first to articulate these theoretical ideas but also among the first to deploy them in the empirical analysis of particular cases.” (Fligstein and McAdam 2012:24-25)

Furthermore, Saurugger criticises that social fields, such as European politics, are inherently stable and not open to change – a critique that is shared by many who use field-theories in their research.²⁸ It is indeed important to ask the question, why and how actors decide to act given certain circumstances e.g., the GFC, the Great Recession, or the threat to European unity. However, a theory of social fields allows researchers to identify those actors who can or cannot act in the first place and to explain the respective positions *vis á vis* others. Nonetheless, the alternative proposed by Saurugger and many others, actor-centred constructivism, poses relevant questions on actors’ ideational and social backgrounds which may guide their actions. It also deviates from pure constructivist approaches which are criticized for treating power relations as “secondary, if they appear at all” (Saurugger 2013:896). The related concepts of agency and strategy, formal and informal institutions and shared experiences are clearly underrepresented in Bourdieu’s work on fields, yet they exist in the in the concept of reflexivity (i.e. the mental ability to observe oneself in relation to other actors and their contexts (Yang 2014).²⁹ Since the early 2000s, many scholars have advanced the theoretical understanding of actors in social fields. One particular framework for EU studies from a Bourdieusian field perspective is the Strasbourg School, a group of predominantly but not exclusively French sociologists who “seek to connect political strategies of actors to their structural location and social characteristics” to analyse the emergence and changes in transnational social fields (Landorff 2019:32). Their work centres various in-groups of European policymaking such as administrative personnel (Georgakakis

²⁸ Yang (2014:1530) for example writes: “Reviewing Bourdieu’s oeuvre reveals that he dwells too much on reproduction and not enough on change.” While he then points out conditions of change in a social field, he is indifferent to the question, whether Bourdieu himself believed that social fields were not deterministic. The individual beliefs of Pierre Bourdieu, however, are not relevant for the question whether and how the theoretical lens of social fields of actions allows for agency and actor-induced change.

²⁹ Originally, Bourdieu only bestowed social scientists with the ability of reflexive thinking which may already be arrogant. More importantly, however, almost all actors in the social field of (European) politics in the 21st century will have at least some social science background and – as the dissertation will show – actors with a track-record of doing social sciences play an important role.

2013; 2017), MEPs and the parliamentary staff (Beauvallet and Michon 2013, Landorff 2019), European central bankers (Lebaron 2008; 2013), trade unions (Wagner 2013), interest groups and lobbying firms (Courty and Michel 2013, Michel 2013), employer and business associations (Dudouet et al. 2013), (economic) experts (Büttner and Mau 2014, Büttner et al. 2015, Coman 2020, Robert 2013, Schmidt-Wellenburg 2017, Schmidt-Wellenburg and Bernhard 2020), or NGOs and social movements (Bernhard 2010, Fillieule and Blanchard 2013). Thus, the redundancy of actor behaviour to structural relations and the neglect of strategy and agency has been addressed by the recent literature. Lisa Suckert (2017:417-18) has rejected the claim that Bourdieu's work was deterministic, yet agreed that exclusion of intentional strategies is a weakness in Bourdieu's analysis of economic and political fields.

The research on agency and strategy in social fields has also a lot to gain from studies with other theoretical frameworks. Skilled actors may use their skills (i.e. their field-specific knowledge) to establish and change cultural frames about social and economic problems (Sweet Stone, Fligstein and Sandholtz 2001:8). Similarly, institutionalists apply the concept of policy entrepreneurship to analyse both collective and individual actors who use situations with weak path dependence to open up policy space. However, the literature on policy entrepreneurship in the EU, particularly on social and economic policies, is ambiguous on the motives and modes of functioning of policy entrepreneurs. Sometimes, they are described as “crucial in a process of institutional change, as they are capable, inter alia, of identifying problems and finding solutions, advocating new ideas and mobilizing political support and public opinion” (de la Porte and Natali 2018:831). In that sense policy entrepreneurs would be needed to solve collective action problems and to bring policy solutions and institutions closer to a perfect political equilibrium. This definition is close to the original literature on policy entrepreneurship by Michael Mintrom who argues that entrepreneurs are necessary agents of policy innovation (Mintrom 1997).

Social Network Analysis (SNA), too, experienced a backlash against overly structural and deterministic research setting during the late 1990s and early 2000s, even though it was different type of structural determinism – not French, but American; not inspired by Bourdieu, but by mathematical sociology. Until then, SNA had either been characterized by a formal research approach which employed regression models and implicitly argued that actors were the sum of their personal attributes (e.g. gender, age, wealth, job) or it used a

classical rational-choice model to analyse behaviour.³⁰ While the word ‘network’ was in the name, the research agenda was one of methodological individualism and disregarded truly relational aspects, i.e. the ties between actors.³¹ Mustafa Emirbayer developed the new approach to social networks, sometimes called the “New York School of Relational Sociology” (Mische 2011)³², in three articles in the *American Journal of Sociology*. In “Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problem of Agency”, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994:1413) criticise that SNA has not been situated in sociological theory which leads to an “inadequate conceptualizations of human agency on the one hand, and of culture on the other”. Historical sociologists and social theorists meanwhile have been deterred from engaging with the SNA research which they describe as infused by “abstruse terminology and state-of-the-art mathematical sophistication” (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994:1446).³³ Building on this critique of existing approaches towards networks, Emirbayer and Ann Mische reflect on the concept of agency in various streams of sociological theorizing and ask how it can be integrated into a framework for relational sociology. They define agency as follows:

“We define it as the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments—the temporal-relational contexts of action—which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations.” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:970)

In this definition, we can find three aspects which help to conceptualize agency from a field perspective.

³⁰ Confusingly, this rational-choice inspired approach in network analysis also applies the term social capital to analyze social behavior, albeit from a purely functional perspective (Coleman 1988, Lin 2002). This has only added to the many misunderstandings between network analysis and relational sociology.

³¹ This dissertation cannot give a complete picture of the scientific development in the field of network studies. The book *Schlüsselwerke der Netzwerkforschung (Key works of network research)*, edited by Boris Holzer and Christian Stegbauer provides a very good overview of central works during the last 50 years. While the short explanatory texts are in German (and aimed at students most likely), non-German readers (and experienced scholars) can use the table of contents as an overview of key texts (Holzer and Stegbauer 2019). The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology is broader in scope but may also serve as a starting point for studying contemporary trends in network analysis from a sociological point of view (Dépelteau 2018), while the SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis focusses on methodological, i.e. algebraic, issues and best-use examples (Scott and Carrington 2014).

³² Other prominent sociologists who are usually subsumed under this name and who are associated with the ‘cultural turn’ in network analysis are Ann Mische, Charles Tilly, and Jeff Goodwin. Harrison White who holds a PhD in theoretical physics had originally presented a purely mathematical approach to network analysis before his own turn towards culture, identity, meaning, and actors (White 1992).

³³ The article concludes with a glossary of network analysis term for the general reader – further proof for the very distant worlds and languages of social network analysis and mainstream sociology during the 1990s.

First, this definition clearly acknowledges the “iterational element” of agency: Structural environments play a role in shaping specific actor’s agency which in turn may either reproduce or transform the structure as such. This points further to the fact that actions are informed by past experiences, ideas, and actions which generate certain behaviours and habits and help to stabilize the social environment. In that sense, the “iterational element” is directly linked to Bourdieu’s function of social capital and habit in the emergence and reproduction of social fields (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:978; 81). Second, the definition goes beyond Bourdieu as it develops a “projective dimension” of agency.³⁴ The authors argue that in responding “to the challenges and uncertainties of social life, actors are capable of distancing themselves (at least in partial explanatory ways) from the schemes, habits, and traditions that constrain social identities and institutions.” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:984). Projectivity nests on human’s ability to anticipate, speculate and hypothesize future developments based on past experiences and narratives (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:989-90). The third and final dimension of human agency, “practical-evaluative” describes the ability to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity and relates to concepts such as judgement or improvisation. Emirbayer and Mische (1998:997) describe this as a communicative contextualization, i.e. an act during which actors reflect on and problematize their situation (“do we have a problem and if, so, what is it?”), deliberate and decide how to solve the problem and execute the decision. However, Emirbayer and Mische do not properly situate this third dimension within their agenda of bridging the gap between relational sociology and network analysis. Instead, the language they use and the examples they provide (e.g., from political decision-making in the seminal works of Alfred Stepan and Philippe Schmitter) comes close to process-tracing. It is hence doubtful, whether the “practical-evaluative” dimension constitutes a distinct form of agency or whether it is a field-specific representation of the iterative and projective dimensions. I tend to argue the latter.

Finally, the role of individuals as actors in shaping the EMU has been studied from an explicit historical-biographical perspective. While it is disciplinary rooted in history, it corresponds well with the sociological literature on social fields as it utilizes concepts as

³⁴ Emirbayer and Mische do not cite Joseph Schumpeter in this seminal article – another blind spot, as Schumpeter’s notion of “creative destruction” is a clear example for this form projective agency. Emirbayer and Mische even use the term “creative reconstructive dimension of agency” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:984). Importantly, the entrepreneurial action of “creative destruction” does not describe a physical destruction, but rather a reorganization of (production) processes and thus relations between human actors.

power, network, and relations and also seeks to address the difficult question between structure and agency. Kenneth Dyson and Ivo Maes (2016a) argue that the study of biographies matters in two ways for understanding policy outcome and institutional design: First, individuals matter. They have introduced and debated ideas, built personal networks, and supporting coalitions to promote their concepts of EMU which may have led to new economic and political challenges in the future. Second, the technical debates on policy details, socio-economic concepts and terminology, and data choices matter in their own right, as they leave legacies which go beyond the life span of specific working groups or political offices (Dyson and Maes 2016b:9-10). Actors with high social and symbolic capital can contribute normative definitions about technical issues to the field which will prevail the actors' field participation – a development that is discussed as policy diffusion in the governance literature (Graham, Shipan and Volden 2013:684) The legacy of SI as a leading policy concept, as discussed in the introduction, is a striking example.

Summing up, the analysis of actors within a social field must go beyond a purely structural understanding of social capital in its various forms and objective relations. Instead, it conceptualizes social capital as unequally distributed power resources that actors can use intentionally and unintentionally to achieve dominance in a social field. Having power is one thing, using is another thing. Anthony King (2000) has identified the unresolved antagonism between agency and structure in Bourdieu's writings itself. He argued that Bourdieu meandered between a practical theory of action, where actors with a "sense of the game" perform to the best of their abilities, and a relapse into overly deterministic and objectivistic theories of habitus (King 2000:419-20). The antagonism between structure and agency cannot be solved theoretically but must be embedded in the empirical project since the changes in relationship between agency and structure are part of the sociological research agenda as the *double constitution of agency and structure*:

"Temporal-relational contexts support particular agentic orientations, which in turn constitute different structuring relationships of actors toward their environments. It is the constitution of such orientations within particular structural contexts that gives form to effort and allows actors to assume greater or lesser degrees of transformative leverage in relation to the structuring contexts of action." (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:1004)

II.2.2 Narratives, discourses, ideas, and meaning

A related aspect of the constructivist or 'cultural turn' (Fuhse 2008; 2015) and its renewed focus on actors and agency in relational sociology (stemming from either Bourdieu or SNA)

was the return of ideational aspects, i.e. the question how discourses, narratives, and ideas shape the political field – as Emirbayer and Goodwin have put it:

“[SNA] has inadequately theorized the causal role of ideals, beliefs, and values, and of the actors that strive to realize them; as a result, it has neglected the cultural and symbolic moment in the very determination of social action.” (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994:1446)

Recentring actors, agency and behaviour from a non-rational-choice perspective is only possible when the causes and conditions of their (in-)action themselves become the element of sociological analysis. While ideas and the power struggle over legitimate conceptions of the social order and social actions are relevant for all fields, they play an even more prominent role in the political field, since these fundamental ideas directly translate into political capital in the form of popular support and recognition by peers (Swartz 2012:168, 74). Niilo Kauppi and Mikael Madsen have pointed out that transnational power elites who overwhelmingly have educational backgrounds in the social sciences emerge from the specific division of labour in global and European governance. They are responsible for purely ideational tasks, i.e. defining problems and solutions to policy, so that ideational factors are perhaps their main power resource (Kauppi 2014, Kauppi and Madsen 2014). Navigating discursive concepts, statistics, and the theories of European integration and political change themselves becomes a necessity and component of political capital.³⁵

“Nowhere is this more visible than in the fields of politics, law, and economics where transnational professionals are competing over the classification and solution to global issues and through that very competition are structuring global fields.” (Kauppi and Madsen 2014:328)

Büttner et al. (2015:582-83) have pointed to the professionalization within the field of EU politics which is characterized by a growing number of think-tanks, lobbying firms, and NGOs and a high demand of people whose job title (Policy Advisor, Public Affairs Consultant, EU Campaigner etc.) symbolizes the fight for and with ideas. The discourses about Social Europe and the charging of terms with meaning for example are forms of appearance of the relational power struggle and the persistence of some terms and the exclusion of other terms are elements of the research endeavour. Thus, the role of ideas, narratives and political discourses relates to the specific fields and forms of capital under investigation.

³⁵ This happens when actors refer to certain processes as intergovernmental or argue that they see “windows of opportunity” for policy change. This reflexive nature of theories of European integration where these are not only scientific analyses of policy output but also input variables as they shape the thinking of actors within the integration process is too often neglected.

II.2.3 Key concepts in field reproduction

Based on these elaborations, four concepts which stem from SNA, are particularly useful for the analysis of EU politics as a transnational field: centrality, multipositionality, homophily, and historicity.

Centrality is perhaps the most known and intuitively understood concept in SNA and field analysis. It is commonly used in statistical network models and measures the number and importance of an actors' social ties (Hawe, Webster and Shiell 2004, Rodrigues 2019). The most common measures are *degree centrality* (the number of connections of one actor), *closeness centrality* (the number of intermediaries one actor has to go through to reach every other actor in the network), and *betweenness centrality* (the number of times an actor is part of the shortest path between two actors). Bottero and Crossley (2011:111-12) have translated these centrality measures into ideal types of actors. Actors with high closeness centrality who have access to many others can gather information, have a superior perspective of the social field and are network organisers, while actors with high betweenness centrality can function as brokers and mediators. High degree centrality is linked to prestige and political claims (Krinsky and Crossley 2014:12).

Multipositionality is an important feature of personal political capital. This refers to individual actors who have held numerous positions in various organisations on different levels and with different institutional tasks. They have been members of national and European Parliament and government, worked for international organisations, think-tanks, in academia and the private sector. This allows them to speak from a position of greater expertise and to see political issues through more than one lens, while it may also contribute to bigger and more powerful networks (Robert 2010; 2013). They can also use their positions within and between different levels and sectors of politics to gain advantage and achieve centrality (Vauchez 2010:110). Thus, the acquisition of personal political capital takes time, and the capital investment is always at risk of getting lost, when an actor leaves the social field.

Homophily has been defined as the principle that people with similar traits are more likely to form networks with each other than with people with dissimilar traits. Most studies on homophily have focussed on sociological characteristics as family, friendship, and workplace relations, limiting research on the importance of homophily for researching policy

networks (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001:435). However, political homophily, can be defined along similar lines as “the tendency to form connections with others who are politically similar” (Gerber, Henry and Lubell 2013:598). Huhe, Naurin and Thomson (2018) have applied the concept to study regulatory politics in the EU energy market and, in a very recent article, have found homophilous networks of senior national officials in permanent positions Council positions which are more decisive than ideological orientations of their respective governments (Huhe et al. 2022:92-93). Thus, the SNA term of homophily may be used in a similar way to the description of public servants who, over time, become permanent Europeans and permanent actors in a social field (Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010).³⁶ Applying this definition to the social field of Social Europe, political homophily can be found in similar political opinions but also in similar experiences in negotiations.

The concept of *historicity* goes beyond the study of historical events and the general tide of history. The concept instead expresses a repudiation of theories which search for and prescribe holistic laws onto socio-historic events (Hall 2007). Furthermore, historicity points to the reflexive element of social theories for social actors. It studies the lessons and reference points in history which actors turn to when they search for meaning and narratives suitable for their own crisis experience, as Kenneth Dyson and Ivo Maes have argued to justify the need for a biographical and historical lens in the understanding of EMU:

“Characteristically, when confronted by acute threats to its identity, coherence, and survival, a polity looks back for inspiration to its architects. The Euro Area crisis provides an opportunity to re-examine their contribution and legacy, in particular the adequacy of the ideas on which monetary union was constructed.” (Dyson and Maes 2016b:7)

Thus, the concept of historicity helps to situate actors and their experiences, knowledges, expectations, and relations in their selective understanding of Social Europe, its history, and its possible futures. Following this approach, the appeal to Europe’s “founding fathers”, architects and greater-than-life characters must be analysed as a form of symbolic capital and strategic action within a field.

³⁶ “Permanent representatives, who are supposed to be ‘national’, are sometimes more international and permanent in the field than a Commissioner or a director of the Commission, who are supposed to be real ‘Europeans’.” (Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010, 96)

II.2.4 Social fields, social networks, and mainstream theories of European integration

As seen above, the seemingly distinct research approaches of field analysis and SNA do share some important characteristics, insights, and objects of interest. Both aim to explain the political process and its outcomes by starting with the social relations that are at the core of human action. Insofar they differ greatly from mainstream theories of European integration, neo-functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism, which take institutions, governmental actors and procedural rules as given and see how actors function within a given environment. Power and power struggles as the constituting factor of field analysis meanwhile put it into close proximity to International Political Economy (IPE).³⁷ IPE may approach the study of Social Europe from the viewpoint of the international monetary and financial system, including structural imbalances and inequalities in the euro area. The main difference between IPE and the field approach is that the former is – it is in the name – is international rather than transnational. IPE for the most part focusses on power struggles within countries and between countries but has little to say about the relational aspects that transcend the nation state. The best indicator for this prevalent methodological nationalism is the tendency of IPE, and comparative capitalism in general, to typologize whole countries with reference to their respective growth models (Baccaro and Pontusson 2016, Hassel and Palier 2021), industrial relations (Afonso and Papadopoulos 2013, Avdagic 2010, Ebbinghaus and Weishaupt 2022), or welfare state regimes (Bonoli and Natali 2012b, Esping-Andersen 1990, Garritzmann, Palier and Häusermann 2022b).

Likewise, governance approaches start with a single (or more) institution or a specific political process from proposal via output to outcome and implementation, while relational sociology starts with the field and aims to populate it with actors. Thus far, the literature on policy or governance networks in the European Union has not been discussed systematically here which reflects the respective ignorance towards each other in the governance literature, the social network analysis, and the sociological analysis of social fields. The “governance turn” (Kohler-Koch and Rittberger 2006) in EU integration took place during the early 2000s, when SNA and relational sociology began to shift towards each other yet moved in a different direction. The analysis of governance networks was not to analyse power relations

³⁷ I refrain from discussing the very much existing differences within IPE, especially between the ‘American’ and ‘British’ school in the same way that I do not discuss how Cultural Political Economy (CPE) relates to a field-theoretical approach at all as the latter would go well beyond the scope of this dissertation.

but asked whether governance by and in networks could contribute to effective and legitimate policymaking (Börzel and Heard-Lauréote 2009:140-46). Political science as a research discipline studying EU politics did move further away from sociology and towards organizational studies and public administration. This steered the research focus towards collective-action-problems and managerial problem-solving and away from a more historically informed analysis of long-term power relations (Klijn 2008).³⁸ This is exemplified by Dion Curry's (2016) network-based analysis of the peer-review process of the Social OMC. While she makes ample reference to theoretical concepts from relational analysis, she does not argue why and how certain network structures emerge and change over time but instead asks how "structural and relational factors affect the legitimacy of this governance process? (Curry 2016:169)" Literature on social networks from a governance perspective takes a descriptive approach towards relational configurations in order to analyse other theoretical concepts – in this case the issue of legitimacy in EU decision-making.

³⁸ There is indeed a debate within political science whether the discipline has lost its critical appeal and is becoming a science for not of these in power.

II. 3 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION AND EXPECTATIONS

Summing up, this dissertation approaches the three research questions on policy, politics, and polity of Social Europe after the Great Recession from a theoretical perspective informed by relational sociology and social network analysis. Thus, it offers an explicit alternative to research on these issues from the theoretical angles of integration theories and governance studies, while it is sympathetic and partly informed by IPE/CPE approaches which, too, nest on power relations as the main explanatory variable. The theoretical argument in brief: European politics on Social Europe takes the form of networks. Networks are social fields of power relations in which actors seek centrality via the application of forms of capital. Actor-relations are particularly structured by specific European forms of social capital which are built on diverse forms of experience, long-term trust, a shared understanding of the European vision, political offices, multipositionality, moderate views in general and the ideological view that social and economic policies must be brought together. In accordance with the literature on Social Europe and the EMU, this approach leads to case-sensitive theoretical expectations:

1. Network forms will differ according to the actors who propose certain policies. Successful social policy actors will show high degrees of homophily and centrality which they achieve through their social capital. They will likely possess multiple perspectives on European and national policymaking and will have years of experience. Policies promoted by actors with less social capital on the other hand will be more fragmented.
2. Social Europe will likely be discussed with references to other policy fields, especially as fiscal and monetary policy. The conflict between social progress and fiscal discipline structures the field and explains most field positions. The need for Social Europe will be linked to the necessity of the European integration project per se and the threats that arise from a sole focus on economic issues. Moderate and consensus-based policy proposals which build on existing networks in the broad pro-European political centre will have a higher chance of approval than divisive issues.
3. Actors who want more Social Europe and who especially want a social dimension for the EMU will use capital to convince powerful traditional opponents of EU social policy, especially Germany. Access to and understanding of German policymakers and economists can decide whether a proposal gains initial traction. The pivotal role of

various German actors such as the Bundesbank, business interests, the federal government in opposition to social and fiscal integration has been well-known in the literature for a long time. Likewise, Dyson and Maes (2016b:21) point out that actors in the past had strategically sought German support for their proposals:

“In particular, individual architects had to position themselves with respect to the underlying power structures of European monetary integration, specifically Germany’s systemic power. Quite simply, agreeing a credible and sustainable monetary union depended on German willingness to participate. Hence, in the period before 1999, the non-German architects of the euro faced the practical challenge of how to engage Germany and to retain German support during the long transition to a monetary union.”

Other governments will orientate their positions towards Germany, either in a supportive way, or they will try to change the German position.

III METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS: VALIDITY AND TRIANGULATION

All sociological research must fulfil the standards of internal validity.³⁹ Results are internally valid, when the conclusions are based on a solid theoretical model, sufficient empirical evidence, and checked against multiple alternate explanations. Data triangulation is the main tool to generate internal validity in qualitative research. Triangulation in the most basic sense means that observations and explanations can be verified with multiple data points which should come from multiple data sources (Turner, Cardinal and Burton 2017:243-44). The same empirical phenomenon and question a researcher asks can be studied using legal documents, expert interviews, or newspaper articles. Different types of data have different characteristics, and the combination reduces the risk of biased, skewed, or simply invalid conclusions.

The source material of this dissertation has been selected in three forms: interview data, textual data, and through participatory observation. Interviews were mainly conducted between March and August 2018 in Brussels during a stay at the Observatoire Social Européen (OSE). All but one interview (EP-S&D1) were conducted solely by the author of this study. While staying in Brussels, I also participated in various discussion seminars, panel talks, conferences, poster presentations etc. which focussed on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Multi-Annual Financial Framework, structural imbalances in the euro area or social partnership in the EU. Additionally, I have received and participated in invitations for online seminars on the same and similar issues which intensified following the outbreak of the Covid-pandemic in early 2020. This type of source which informs much of my writing and understanding of Social Europe (and which has since become an element of my personal embodied European capital) can be credited but not cited. Finally, the majority of the empirical work nests on textual sources of different forms. All chapters make ample use of documents by EU institutions as the Commission, the Parliament or the Council and their respective sub-divisions, working groups etc. They also explore policy statements from other collective actors such as social partners, interest groups, NGOs, think-tanks, or lobbying groups. Often times, these take the form of policy letters, policy briefs etc. Finally, they build on documents which are published in personal capacities: speeches, interviews, opinion

³⁹ This dissertation will use the terms data and sources as synonymous.

articles, and the like. Chapter V stands out as it analyses an economic debate within the field and thus analyses contributions in economic journals.

All interviews were conducted following a semi-structured questionnaire (Brinkmann 2014:437), however the questionnaires itself were slightly changed depending on the respective interviewee and the specific issues they had worked on. All interviews started with the same question to introduce themselves and to describe their institutional role(s) since the beginning of the Great Recession. If needed, follow-up questions were asked on the specific involvement with the social dimension of the EMU, the EUBS, and the EPSR. Additionally, all interviewees were asked to describe their relations *vis á vis* other actors. The form of these questions varied on prior descriptions of relations given by the interviewees as well as on their background. Interviewees who had a public sector background (i.e., working as public sector officials in the institutions) were asked, whether, how and to which extent they engaged civil society, social partners, and other institutions, as well as other actors within their institution. Additionally, interviewees should construct the field by talking about supporters and adversaries, political influence, and ownership of policy. Unsurprisingly, interviewees with political roles, i.e., MEPs and their advisers, civil society and social partner representatives and cabinet members, were less reluctant to discuss strategies and support and opponency structures than career public servants. This can be seen in the vastly different lengths of replies to the first question which reach from 00:28 minutes (Interview EMPL1) to more than three minutes in many cases. While an extreme example, this specific reply conceptualizes the approach towards relational questions by many interviewees with a public sector background. The interviewee downplays their personal experiences as “not relevant” since they are not related to the overall issue of Social Europe.

“I had a unit for the European Semester in the DG Employment that coordinates everything on the European Semester, we bring everything together from policy units, tier units, analysis units, interaction with other DGs that are also active in the social dimension. Think of EARC, SANTE. Before that, I did other things that are not relevant.” (Interview COM-EMPL1)

Consequently, as an interviewer I adapted my follow-up questions. Questions would first focus on policy with follow-ups on relational aspects. Additionally, there was a learning effect in conducting the interviews as well as there were different circumstances. Some interviews started with considerable delay (maximum of 45 minutes for Interview COM-EMPL3) and were rushed by the interviewees side, others took place in a relaxed atmosphere and included small talk before and after the interview during which the interviewees

provided “off-the-record”-information. The transcription of interviews was mainly done by the me with some help from student assistants. The transcription used a non-narrative naturalized and readable style and interviewees have been given the opportunity to proof-read the transcripts to comply with ethical standards (Mero-Jaffe 2011).⁴⁰ In addition to triangulating interview data with other interviews and other data sources, I shared some anonymized interview data with a group of fellow PhD students who, too, used theories ranging from SNA to relational sociology. As researchers without case-specific, but research-specific knowledge, they were asked to identify and analyse relations described by the interviewees. This is sometimes called investigator triangulation (Hussein 2009), a process to guarantee that the conclusions from the interviews are not researcher-specific but case-specific independent of the person who interprets them.⁴¹

Similarly, the analysis of textual data must fit the research interest. In principle, it can suffer from two problems: It can either be too arbitrary or it can be too systematic. If it is too arbitrary, the choice of sources considered in the research process appears either random or on purpose to promote a specific narrative by the researcher. The result would be one narrative among many but not a scientific sociological analysis. If it is too systematic, the choice of sources risks to ignore empirical evidence because it may not fit into a standardized model. The choice for and against the publication of types of texts (press releases, policy briefs, interviews) must be analysed as a strategy within a social field.

This dissertation has systematically analysed textual data by the European Commission, the European Council, and the Council of the European Union, the EESC, the European social partners between 2012 and 2019, whenever the content related to the social dimension of the EMU, EUBS, and the EPSR. Additionally, a wide range of textual sources were employed to analyse issue positions and relations between actors. These may be press interviews, conference programmes, books and book contributions, articles in scientific journals, newspapers, and weekly/monthly magazines. Besides the relational analysis, elements of process-tracing have been undertaken to establish case-specific timelines (Beach and Pedersen 2018, Levy 2008).

⁴⁰ Interviewees have reacted very differently to this opportunity. Some have made many changes and additions, while others have simply given consent.

⁴¹ This is even more needed when the interviewer and the interpreter are the same person.

Written reports from political insiders have special value as they describe politics from their field position, even more so when complementary insider reports from adversarial positions exist. A well-known example are the books on the euro crisis in Greece, written by Greek Minister of Finance Yanis Varoufakis and Eurogroup President Jeroen Dijsselbloem (Dijsselbloem 2019, Varoufakis 2017). A comparative reading of the same events and their respective preparations, network activities, and strategies provides a formidable overview of the Greek crisis in European politics. The capital as well as the specific strategies within a social field determine varying uses of different types and quantities of texts. NGOs will be more likely to follow activist strategies than and actors with established networks will have greater possibilities to make themselves heard if they wish so. Economic capital is essential in financing advertisement, research groups, or simply PR personnel, an office, and publications. Accordingly, the research design did not pre-select specific sources (e.g., press releases) to compare them one-on-one but was instead open for the integration of various sources. Furthermore, the choice of sources was guided by the empirical puzzle and the political proposals at hand. The debate on EUBS was dominated by (economic) expertise and economic research in the form of journal articles and think-tank pieces, thus, plays a major role in chapter V. The EPSR on the other hand involved a lengthy public consultation regime which produced its own sources.

Thus, the way this study utilizes its source-material is two-fold: For one, the source material is questioned on substance, i.e., on the contents and timings of policy. Second, the sources are analysed from a viewpoint of relational sociology, i.e., they are asked how they show networks and ties but also antagonism between actors. This may take the form of direct references to other actors in the field but may also be more subtle, e.g., by referring to certain established terms and employing or challenging established normative foundations of the field.

IV A NEW PARADIGM FOR SOCIAL POLICY: THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF EMU

- “Is there any topic less sexy than the ‘social dimension’?”

(Wolfgang Kowalsky)

The term “social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU)” has not been invented as a response to the GFC and the Great Recession but in fact predates these events by more than one decade. While EU social policy always targeted all member states,⁴² there were always arguments and proposals in favour of social policies specifically targeted towards the euro area, beginning during the late 1980s and 1990s, when the EU began to implement the monetary union. In an article titled “Europe and the Crisis”, the economist Peter Nunnenkamp (1999:15) referred to the “debate on the so-called social dimension of EMU” as a step towards European minimum standards for labour markets and industrial relations. Even earlier, economists Filip Abraham and Paul van Rompuy (1991:280) discussed and eventually dismissed the idea that monetary integration should include “active steps towards establishing minimum social rights as part of the so-called social dimension of EMU” in a research paper for the Directorate-General for Regional Policies (DG REGIO). Finally at the eve of the introduction of the new currency, Bart Vanhercke summed up a debate about the form, timing, and necessity of a specific social dimension of the EMU up with reference to its contested nature:⁴³

“The debate about EMU and social protection concerns, in the end, the ideological discussion about what society we want, about whether we wish politics to regain force over economics, or whether we continue to think that the market economy will allow, in the long run, a solution to be found to the existing social inequalities. If we choose in favour of the preponderance of the political element, Europe should become more democratic, which implies, among other things, that the political and social actors affirm their European character much more clearly, but it also implies that the efficiency of European politics is to be improved (among other things by reducing or even suppressing unanimity voting).” (Vanhercke 1998:184)

This quote – which could feature without any adjustments in contemporary policy debates – shows that the question whether the EMU should have a social dimension was not only contested but also charged with meaning beyond the technicalities of social and welfare

⁴² With the exception of the United Kingdom which only adopted the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (1989) after Labour took over government in 1998.

⁴³ Bart Vanhercke who now heads the OSE and his predecessor and current Director of the ETUI also published some articles on the social dimension of EMU in French during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

policies. Being in favour of a social dimension correlated with calls for more political integration to increase democratic legitimacy and calls to adjust decision-making processes within Europe towards a more parliamentary opposed to intergovernmental style. OSE Director Philippe Pochet had advanced a similar argument in a literature survey on social policy and the EMU which the OSE had undertaken on behalf of Eurofound in 1999 (Pochet 1999).

However, the specific and explicit term “social dimension of (the) EMU” was rarely used before the introduction of the euro (seven articles that use the term on Google Scholar predate the year 2000) and only slightly more often (nine articles) in the decade afterwards,⁴⁴ when European social policy centred on the Social OMC and ALMP (see chapter I.3). The rare occurrences interpret the social dimension as an unplanned and largely unexpected spill-over from other policy fields: Gerda Falkner (2004:269) argued that the “perceived absence” of the social dimension led to the inclusion of European social partners in policymaking, an “unexpected resilience of corporatist patterns”, while Waltraud Schelkle and Deborah Mabbett (2007) found an incidental and productivist social dimension in the fiscal surveillance of national budgets.

Between 2009 and 2022, however, the term “social dimension of (the) EMU” appeared 227 times on Google Scholar and the exact term can also be found using a standard Google search.⁴⁵ This indicates that the specific term “social dimension of (the) EMU” signifies either the emergence of or the changes within the particular field of Social Europe, while the earlier usage already implies the contested nature. The following chapter will trace the reinvention of the term (IV.1), show the diffusion and its usage by individual and collective actors in the field (IV.2), before it will explain how and why it disappeared (IV.3). Finally, the conclusion (IV.4) situates the “social dimension of the EMU” within the field of Social Europe and analyses actors’ relations and networks.

⁴⁴ This is not to say that the nexus of welfare states, European fiscal and social policy, and the EMU was not featured in either the research or policy community but that the defining term “social dimension of (the) EMU” did not feature in these debates.

⁴⁵ Some may argue that these differences are a product of time of the internet itself, but it should be mentioned that Google Scholar tracks older articles relatively well. The terms “social dimension of Europe” and “social dimension of (the) EU” bring sufficient results pre-2010.

IV.1 BRINGING THE ‘SOCIAL DIMENSION OF EMU’ BACK IN

When the European Union left the period of ad-hoc crisis management and turned to reforming the regulatory and institutional framework under the banner of a completed or genuine EMU, the social dimension was not at the centre of their objectives. The first draft of the Four Presidents’ Report (van Rompuy 2012:3) identified four essential building blocks:

- (1) A financial framework for banking supervision, including insolvency regimes and customer deposit guarantees;
- (2) A budgetary framework for fiscal supervision and control;
- (3) An economic framework for promoting sustainable growth, employment, and competitive labour markets; and
- (4) A governance framework which enhanced democratic legitimacy and accountability of the EMU.

Social policy was not seen as an essential building block, but the text urged to consider social issues when implementing fiscal consolidation policies and subsumed social cohesion under economic growth in typical productivist fashion. The final version, while being more prone on detail, did not deviate from van Rompuy’s initial agenda. The lack of a social dimension was not identified as a weakness of EMU per se and thus, the creation of a genuine social union was not on the agenda, unlike a full banking, fiscal, and economic union (van Rompuy et al. 2012:13). The European Parliament criticized this The parliamentary resolution on the Four Presidents’ Report called for attention to the EMU’s social dimension yet did not specify this further (European Parliament 2012a). It was prepared in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) with Belgian Christian Democrat and long-standing MEP Marianne Thyssen as the rapporteur (European Parliament 2012a). The corresponding Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) meanwhile was represented by its chair, French social democrat Pervenche Berès, a veteran MEP herself.⁴⁶ While the average MEP stays in parliament for a little less than two election periods (Beauvallet and Michon 2013), both Berès and Thyssen had continuously sat since 1994 and 1991 respectively. During this period, they had been members of both the EMPL and the

⁴⁶ For their respective CVs see https://www.pervencheberes.fr/?page_id=19 and https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/default/files/cv_thyssen.pdf.

ECON committees at various times. While many MEPs noticed that social policies were missing from the report, Berès was especially critical as she pointed out the imbalance between economic and social, especially employment policies, in van Rompuy's proposal with reference to their equal status in the Maastricht Treaty (European Parliament 2012c). The EMPL committee had earlier suggested to add a fifth – social – block or pillar to the reform package. In response, Commissioner Michel Barnier who represented the Commission during this hearing communicated concern about these remarks but referred substantially to the Europe 2020 targets for social policies (European Parliament 2012c) which largely predated the euro crisis and were contradicted by fiscal austerity implemented later via the Fiscal Compact, the two-pack and six-pack (Leschke, Theodoropoulou and Watt 2015). Additionally, the social policy targets in Europe 2020 were more directed towards poverty and social inclusion and were, thus, relatively futile in dealing with the euro crisis and its main social challenges, i.e. structural imbalances, inequality, and unemployment (Daly 2012). Nonetheless, the EP in May 2013 called upon the Commission to develop a proposal to implement convergence which must include a "strong social pillar", reflecting their earlier language (European Parliament 2013).

Meanwhile, the strongest push for the inclusion of the social dimension of EMU into the framework did not come from the Parliament, but from within the Commission itself, namely from Commissioner László Andor.⁴⁷ Andor, an economist by training and profession, was a leading voice on the left-wing of the then governing Hungarian social-democratic party MZSP and had consulted the party, affiliated think-tanks, and prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány until 2005 on economic and especially European economic policies. As such, he had been a vocal critic of the neoliberal transition to free market economies, which post-communist countries experienced during the 1990s as well as the way the European enlargement process in 2004 repeated the central mistake of coupling market integration with labour market liberalisation and deregulation (Andor 2000). He argued against Hungary's ascension to the EMU on the grounds that their fiscal positions would deteriorate in the absence of the exchange mechanism and that Hungary would probably need EU funding in the form of loans to cope with the costs of euro area membership (Andor 2003). From 2005-2010, he had been a board member of the European Bank of Reconstruction and

⁴⁷ For a CV see: https://www.kuwi.europa-uni.de/de/studium/master/es/MES-Team/Honorarprofessoren/Prof.-Dr.-Laszlo-Andor-PhD/Andor_LA_CV_2020_May.pdf.

Development (EBRD) but his nomination as European Commissioner came as a surprise to many observers. Relatively unknown in Hungary, he was denounced as a “communist banker” by the opposition party Fidesz (Euractiv 2010). While Andor’s political and economic worldview was anything but communist, he was clearly to the left of Commission President Barroso and most, if not all, members of the College, most importantly Vice-President for the Euro, Economy and Finance, Olli Rehn.

In October 2012, during a speech on the Future of Europe given on invitation of the “Friends of Europe” think-tank, Andor seized the opportunity presented by the renewed interest in institutional reform to push for his vision of a social dimension. He argued that social policy should be of equal importance to banking, economic, fiscal, and political initiatives in the EMU reform process for three reasons:

- (1) Resilient labour markets and high employment levels would help to diminish macroeconomic imbalances between member states.
- (2) The interdependence of European economies would lead to spill over of unemployment and poverty crises between member states.
- (3) Socio-economic divergence would damage the legitimacy of the European integration project (Andor 2012).

Thus, his arguments were both economic and political but not founded in explicitly social thoughts.⁴⁸ Substantially, his early proposal for a social dimension rested on two pillars: On the one hand, social and employment policy objectives should take the same importance in EMU policymaking as fiscal and economic objectives. In that sense, economic and social policy were two sides of the same coin which must be equally considered. Practically, this would be achieved by amending the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and the Fiscal Compact with policy benchmarks and monitoring for social issues such as the unemployment or poverty rate.⁴⁹ Consequently, EU enforcement rules should apply to social indicators in the same way as to economic indicators. This may be called the reconciliation element of the

⁴⁸ It could be possible to imagine the need for a social dimension because all EU citizens deserve a minimum/decent income, however arguments that build on decency or dignity are never present in these debates.

⁴⁹ Andor expressed this idea for the first time in a speech to the ETUC in January 2013: “The existing macroeconomic surveillance framework can be supplemented by reinforced social surveillance of fundamental indicators such as the unemployment rates, the number of young people not in employment or education, gross household disposable income, risk of poverty rates and also in-work poverty.” (Andor 2013)

social dimension.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the EMU should develop a fiscal capacity, i.e., the means to raise funds via taxes or similar regular payments and use those for transfers between member states to stabilize the euro area economy (Andor 2013). This may be called the fiscal solidarity element of the social dimension and its most prominent example is the European Unemployment Benefit Scheme (see Chapter V).

Following both the internal and external criticism which the EU had received for missing out on social policy challenges within the EMU framework and the widespread discontent with austerity in Southern Europe, the European Council started to consider the social dimension of EMU as an issue of its own. After the adoption of the Four Presidents' Report, the European Council promised to examine the social dimension by June 2013 (European Council 2012) and, in January 2013, tasked the EESC⁵¹ to provide an explanatory opinion "For a social dimension of European Economic and Monetary Union".

This report was co-authored by two very experienced EESC members, rapporteurs Luca Jahier (Diversity Group) and Georges Dassis⁵² (Workers Group) and resembles their backgrounds in Greek, Belgian, and Italian trade unionism. Dassis had been engaged in European politics for decades. As a political refugee during the Greek dictatorship, he had joined the Belgian trade union Fédération du Travail de Belgique (FGTB) in 1976 and had since then hold top positions in both the Belgian and Greek workers movement. First elected to the EESC in 1981, he had headed the workers group from 2008 to 2015, before he became EESC president in 2015. Luca Jahier⁵³ had joined the EESC in 2004 as a member of the third group, today named "Diversity" and had been a constant member of its Social Economy

⁵⁰ This distinction between economic and social policies is common in the comparative literature on the surveillance regime in the European Semester (see e.g., de la Porte and Heins 2015).

⁵¹ The EESC has 329 individual members who are nominated by member states on roughly proportional base and select themselves into three working groups: (1) Employers, (2) workers and (3) Diversity Europe (representing civil society in its broadest meaning). The main task of the EESC is to consult and advise European Council, Commission and Parliament on issues broadly linked to economic and social integration. EESC opinions are prepared in ad-hoc study groups and standing committees, before they are put to a vote in the plenum. Despite its central role as a de facto in-house European consultancy and being the self-declared bridge between "Europe and organised civil society", Smisman's (2000) findings that research has been scarce still rings true 20 years later. The literature suggests that the EESC has the best chance to influence policymaking, if it acts quick, produces expert-driven opinions and aligns its recommendations close to the initial proposal, yet its overall influence remains limited (Hönnige and Panke 2013).

⁵² Sometimes transcribed into Georgis or George, for a short CV see: <https://web.archive.org/web/20160304194254/http://www.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.president>.

⁵³ See for his CV: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/resources/docs/cv-lj-en.pdf> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/luca-jahier-03a10a120?originalSubdomain=be>.

Category. Additionally, he had been elected to lead this group within the EESC in 2011. Since 2001, he had worked as a lobbyist for the Christian Associations of Italian Workers *ACLI (Associazioni Cristiane dei Lavoratori Italiani)*, an NGO inspired by Catholic Social Teaching and linked to Christian trade union movement. Finally, his CV lists memberships in Social NGOs as the Social Platform and shows a commitment to solidarity, democracy, and the concept of Social Europe. In 2018, Jahier would follow Dassis as President of the EESC.

The EESC opinion already distinguished itself from the Four Presidents' Report and the parliamentary resolution in its first sentence through its integration of the social dimension as equal among others as it states that "European Economic, Social and Political Union is still to be achieved. (EESC 2013: 1)" The opinion strongly supported the implementation of a social dimension and provided some concrete proposals in this regard. For one, the EESC, too, favoured the reconciliation element. This should be achieved by putting social indicators and benchmarking exercises at the centre of economic governance in the European Semester. The fiscal solidarity element is present in the proposal for European Social Bonds, an instrument to finance social investment policies without additional debt burden on national budgets. Additionally, the EESC called for the guarantee and monitoring of "fundamental social rights" which were needed "to build the social pillar of the EMU within the framework of social Europe". The necessity to respect social rights, not as a means to achieve economic policy goals but as a means in itself, came as a reminder to the Commission and the ECB as "members of the Troika" (EESC 2013: 3-4). However, the opinion did not provide concrete proposals as to how social rights should be better observed and enforced in the future. All three elements of the social dimension and possible policy outputs are depicted in Table 1.

	Policy objective	Policy content
Reconciliation element	Balance between economic (market-making) and social (market-correcting) objectives	Introduction of European social benchmarking, monitoring, and scoreboard Social partner participation in European Semester Amendment of SGP
Fiscal solidarity element	Automatic stabilization of euro area in economic recession Prevention of high unemployment rates	European tax base European social bonds European Unemployment Benefit Scheme (EUBS) Euro area budget SI and ALMP
Social rights element	Guarantee, assurance, and monitoring of social rights for all EU citizens	Implementation in the European Semester, however mainly unclear

Table 1: Social policy elements in the social dimension of EMU, own representation

Finally, in October 2013, the European Commission published a communication on “Strengthening the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union” (European Commission 2013a). While the document includes some proposals, the Commission made it clear that its main objective was to contribute to a wider discussion, mindful of the fact that social policy remained a prerogative of member states:

“This Communication on strengthening the social dimension is a further contribution from the Commission to the debate on deepening EMU, bearing in mind that the general social agenda is a matter for the 28 Member States. “ (European Commission 2013a:1)

It proposed the addition of a Social Scoreboard to the European Semester, composed of five headline indicators (European Commission 2013a:3):

- (1) unemployment rate
- (2) youth unemployment and the rate of those not in education, employment, or training (NEET),
- (3) household disposable income,
- (4) the at-risk-of-poverty-rate (AROP), and
- (5) socio-economic inequalities.

While the adoption of the scoreboard proved relatively uncontroversial,⁵⁴ Andor had unsuccessfully pushed for automatic consequences once countries fell below pre-defined targets (Vogel 2013). Thus, the reconciliation element was present, yet weakened, while the fiscal solidarity element was lacking for all but rhetoric. Social rights were not mentioned explicitly as an element of the social dimension. The communication dedicated a chapter to solidarity and financial instruments which may be used but the corresponding FAQ which was given as additional information to the media clarified its quality in no unclear language:

“Does the Communication propose any new money to tackle employment and social problems in the EMU?”

No.

But in developing a truly social dimension, the Communication recalls that the scope of the EU budget must be fully exploited. The 2014-2020 budget contains reinforced means and programmes to target employment and social problems:

- The European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) will continue to be an important driver for the necessary reforms and modernisation of social policies.
- The Youth Employment Initiative will mobilise up to €8 billion to help Member States implement a Youth Guarantee in regions with youth unemployment rates over 25%. This will be frontloaded in 2014-15.
- The new Programme for Employment and Social Innovation, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived are also important instruments available to Member States.
- Moreover, on 20 February 2013 the Commission proposed a Social Investment Package aimed at providing guidance to Member States on improving social protection systems, with a focus on social investment.” (European Commission 2013b)

The communication referred to existing funding instruments in the EU’s Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Social Investment Package (SIP) which did not provide funding for SI, but provided counselling for member states on how to enact SI policies (de la Porte and Natali 2018:838, Hemerijck 2017b:4). On request of Andor, the preparation of the SIP by DG EMPL was supported by the Social Investment Expert Group, a group of leading experts on SI including Maurizio Ferrera, Anton Hemerijck, Bruno Palier, and Frank Vandembroucke. They made far-reaching proposals to establish SI as a long-term policy paradigm which could be mutually supportive with the goals of fiscal sustainability and argued that SI spending should be excluded from budgetary boundaries set by the fiscal

⁵⁴ In the background, controversies regarding the choices for specific indicators existed. Roland Erne (2015) has noticed the politicized nature of performance indicators in the new economic governance regime. At the same time, he voiced skepticism whether conflicts over the ‘right’ indicators were worthy of political capital use.

consolidation framework (Hemerijck and Vandenbroucke 2012, Vandenbroucke, Hemerijck and Palier 2011), but these plans were vetoed by DG ECFIN (Hemerijck 2022:6-7).

Overall, Employment Commissioner Andor had seized the opportunity provided by the Four Presidents' Report and Draghi's promise to stabilize the euro area via the monetary policy channel to re-introduce the social dimension into the debate of reforming EMU. However, the term was ambiguous, insofar that it contained various meanings. Andor and DG EMPL used it in two ways, both in relation to the economic dimension, while the EESC added a third dimension, a social rights inspired social dimension *sui generis*. The Commission communication in October 2013 picked up the reconciliation element Andor had attached to the term and added social indicators which correspond with macro-economic and fiscal indicators from two-pack and six-pack regulation in the new economic governance regime. More importantly, however, the communication opened up the debate, so that afterwards many actors started to weigh in on the necessity and institutional design of the social dimension of EMU in the eye of the Great Recession.

IV.2 THE SOCIAL DIMENSION AS AN ANCHOR POINT IN THE FIELD: TRADE UNIONS, EMPLOYERS, AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Council decision from December 2012 and the Commission communication from October 2013 started a lively debate on the social dimension of EMU among collective actors, especially social partners but also political party groups in the EP, European think-tanks, and individual actors of European calibre.⁵⁵ This sub-chapter provides an overview of their respective positions.

IV.2.1 Social partners

European trade unions were clearly encouraged by the debate on a social dimension and invested resources into making themselves heard. Besides regular participation in consultation and the publication of position statements by the ETUC on behalf of European trade unions, they worked on a “Roadmap to Social Europe”, presenting their own visions and ideas (Grozelier et al. 2013). Organised and published by the Social-Europe-Blog, it combined short articles on the origins of the crisis and the deficits of European integration by famous centre-left social scientists such as Jürgen Habermas, Zygmunt Bauman, or Simon Deakin (Part I) with statements from EU and European trade union leaders (Part II) and concrete proposals for a new pathway towards Social Europe by researchers from trade unionist institutes such as the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) and its German and French counterparts, the Hans-Böckler-Foundation and the Lasaire Institute (Part III) – 43 short articles in total. The latter helped to put the book together and provided the necessary financing, as were the largest German trade union IG Metall and the social-democratic Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation. Compiled during the spring and summer of 2013, the book was published after the Commission communication on the social dimension from October 2013 and, in its totality, provides a great overview of trade unionist sentiment during the early 2010s.⁵⁶ Its view on the EU and the euro area was dominated by the crisis experience and

⁵⁵ A non-exclusive overview of think-tank, civil society and social partner contributions to the debate can be found on the homepage of the European Parliamentary Research Service: <https://epthinktank.eu/2013/10/06/the-social-dimension-of-the-economic-and-monetary-union/>.

⁵⁶ Readers who have not lived through the early 2010s or who want to update their memory are encouraged to pick up the book and skim through a few articles to gain an impression how discontent trade unions and the centre-left in general were with EU crisis management. The book is available online for free.

the harsh fiscal conditionality which was forced upon bail-out countries. The term “austerity” is used fifty-nine times and all authors agree that the EU needed a complete policy U-turn on economic and social policy. Regarding the proposals for a social dimension, outlined in the Commission communication, two of the co-editors, Wolfgang Kowalsky from the ETUC and Henning Meyer, editor of Social Europe, set the tone:

“On 2nd October 2013, the Commission finally published its long awaited communication on the social dimension proposing to create a new scoreboard to allow for better and earlier identification of major employment and social problems. The communication, quite frankly, was disappointing. [...] The communication also does not propose any new resources to tackle unemployment and social problems in the European Monetary Union, which is also a big omission. [...] More and more, the question is if a social dimension is still compatible with the new economic governance system now emerging in the wake of the Eurozone crisis. Internal wage devaluation and financial rescue packages as permanent new features are in contradiction to a social dimension, whatever form it is meant to take. The core problem is not one of too few indicators but the necessity to fight unemployment more efficiently and to establish a democratic economic governance system in line with the European Social Model.” (Kowalsky and Meyer 2013:2)

The disappointment in the limited approach by the Commission is consistent with earlier ETUC statements on the social dimension. In April 2013, the ETUC Executive Committee positioned themselves in favour of the social rights and reconciliation element of the social dimension but their main focus was not the EMU reform programme but the austerity policies. The first two priorities were to stop cuts to public spending, protection and wages and to stop competition in the EU on labour costs, working conditions, and tax rates (ETUC 2013a). In December 2013, the ETUC repeated these priorities, while arguing that the analysis of social indicators should have automatic consequences and assessing that the “proposals presented will do little” to reconcile social and economic policy objectives (ETUC 2013b). However, the ETUC and national trade unions disagreed with the proposals for the social dimension of EMU on one very central point – its focus on the EMU proper. Both ETUC positions and most statements from trade unionists in the “Roadmap to Social Europe” made this point. The challenges of unemployment, poverty, inequalities, and social dumping were not unique to the euro area but concerned all twenty-eight member states. The two elements of the social dimension favoured by trade unions, reconciliation and social rights, and their respective implementation in the European Semester and European legislative action would likewise affect all EU countries (Bsirske and Busch 2013, Dimitrov 2013, ETUC 2013a; b, Ségol 2013, Sommer 2013, Zavadil 2013). Additionally, the national contributions showed slight disagreements regarding the need for treaty change which may explain the ETUC’s reluctance to endorse the fiscal solidarity element.

Besides this roadmap, the European trade unions and their research institute, the ETUI, produced various articles, books, and opinion reports on the issue of a social dimension, showing huge investment. ETUI's academic journal *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research* published a special issue, edited by ETUI Director Philippe Pochet and Senior Researchers Christophe Degryse and Maria Jepsen, in February 2013 which asked, whether the crisis management and the economic consequences were compatible with the social and democratic model of the EU (Degryse, Jepsen and Pochet 2013b). Pochet as a person occupies a key spot on the trade unionist side within the field who combines a trade unionist agenda with knowledge of and participation in academic debates, as he had continuously worked on the connection of social policy and the EMU since the 1990s.⁵⁷ Building on Pochet's (1999) earlier work for the OSE, the authors distinguish between three models for the interplay between EMU and social policy which they broadly link to groups of actors and specific moments in history. American economists favoured the establishment of a monetary union only after the institutionalisation of a social and political union – as the final culmination of the European integration project. European federalists hoped that monetary union would advance a social dimension via functional spill-over, while European central bankers and economists were responsible for the status quo – a monetary union coupled with deliberative governance and social deregulation (Pochet and Degryse 2013:106-07). Ideologically, these actors build on two pillars: First, they borrowed concepts from comparative capitalism, especially but not exclusively the Varieties of Capitalism (VoC) framework to argue that economic imbalances coupled with an inflexible and universal monetary policy were the root cause of the euro crisis. Different capitalist accumulation regimes without European democracy including macroeconomic and fiscal policy coordination led to the dissolution of national wage-setting mechanisms, a race-to-the-bottom and unfair disadvantages for Southern European countries (Degryse, Jepsen and Pochet 2013a).⁵⁸ Second, they had an explicit perception of European social and economic policy as a field of power, and even more so a field of ideas. The dominance of 'economic'

⁵⁷ For a short CV see <https://www.etui.org/about-etui/staff/philippe-pochet>.

⁵⁸ Their line of thinking is heavily influenced by scholars from the field of International Political Economy (IPE), especially those affiliated with the Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne, as they regularly cite Fritz Scharpf, Martin Höpner, or Lucio Baccaro to name a few. Accordingly, in newer publications, their framework shifts from VoC to growth models. When Pochet writes that he wants to weaken the influence of 'economists', he would in turn very much like to strengthen the influence of these "political economists".

over ‘social’ experts during the 2000s which in turn led to the dominance and realisation of the deregulatory integration model is explained by the former’s group institutional power and cohesion – both of which the trade unions themselves lacked (Pochet 2006).

Additionally, OSE and ETUI started to publish an annual overview of developments in the EU social policy in 1999 called “Social policy in the European Union: State of play”. These books contain roughly ten articles, written by researchers from trade unionist and social-democratic institutions as well as university-affiliated academics and provide key insights into the positions, beliefs, and strategies of these actors.⁵⁹ Pochet, Degryse, the ETUI and the OSE saw the upcoming debate on the social dimension of the EMU as a chance to recalibrate the actor constellations, dominant ideas, and thus the expert consensus within the field, as they laid out in the article. In particular, they strategically wanted to use the debate to weaken economists within the European institutions (mainly ECB and DG ECFIN) and to strengthen a variety of other actors from the social, employment, and trade unionist side in shaping the meaning of the ambiguous term “social dimension of the EMU”:⁶⁰

“[We] will refer to some more recent developments, since mid-2012, which make it appear that a new sequence is now beginning, with a more assertive recognition of the need to strengthen political union within the euro area. Even if this trend in debates remains rather vague as to the potential nature of a ‘social union’, our own view is, nonetheless, that it is a new turn that could well represent an opportunity for the proponents of social progress.” (Pochet and Degryse 2013:110)

European cross-industry employer organizations also got involved in the debate, albeit to a lesser degree. BusinessEurope, the “flagship” (Platzer 2017) of EU employers and by far the largest organization, disregarded all three possible elements of the social dimension of the EMU and argued that such a debate and additional policies were not needed for two reasons (BE 2013b). First, the social dimension was “inherent in the completion of the internal market” which was not only “an economic but also a social project” and second, any focus on a social dimension would abstract from real necessities of EMU reform, such as fiscal consolidation, structural reforms and increases in competitiveness. Regarding social

⁵⁹ Of course, articles cover a wider range of social policy issues including gender equality, occupational health and safety, or health care.

⁶⁰ Pochet’s 1999 literature review includes an interesting citation from Anthony Ferner (1998) which explains this way of thinking, and which has likely influenced their strategic considerations. It reads that “the social dimension, like the European dimension, is more of a battlefield than a predetermined issue.” (Pochet 1999, 2).

policymaking, BE saw no lack of either options, instruments, or results and referred to the OMCs and indicators and benchmarking as successful policy tools, while they cited high public spending on welfare policies in a worldwide comparison as both success of the European Social Model and as proof that the EMU did not suffer from lacking a social dimension (BE 2013a). Accordingly, BE did not use this term any further as they tried to steer the debate away from social policy towards labour market flexibilization and growth creation. UEAPME (Union Européenne de l'Artisanat et des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises)⁶¹ almost ignored the debate on the social dimension. They only published a position paper in January 2014, three months after the respective Commission Communication and more than a year after the initial Four Presidents' report. In line with BE, UEAPME argued that the social dimension of EMU must be achieved through “fiscal consolidation, productive investments, better education and training systems, growth friendly structural reforms including labour market reforms and modernisation of social protection systems” (UEAPME 2014). However, the timing and the content of the position paper as well as the fact that there are no follow-ups indicate a relatively low engagement. UEAPME e.g., criticized the choice of social indicators for the social scoreboard after they had been selected by the European Commission.

The public-sector employer organization CEEP (European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services and Services of General Interest)⁶² took a different position and advocated against prolonged austerity and for an investment-driven policy to tackle the European unemployment crisis. While they did not endorse specific policy elements besides the addition of social indicators and benchmarks to the European Semester, they acknowledged the need for further social integration, as General Secretary Valeria Ronzitti outlined in a meeting with Herman van Rompuy in October 2013:

⁶¹ The organization has been renamed to SMEUnited in 2019 and discontinued its web presence. Thus, all older publications must be checked using the internet archive.

⁶² The organization has been renamed to SGI Europe (Services of General Interest Europe) in December 2020 and the new web page www.sgieurope.org makes all publications available from 2014-2020. Older statements must be researched using the web-archive.

“CEEP has been supportive of increased economic and fiscal coordination at EU level and considers that further corrections are needed. However, it is of utmost importance to effectively integrate the social dimension and the important role of social dialogue for this process to be beneficial. This is a matter of democratic accountability and legitimacy of the European Union.” (CEEP 2013)⁶³

Overall, the employer organizations were less active in the debate on the social dimension than European trade unions. Their lack of policy participation via research and publications is especially striking compared to trade unions. BE and UEAPME were largely opposed to the argument that an additional social dimension was needed, yet favoured the introduction of some indicators and benchmarking, i.e., reconciliation elements. CEEP on the other hand took a position similar to those of the trade unions, as they demanded an end of austerity and European investments to create jobs and growth.

IV.2.2 Think-tanks and research institutes

Important contributions to the debate were made by think-tanks and research institutes who tried to establish a broad consensus on the meaning of the term. One milestone in this regard was the study by Sofia Fernandes and Kristina Maslauskaitė from the Jacques-Delors-Institute (Fernandes and Maslauskaitė 2013b). The study was commissioned by the Austrian Chancellor, social democrat Werner Faymann, and, as is standard with think-tank work, has been the base work for a number of similar publications (Bertoncini et al. 2015, Fernandes and Maslauskaitė 2013a, Fernandes and Rinaldi 2016). The authors argued that further social integration within the euro area is only the second-best option for Social Europe, as the social challenges would affect all twenty-eight member states, yet the diversity of welfare state regimes and opposition from some member states outside the euro area would make implementation in the euro area more probable to achieve politically. Additionally, they made the case against a single “social pillar” as part of EMU reform but argue that social issues should be mainstreamed in other reform projects such as economic, fiscal, and banking union as these policy fields interact with welfare outcomes (Fernandes and Maslauskaitė 2013a:147). Substantially, they identified three different scenarios for the future of EMU, from “muddling through” as before (scenario 1), via further integration by means of an intensified economic crisis (scenario 2) to the social progress stemming from

⁶³ The link leads to an overview of all press releases and statements by CEEP officials in 2013 and contains further statements on the social dimension of EMU which go in the same direction.

sense of a common purpose (scenario 3). While the first two scenarios would continue to see “social policies as adjustment variables” (Fernandes and Maslauskaite 2013a:151) which would be subordinated to economic shocks and fiscal consolidation policies, the third scenario describes the desirable outcome for the EMU’s social dimension, rooted in a new (inclusive, social, and sustainable) European growth model and the perseverance of welfare states. This scenario would touch upon on all three social policy elements, even though social rights are only mentioned briefly when discussing minimum standards to prevent social dumping. The mainstreaming of social policies would guarantee the reconciliation element, while shock absorption policies such as a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme (see Chapter V) or an EU-funded Social Investment Package would address the fiscal element. A short overview of their proposals can be found in a related policy brief (Fernandes and Maslauskaite 2013b:14).

Fernandes and Maslauskaite located themselves and their study firmly within the European centre-left as is exemplified by their gratitude. They thank S&D MEP Pervenche Berès, staff members of French Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Pierre Moscovici and László Andor, Philippe Pochet and finally Frank Vandenbroucke. Vandenbroucke has been an important contributor both to the academic understandings and the political realities of Social Europe since at least the 1990s.⁶⁴ After starting a career as a social democrat in Belgian politics during the 1980s, he received a PhD from the Faculty of Social Sciences at Oxford University in 1999. From 1999-2004, he held the portfolios of social affairs, labour markets and pensions as a minister in the federal government of Belgium and switched to the state government of Flanders in 2004 with similar competences. After leaving government, he soon became a professor at the universities of Amsterdam and Leuven in 2011 and 2012, respectively. In 2020, he returned to the federal government as Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health amidst the Belgian government formation during the Covid-19 pandemic. His academic and hitherto his practical work has centred on questions such as the future of social democracy and the welfare state in the age of globalization and the European dimension of social policymaking. His distinguished position as a national minister and a European social scientist can be found in speech, he gave to the German Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in 2002. For once, he attempted to evaluate the current status of social policy making in the EU, i.e. the soft governance of the Social OMC

⁶⁴ For a short CV, see: <https://vandenbroucke.belgium.be/fr/biographie>.

and the goals set by the Lisbon Agenda, while simultaneously examining the “impact of the EU on the typical work of a national minister who is responsible for social protection (including health care), and what kind of EU such a minister would like to see develop now, and after the Convention” (Vandenbroucke 2002:3). As a realist, he understood that the economic reality of competition and the four freedoms of the single market limited the capacity of national governments to conduct independent welfare state policy and that Europeanization of social policy would happen either way, yet as an optimist, he expressed the hope that soft governance would help European welfare states to maintain institutional diversity via the implementation of ALMP and SI. In short: Vandenbroucke represents the arch-type of the European Third Way-social-democrat as outlined in Chapter I.

As his nomination of professor in both Amsterdam and Leuven coincided with the debate on the social dimension of the EMU, Vandenbroucke published several articles and reports outlining his position which aligns with Fernandes’ and Maslukaite’s detailed work and explicitly borrowed their distinction between a continuation of the muddling-through approach and a Social Europe built on a common purpose (Vandenbroucke 2014:26). His report on a possible European social union, co-authored with Bart Vanhercke for the Friends of Europe think-tank,⁶⁵ is a key text for understanding the debate on the social dimension of EMU, as he outlined three different origins of the social dimension:

- (1) the history of the existing Social Europe (the OMC, the EES, the Lisbon Agenda),
- (2) the SI paradigm and its academic proponents, and
- (3) the Great Recession and the macroeconomic imbalances in the euro area which have contributed to the sovereign debt and the euro crisis.

By acknowledging that the first two origins were not related to the specific problems of the euro area and the euro crisis in particular, Vandenbroucke, too, argued against a specific social pillar for the EMU. Neither should the social dimension be limited to the euro area, nor should it be separated from other policy fields:

“First, a European Social Union should not be a parallel and separate social pillar to be added to the existing pillars. The social dimension should be mainstreamed into all EU initiatives because social policies are very often affected by policies pursued in other areas. The same holds for the social dimension of the EU at large.” (Vandenbroucke and Vanhercke 2014:22)

⁶⁵ The FoE high-level group on ‘social union’ had 28 individual members, including László Andor, Pervenche Berès, Vandenbroucke, Vanhercke and various other actors from the European Commission, Parliament, international organizations and civil society (for a full list see Vandenbroucke and Vanhercke 2014, 105-106).

Accordingly, the ten “nuts”, i.e., the ten challenges associated with Social Europe, went far beyond the need for structural change within the EMU, as they focussed on the policy objectives such as SI, governance and implementation (European Semester, mainstreaming, benchmarking), and the social partner and civil society involvement as well as democratic legitimacy (Vandenbroucke and Vanhercke 2014:86).

Thus, the initial supporters of a social dimension for the EMU faced problems that stemmed from their approach to the problem. Since they had narrowly defined the main challenge for the EMU in overcoming its political economic design failure, they disregarded the two other streams that experts on European social policy as Vandenbroucke or Vanhercke acknowledged. An (unjust) oversimplification: A traditional Keynesian economist who had experienced the shock-therapy of economic liberalisation in Hungary met Third-Way social democrats who wondered how they could adapt and preserve West European welfare states against the broad background of globalization, technological and demographic changes. Accordingly, their perceptions of the nature of the crisis and its solutions differed, even though they all opposed austerity and favoured more social integration.

Additionally, background knowledge of economic theory was helpful, if not needed, to understand and to act on the problem in the way Andor had framed it. The push towards a social dimension of EMU would therefore need to overcome scepticism and opposition from two directions. For one, there were those who opposed the need for a social dimension on grounds of differing economic arguments and secondly, potential allies unfamiliar with the term would need to be convinced of its usefulness. The second aspect can be seen as critical for the implementation of the term within centre left and trade unionist political discourse, however it proved to be difficult as acknowledged by one interviewee who was a member of Andor’s cabinet at the time.

“Some people with the deeper economic background understood very quickly, [ETUC General Secretaries] Bernadette Ségol or Luca Visentini, they understood there is a problem with the social dimension of the EMU and the EMU is really functioning in a way that incurs a very heavy social cost. There are people with weaker economic background, also on the centre-left, who did not act as much as they should have. You can also count the former French President Françoise Hollande in this camp and I think Martin Schulz also could have acted more actively, much earlier on and could have pushed these issues.” (Interview EP-S&D2)

IV.3 THEY COME AS THEY GO: WHY EVERYBODY STOPPED TALKING ABOUT THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF EMU SO SUDDENLY

The social dimension generated one key outcome, the social scoreboard, which contributed to the gradual “socialization” of economic governance in the European Semester (Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018).⁶⁶ Beyond this development, the “social dimension of EMU” as a new model for Social Europe after the Great Recession did not become a focal point of EMU reform after the Juncker Commission took over in 2015. The 2017 White Paper on the Future of Europe did refer to the need to “developing the social dimension of Europe” on the one hand and to “deepening the Economic and Monetary Union” on the other (European Commission 2017d). The corresponding reflection paper on the social dimension warned that a distinction between the EU proper and the euro area would deepen the divide and may attract social dumping in non-EMU countries (European Commission 2017b:29). While the reflection paper on deepening the EMU mentioned the need for social fairness and solidarity (see more in Chapter V), its main focus laid on banking and capital markets union (European Commission 2017c). The ambiguous and at times contradictory definition and meanings did not allow for building a lasting and powerful enough supporting network, i.e., a group of actors who would have made the social dimension their primary policy objective. Based on the previously analysed positions, this sub-chapter outlines the opposition to the social dimension which came from two directions: From those who worked actively against any form of further social integration and from those who favoured an approach towards Social Europe for all EU member states. The latter position had already been a concern for European-wide organisations as the ETUC or the centre-left groups in the EP but became even more important when new policy challenges such as Brexit, the rise of the European far-right, digitization, and new types of work such as platforms started to overshadow the social crisis caused by the Great Recession and European austerity after 2015.

IV.3.1 Do not even talk about it: Opposition from within the Commission

The most powerful opposition to any proposals regarding the EMU’s social dimension came not from those who voiced their critique, but from any actors who did not use the term at all

⁶⁶ This article has been published in various versions as a pre-print since 2014. For a detailed discussion of the development of the scoreboard by EMCO and SPC see Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2014, 19-25.

or engaged with the debate in any meaningful way. Olli Rehn, Vice-President and Commissioner for Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Euro, was by far the most powerful Commissioner after President Barroso, as he managed the Commission engagement and crisis response.⁶⁷ Rehn and DG ECFIN were given autonomy over the euro area governance and they did not include others within the Commission in the monitoring, let alone decision-making processes (Schmidt 2020:189-90). The only time Rehn used the term “social dimension of EMU” was in a vague statement to the European Parliament in May 2013, when he promised the Commission may look into reconciliation elements (Rehn 2013a) – a promise the S&D group in the European Parliament called “half-hearted” and “woefully inadequate” (Swoboda and Gow 2013:65). In fact, Rehn himself makes it hard to believe that this was more than lip-service, as he used the term “social dimension” only once in his book which gives an account of the EU crisis experience from his perspective as a mere afterthought and distant possibility in reference to the six-pack legislation and the Annual Growth Surveys (AGS) (Rehn 2020:156). This book can be read as the polar opposite to everything discussed so far with regard to the social dimension, as he (and with him largely DG ECFIN) saw no need for any form of social reconciliation, even though he agreed with the general sequencing of events that pre-dated the social-dimension-debate. The EU was in crisis management mode until Draghi’s famous “whatever it takes”, when the need to reform the EMU architecture became more important (Rehn 2020:183). Rehn’s ambition for EMU reform aligned with austerity policies as it highlighted the need for fiscal consolidation and structural reforms.

Additionally, the actors and networks Rehn mentions and participates in are vastly different than those presented here so far. Rehn located the actors in the politics of the euro area in an “impossible triangle” of three key actors who provided the necessary financial means to bail-out euro crisis countries, i.e. the economic capital to overcome the crisis: the IMF, the ECB, and the German Federal Government (Rehn 2020:12).⁶⁸ The latter exercised their power via

⁶⁷ For a short CV see: https://commission.europa.eu/persons/olli-rehn_en.

⁶⁸ The inclusion of the German Federal government as the third key actor in this triangle of course diverts blame from the Commission which is typically identified as the third member of the Troika. Rehn followed the usual script of many DG ECFIN insiders to re-interpret their role as that of an honest broker who intermediate and guarantee the rule of law and lawful procedures in the EU. In his words: “Hence, in the real world of “show me the money”, the Commission did not have substantial direct financial leverage, only (at most) indirect. Thus, the Commission’s role became that of a proactive broker and compromise-builder to create the required common territory for decisions within the Impossible Triangle and in the Eurozone, so as to facilitate or enable a solution and action” (Rehn 2020:14).

the Eurogroup, the regular meetings of euro area finance ministers who were the de-facto European crisis government as they implemented the bail-out via the newly created EFSF and ESM and later came up with new fiscal rules: the two-pack, six-pack, and the Fiscal Compact (Puetter 2012, Smeets, Jaschke and Beach 2019). The euro area finance ministers had acquired powerful policymaking and decision-making competences both in the EU and at home through their informal and deliberative meetings since the late 1990s (Craig 2017, Puetter 2006). The Commission, meanwhile, and according to Rehn, functioned as a broker and intermediary between these institutions.

After two years of bailout programs which had worsened the economic and social situations, IMF chief economist Olivier Blanchard had started to divert from a position that demanded strict conditionality in exchange for access to funding and had argued that the euro area economy needed a fiscal stimulus which would have significant multiplier effects. According to his findings, fiscal consolidation had negative effects on economic growth in the euro area countries which had either applied for a bail-out or tried to avoid the necessity of bailouts at all costs (Blanchard and Leigh 2013; 2014). Dissatisfied with the socio-economic results of austerity, the IMF moved towards the fiscal solidarity element of the social dimension. This argument was taken up by some economists such as Nobel laureate Paul Krugman and Paul De Grauwe who advocated for an end of austerity (Hjertaker and Tranøy 2022). The ECB and, even later, the Commission, too, would start to subscribe to this “technocratic Keynesianism” (van ‘t Klooster 2021), yet Rehn, did not agree with any of this. Far from being an honest broker with little power who simply followed the demands of the Eurogroup or the German government, he intervened with a letter to all European finance ministers, calling the research by Blanchard and co-author Daniel Leigh unhelpful and argued it would undermine the trust of financial markets in the euro area – a statement that was criticized by many economists (Portes 2013, Whelan 2013). The IMF’s re-evaluation of crisis management and in particular their gradual change towards a policy more open to fiscal activism and deficit-spending were, in Rehn’s mind, mere fantasies:

“At that time, when the European economy was already on the path of recovery that arrived by stealth, populists and other critics of various political colours in the European Parliament and elsewhere were lambasting the Commission and me, saying we were pushing Europe to ruin. No doubt the post-crisis economic situation was dire and unemployment high in many member states, which caused most regrettable social and human costs. But the heavy criticism was also partly the result of the IMF’s multiplier debate, as the IMF’s (perceived) views started to live a mythical life of their own and became politically instrumentalized” (Rehn 2020:217)

Ironically (or insightfully, really), at the same time as Rehn rejected the findings by Blanchard-Leigh, he flocked to another influential paper on debt sustainability and growth, “Growth in a Time of Debt” by Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff (2010). In short, the authors found a negative relationship between a country’s level of debt and its growth performance, with the 90% debt-to-GDP ratio as important cut-off point. Higher debt ratios would significantly impede perspectives for long-term growth. In his letter to ECOFIN ministers and during a speech at the ILO two months later, Rehn cited the study as proof that the Commission’s focus on consolidation was correct, if the EU wanted to leave the Great Recession and return to a growth path, as this was “widely acknowledged, based on serious academic research” (Rehn 2013b).⁶⁹ However, the Reinhart-Rogoff paper was soon methodologically scrutinized and critics who tried to replicate the results found that much of the effect was caused by a data mistake, the authors made in the original excel data set (Herndon, Ash and Pollin 2014, Islam 2014:51).

Accordingly, Rehn did not agree with the view that the crisis politics of consolidation in itself had contributed to the social problems such as unemployment and inequalities. While he highlighted the Commission’s flexibility in dealing with the crisis in his book, at the time in office he enforced and publicly endorsed inflexible rule-based austerity programmes, especially for the Southern European countries, with no exception, and sometimes in contradiction to the IMF (Schmidt 2015a:45). Rehn’s commitment to austerity and against any form of fiscal – or broadly: social – European policy went so far that Paul Krugman used his name in a play of words to describe the euro area governance as the “Rehn of terror” (Krugman 2013b), while Vivien Schmidt saw in him the archetype of her now famous expression of DG ECFIN as “ayatollahs of austerity” (Schmidt 2020:186) – a title Rehn would likely reject as he stated that austerity was “an ideologically confused and loaded word I refuse to use” (Rehn 2020:218).

Andor himself wrote the most damning review of Rehn’s book.⁷⁰ Not that he disagreed with his account of events or even criticized his style of writing, but he used the review to

⁶⁹ Rehn was not alone, as the paper scored endorsements from prominent fiscal conservatives in the US (e.g. House Speaker Paul Ryan) and the UK (Chancellor George Osborne) who referred to Reinhart-Rogoff to legitimize their austerity policies.

⁷⁰ I can highly recommend reading (parts of) Rehn’s book as well as Andor’s response to understand or to remember the antagonistic political environment in the European Commission and beyond at the time, as both former Commissioners to not withstand from strong opinions and harsh judgement.

document his disagreement with the policies and the politics of the very Commission he was a member of, and he did hold back. On decision-making and collective deliberation in the Commission and with other institutions, Andor described how Rehn and DG ECFIN singlehandedly made decisions and side-lined everyone else:

“In Olli’s company, we meet a long list of finance ministers, central bankers, occasionally prime ministers and leaders of multilateral organisations. It is more than a gesture to former colleagues that Olli does not forget to mention his cabinet members and DG ECFIN colleagues, starting with Marco Buti but also many others, who otherwise would remain “faceless bureaucrats”, but who on these pages receive their appropriate characterisation as masterminds, negotiators and enforcers. Obviously, they do not appear as torturers of Greece and other peripheral countries, but as engineers of European solidarity in exchange of reforms that eventually bring the clients to a brighter future. [...] Please note what is actually missing from this tableau: the European Commission as a body, or the College of Commissioners as a decision-making organ. Yours truly is one of the few colleagues of Olli who is mentioned (once) in the book, but the majority are not, and there is very little sign of collective decision making and responsibility. And this is not an omission in the book, this is how many of us felt at the time – DG ECFIN becoming the empire of its own, and Olli operating as the lone wolf occasionally briefing the College, after arriving late, and before leaving early. President Barroso, of course, is mentioned on many pages, and Olli once describes him as “competent” (this book does not seem to be the most suitable one to add subtlety to such qualifications).” (Andor 2020b)

Furthermore, it does not escape Andor’s attention that the increase in political power went along with an increase in symbolic capital as DG ECFIN and Rehn moved into the Commission main building, Berlaymont, the spatial centre of power in Brussels and as Rehn’s official denomination was amended during the Commission’s term which put him above the other Commissioners.

“The institutional strengthening of DG ECFIN (Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs) was a major development in the crisis period, symbolised by moving into the Charlemagne building, right next to Berlaymont. To satisfy voices that demanded a reinforcement of governance, and especially the enforcement of tough fiscal rules, Olli’s title was extended: he also became Commissioner for the Euro in October 2011, and at the same time Vice-President of the Commission half-way through the euro area crisis.” (Andor 2020b)

Finally, the third criticism concerns Rehn’s favourite policy style of muddling through which was in stark contrast to Andor’s style of long-term planning – something he and DG EMPL tried to achieve with strategic talk about the social dimension of EMU.

Similarly, the Europe 2020 Strategy (for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth) also fails to pop up in the book, despite the fact that it was the flagship long-term development plan of the EU, discussed in our very first College retreat in Bruges, endorsed by the European Council in June 2010, and framing the MFF and much of the European Semester. Unintentionally or not, the omission of the Europe 2020 Strategy does have a meaning. By forgetting about the EU’s 10-year-long strategy, which was the second one in this profile after the Lisbon Strategy adopted in 2000, we have a European Union that cannot really plan long-term, and perhaps should not even be interested in doing so.

The mission barely goes beyond survival, constrained by the Treaties, the institutional, geopolitical and ideological fragmentation of Europe. In the period covered by the book, it was muddling through that was possible, and we should not expect much more in the future either. This is also why the past should not be seen too negatively, and the future should not be seen too pessimistically. And this is the idea reinforced by the motto of the book, the Eastern Finnish proverb that “muddling through can prevent you from tumbling down”. (Andor 2020b)

The difference between the two approaches is stark and while there certainly is an underlying und unresolvable ideological conflict, the difference among Andor and Rehn is also explained by different strategies, even though it should not be confused with the scholarly distinction of the Commission as both an administrative and political actor (Hartlapp, Metz and Rauh 2014) since both “muddling through” and long-term planning are inherently political choices. Having characterised the Commission as an institution in service of the real power players, i.e. the institutions which can provide funding, Rehn’s (and Barroso’s) expressed strategy was to propose only these policies which would likely find support in the European Council, the Eurogroup and in ECOFIN.⁷¹ However, his public letter to euro area finance ministers showed that Rehn could strategically switch between public and stealth negotiations.

Thus, the debate on the social dimension of EMU never made it to the Eurogroup – the institution at the heart of European crisis management. Dutch Minister of Finance Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who had been Eurogroup President from January 2013 to December 2017, did not mention either the term or Commissioner Andor in his book on the euro crisis once. Instead, he, too, implicitly argued that a social dimension already existed in two ways: First, the “old” social dimension which provided financial assistance via cohesion policy, i.e. the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the European Social Fund (ESF) to poorer countries and second the new dimension, the ESM which provided conditional assistance to all euro area countries in need (Dijsselbloem 2019:294-98).

⁷¹ Rehn explicitly blamed the intergovernmental method of decision-making and implementation for poor policy outcomes, yet it is at least dubious whether this is only a description of policy constraints or also an ex-ante legitimacy strategy for his actions: “These are mostly related to the misperception that the Eurozone rescue operations would have followed the Community method, which works through the EU rules and institutions. However, in reality most of the time they had to be conducted by the intergovernmental method, in which decision-making is dominated by the larger member states. And the intergovernmental method reduces the space for common decisions and increases the number of veto points, which by nature leads more often to second-best rather than first-best policy outcomes” (Rehn 2020:xii). This is one striking example how theories of European integration (and of politics in general) should be seen as more than scholarly analyses but as power resources in the social field itself.

IV.3.2 Social dimension for who – EU or EMU?

A second problem for proponents of a social dimension arose from the frequent questioning whether it was necessary and feasible to develop it for the euro area or to renew/advance a social dimension for the EU proper. On the one hand, economic and monetary integration led to divergence in the euro area which needed to be addressed, but on the other hand, social integration threatened to deepen the divide between countries within and outside the monetary union. Actors largely in favour of further social integration, such as the ETUC or the centre-left groups, especially the S&D, in the EP needed to accommodate internal actors from non-EMU countries who feared to be left out. A particular element of this was that all collective actors included members from all EU member states and that institutions such as the European Parliament or the EESC were responsible for the EU as a whole. Specific institutions for the euro area simply did not exist with the exception of the ECB in charge of monetary policy, and the Eurogroup and the ESM in charge of macro-economic and fiscal policy co-ordination and bail-outs. Thus, some had suggested to copy the institutional framework of the Eurogroup with the respective ministers for labour and social affairs from the EMU to bring them to equal footing with finance ministers. European finance ministers met much more frequently during the euro crisis than their social counterparts which highlights their asymmetrical relationship and influence on EU policymaking (Maricut and Puetter 2018:201-02). Such a “social Eurogroup” was technically endorsed by the French and German ministers for labour and social affairs in a non-paper in February 2013 and was later outlined by Marine Boisson-Cohen and Bruno Palier on behalf of the French government (Boisson-Cohen and Palier 2014). During Luxembourg’s Council Presidency in the second half of 2015, labour and social affairs minister Nicolas Schmitt invited his euro area colleagues for a first informal meeting to discuss the social dimension of the EMU (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg 2016:14). However, this format was met with scepticism from many member states who feared that the social Eurogroup would transform into a parallel decision-making body which may exclude non-EMU member states. Instead, EU social policy venues should be open to all member states who wish to participate to provide possibilities for peer-learning. While proponents of the social Eurogroup wanted some kind of structural social policy, many member states within the euro area still only favoured soft governance in this policy area. Thus, the meetings were not continued afterwards, Nicolas Schmitt acknowledged that he could not reach a consensus and only proposed to have further

discussions “from time to time” (Grand Duchy of Luxembourg 2015).⁷² The participant list of this meeting already indicates the failure to start a social Eurogroup to counter the institutional power of finance ministers in the Eurogroup. Many countries, including Germany and France were not represented by their labour and social affairs ministers but by their permanent representative to the EU and a junior minister respectively (EPSCO 2015).⁷³ Despite sporadic mentions in centre-left, pro-integration think-tank reports (Rinaldi 2016, Telò 2017), the idea of a social Eurogroup has not been advanced further after 2015.⁷⁴

Two examples from a trade unionist perspective clearly show the scepticism they, too, had towards developing a social dimension which was restricted to the euro area. They were concerned that this would relegate the Central and Eastern European countries to a mere appendage of the better integrated, richer, and socially protected euro area – basically to a reservoir for cheap labour.

“This was very controversial in our group. We had trade unionists who said, we need to start somewhere, and it cannot be that those member states who do not want [a social dimension], can thwart everyone else. Then we had a debate, in which our Eastern European colleagues expressed their fear that they would be completely left behind and that they would be nothing more than a European economic area.” (Interview EESC)

“A discussion on the social dimension of EMU is acceptable only if it leads to social progress in the European Union as a whole. That is why we consider that the determination of the European Council to discuss essentially the social dimension of EMU is too restrictive. The social dimension of the EU must be based on respect of fundamental social rights and on the improvement of living and working conditions. It must be geared towards the fight against unemployment, poverty, inequality and social and fiscal dumping. It must promote our European social model which has proven its efficacy and consists of solid social protection, quality public services and social dialogue. The social dimension of the EU must be real.” (ETUC 2013c)

However, not only trade unions but other actors in the field of Social Europe voiced this criticism. The Employment Committee (EMCO) and the Social Protection Committee (SPC) argued against any form of euro-area policy from both an institutional and a policy

⁷² Schmitt (almost cynically) re-assured the participants that the social Eurogroup would not transform into a new decision-making body with reference to the Eurogroup which – in theory – was only an informal exchange between finance ministers, yet in practice was the core decision-making body during the euro crisis: “it should be clear that this will not be a decision-making body, not more than the Eurogroup, which is also not a decision-making body under the rules of the European Treaty of Lisbon. The Council which brings together the 28 Member States is and will remain the decision-making body.”

⁷³ Representation through junior ministers or high public officials is common in the Council of ministers, yet not in the Eurogroup.

⁷⁴ In a turn of events, Angela Merkel whose party and government had always opposed the social Eurogroup proposed a ‘Jumbo Council’ for competitiveness of ministers for both finance and economy in April 2018, after her party had lost the finance portfolio to the social democratic coalition partner. This proposal was soon rejected by her coalition partner and European governments, most importantly French President Macron.

perspective. For one, the format of their meetings which included all twenty-eight member states made it impossible to discuss the social dimension of the EMU, and secondly, the issues were the same in all EU countries (Interview EMCO). The SPC issued a report to the EPSCO in June 2014 which only mentioned EMU twice in the title yet referred to the Europe 2020 strategy multiple times. In it, the SPC highlighted that the increasing divergence among European countries for key indicators such as poverty or social exclusion in the early 2010s did appear among both euro-area and non-euro-area countries (SPC 2014). The rejection of EMU-only policies was widely shared among employer organisations and centre-right political parties in the European Parliament, too (BE 2013a, EPP 2013).

The overarching argument was that European social policy should act on the assumption of specified social challenges and their effect on EU citizens and not on either an institutional and economic structure or a legal framework regarding specific EU-wide competences. In 2015, the incoming Juncker Commission also endorsed this view in internal strategic analyses, as they made their push towards social integration. The Commission had come to the conclusion that supporters could not deliver on the social dimension of EMU because they started with institutional, and constitutional frameworks in mind, e.g., the institutional design of the euro area. This approach, however, would restrict the discussion to the possible instead of the necessary. Thus, a new – and likely more successful approach, needed to start with the social problems and challenges such as precarious work, unemployment, fair compensation and working conditions, and the sustainability of national welfare states and transfer mechanisms. As these were universal challenges for all EU member states, the distinction between the social dimension of the EMU and the EU would become indispensable:

“Nobody tried to clarify that. You still have a social dimension of the EMU and the social dimension of the EU, but nobody tried to clarify the relationship between those two, because they are mutually reinforcing each other. It is not an issue, it is not a problem. There is no contradiction. We didn’t specifically look at this and tried to clarify ‘This is, where the EMU social dimension starts and here is the EU social dimension.’” (Interview COM-SEC-GEN)

IV. 4 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION: THE TERMINOLOGY, ITS MEANING AND THE ROLE OF NETWORKS IN THE DIFFUSION

Ten years after the EU institutions started a debate on the social dimension of the EMU, such a social dimension, specifically for the euro area, has not materialised. Current successful social policy legislations, such as the Minimum Wage Directive apply to all member states (Schulten and Müller 2021). While the ‘socialisation’ literature has convincingly argued that both social policies *vis á vis* economic policies and social policy actors have become more important in European policymaking after 2013 as an outcome of the debate on the social dimension of EMU, other possible policy elements as well as other actors have remained somewhat invincible. The question why the social dimension of the EMU has disappeared from the EU policy discourse is still prevalent, even though non-outcomes are rarely discussed in the contemporary research on Social Europe. This is partly explained by the theoretical frameworks deployed in this research. Intergovernmentalism would explain this outcome with the reluctance of member states to give up sovereignty unless they have strong economic incentives. International Political Economy explanatory models would hint at the power imbalance between core countries in the North-West and the economic periphery in Southern Europe (Brazys and Regan 2017, Dellepiane-Avellaneda, Hardiman and Heras 2021, Duarte 2017, Galgóczi 2016, Magone, Laffan and Schweiger 2016; 2017, Regan 2017, Sepos 2016, Streeck and Elsässer 2016). Germany in particular was not interested in social and fiscal integration as German manufacturers profited in two ways from this economic model and the institutional design of the euro area: Low costs of labour and capital and a relatively weak euro benefitted the German export sector (Baccaro and Pontusson 2016, Bonatti and Fracasso 2013, Eichhorst 2015, Notermans and Piattoni 2019). From the perspective of (historical) institutionalism meanwhile, rapid institutional change and policy development is the exception, not the rule, yet incremental change may exist as Paul Pierson (1996) already noted in his seminal article. Studying the micro foundations of EU social policymaking, he found the influence of European actors and policies has become more significant in the long-run and has provided a counterweight to intergovernmental preferences.

Actors in the debate on the social dimension of the EMU were characterized by their clearly defined positions, both in terms of political capital and ideationally. Actors who had originally advocated for the social dimension lacked the power, i.e., the political capital, to transform it into a cohesive policy objective and then a socio-political coalition. These actors

included Commissioner László Andor, DG EMPL, and to lesser extent the EESC. They coupled a technocratic Keynesian ideational foundation with very limited networks and social capital. Critically, they failed to reach out to theoretical allies who did not agree with the narrow political-economic view which linked the social dimension of the EMU solely to the euro crisis and the institutional design failures of the EMU but failed to incorporate the history of and experiences with Social Europe since the late 1990s. Instead, two opposition camps had emerged. One, led by Commission Vice-President Rehn and supported by employer organizations and the centre-right neglected the necessity of a social dimension as they held a productivist perspective on social policy. They argued that the EU should focus all policy efforts on structural reforms in member states to boost competitiveness, growth, and job creation. This group had huge amounts of economic (financing capabilities) as well as social (networks and relations to ECB, Eurogroup, national governments) capital, yet they are only rarely visible as actors in the field of Social Europe. Instead, this network dominated the power relations from a position of stealth. A second group, led by trade unions, the centre-left and think-tanks as the ETUI and the OSE, favoured social policy for the EU-28. Unlike Andor, actors such as Vandembroucke or Pochet had spent decades in the field of EU social policy and as such had a higher degree of European capital – they referred to existing initiatives, governance structures, and policies, such as the Lisbon Agenda, Europe 2020, the Social OMC, and social investment and wanted to build a social dimension against the backdrop of both the Great Recession and the experiences of the second half of the 2000s, when the SI paradigm had become less important.

The analytical distinction between a social dimension for the EU or EMU respectively is not well represented in the scholarly literature and if so, it is often from a legal perspective and the authors analyse and compare different competences and possible implementations (Neergaard 2016, Repasi 2017b). Wolfgang Kowalsky summed up this and further problems which are associated with the term “social dimension”. It was on the one hand too poorly defined to have a clear meaning and on the other hand resembled similar but not completely equal concepts – facts which confused debates.

“Is there any topic less sexy than the ‘social dimension’? Even defining what it is can be tricky, there are many definitions out there so it tends to get mixed up with other terms. It is often used as the equivalent of ‘Social Europe’ or the ‘European Social Model’. The debate also pops up under the heading of a ‘European Social Union’ which would complement the ‘European Economic Union’ and a ‘European Political Union’. It is not a cornerstone of anything. It’s always under suspicion and on the defensive. Moreover, it has to justify its added value.” (Kowalsky 2013:102)

This offered opportunities for actors with social and symbolic capital to shape the term to the advantage and erects barriers for those without as they will constantly chase its meaning. The support-network did have neither the institutionalized political capital, i.e., influence and decision-making competences within the institutions, especially the European Commission, nor symbolic political and European capital which would have allowed them to gain centrality and impose their paradigm of a social dimension onto the social field and its actors.

Hence, the conceptualizations of the social dimension oscillated between mainstreaming social policy in all policy fields and adding an additional social pillar to the institutional framework and policy toolkit of the EU and the EMU, e.g., in the form of a social Eurogroup. Andor's attempts to generate meaning beyond the reconciliation element were largely unsuccessful as he and his allies failed to build a cohesive socio-political coalition which would align itself with one meaning.

Overall, all proponents of Social Europe and any form of social integration lacked the necessary capital, both economic and social, to overcome the dominance of DG ECFIN and the Eurogroup in EMU policymaking. Andor himself described this in his review of Rehn's book. This first stage of attempts to re-make Social Europe after the Great Recession can best be characterized as an unsuccessful search for any form of alternative to the status-quo of austerity politics. From the perspective of relational sociology, the publications by the ETUI or by Social Europe etc. were necessary to create networks and common understandings of what needed to be – and it turned out that the “social dimension of EMU” was not the answer.

V THE LONG STORY OF A NON-POLICY: EUROPEAN UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT SCHEME

- “Why has the Commission not proposed a euro area unemployment insurance scheme?”
(European Commission)

This question was part of a FAQ which accompanied the European Commission communication on the strengthening of the social dimension of the EMU on 2 October 2013 (European Commission 2013b). The answer references legal remedies which put all fiscal policy firmly in the hand of the member states and states that a future fiscal capacity in form of a euro area budget or an unemployment insurance scheme would require “substantial treaty change”. Hence, the Commission argued that the introduction of legislative proposals which would introduce any version of an EUBS was always out of question since the legal framework did simply not allow it. Therefore, the real question for social science should be: Why bother? Why did the Commission find it necessary to add a section on EUBS to its communication on the social dimension?

In the weeks and months before the publication of this communication and in the wake of the renewed interest in the social dimension, the idea of an EUBS had gotten traction in Brussels. The EP and DG EMPL had discussed it, think tanks such as the Bertelsmann Foundation and international organisations as the IMF had stirred academic and policy debates and various groups of economists had started to build models to predict the policy impact based on variables such as the direction and duration of transfers. According to supporters, an EUBS would stabilize the euro area economies and labour markets during a recession, advance European integration and connect individual European citizens with the EU and the euro area in everyday life. Table 2 summarizes the benefits from the standpoints of economic theory and political support for European integration, i.e., the economic and political functions for the euro area.

	Member States	Citizens
Economic function	Business cycle harmonization Fiscal stabilization Absorption of asymmetric shocks Stabilization of national systems of unemployment benefits and respective budgets Risk-sharing	Protection against unemployment Standardization of national systems of unemployment benefits Increase in labour market integration and mobility Social floor (welfare function)
Political function	Increased commitment towards integration Incentive to cooperate further in other policy fields Less requirement for active fiscal crisis management (spill over effect)	Positive identification with the EU Direct European transfers „Solidarity through solidarity “ Public support for EU

Table 2: Possible positive effects of a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme, own representation

Much of this advantageous perspective on EUBS was informed by the optimum currency area (OCA) theory. According to OCA, currency areas in which sovereign countries either share a common currency or agree on pegged exchanged rates between their currencies are the more optimal the more they share certain properties, such as mobility of labour and capital, price and wage flexibility, a harmonized business cycle with similar inflation rates, and fiscal and political integration (Mongelli 2002; 2008). The better the participating countries fulfil these properties, the better would be the cost-benefit trade-off of a currency union and the lower would be the costs of re-adjustment, especially during an asymmetric shock. Thus, any form of automatic fiscal stabilization would be needed for a well-functioning monetary union, a property the EMU missed among many others (De Grauwe 2013). From an economic perspective, unemployment insurances are quite common fiscal stabilizers which absorb some percentage of the economic shock and aid in the recovery process. Unemployment benefits are triggered automatically when workers are laid off, smooth the business cycle, and prevent negative downward spirals because the newly unemployed would not immediately default on their long-term spending obligations, such as their mortgage or car payments. As this effect is well understood in economic theory, current research typically focusses on its size and the optimal design of unemployment insurance systems (Di Maggio and Kermani 2016, McKay and Reis 2016; 2021). Citizens would profit from unemployment insurance not only because it protects them against unemployment but

also because it would allow them to enter into these long-term contractual agreements in the first place. Unemployment insurances would create a social floor and the corresponding integration and standardization of labour markets would create job opportunities. The political function of EUBS for member states meanwhile is nested in a mix of neofunctional and constructivist ideas about European integration. The successful implementation would lead to further integration in other policy fields channelled by policy spill-over and an increase in political commitment. Similarly, it would allow European citizens to see direct benefits of EU and euro area membership as they would receive benefits from the European level, and it would thus strengthen European belonging and solidarity (for the most elaborated and detailed case in favour of EUBS see Dullien 2014a).

All these possible benefits, however, come with trade-offs. EUBS may not lead to overall economic benefits and further European integration but may, in turn, lead to economic lock-in effects. In such a situation, it would result in permanent transfers between countries, disincentives to reform uncompetitive labour markets and finally political distrust and a rise in anti-European sentiment (see Table 3). Moral hazard is by far the most common economic argument against a common unemployment insurance system. Moral hazard occurs with every type of welfare insurance and describes the phenomenon that the insured (member states or citizens) will take more risks and will not adjust spending because they know that an insurance is in place, i.e., that they could overexploit the insurance mechanism. If a European unemployment insurance were in place, countries may not engage in policies to reduce unemployment because their unemployment costs are covered by the European insurance.

	Member States	Citizens
Economic function	Moral hazard Disincentive for structural reforms Permanent transfers between countries Misidentification of shocks	Higher contributions and less generosity than national systems Threat to national labour market features (collective bargaining and social concertation)
Political function	Politicization of automatic stabilizers Blurred competences between different levels of politics Rise in political distrust Permanent antagonism between payer and contributor countries	Dislike of enforced solidarity Higher distance to administrative authorities Loss of democratic input Rise in anti-European sentiment

Table 3: Possible negative effects of a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme, own representation

Notwithstanding these trade-off, to many followers of European politics, a fiscal capacity for the euro area, likely in the form of an unemployment insurance, felt like an idea whose time had (finally) come after the GFC (Wolff 2012). However, historically, this time had come many times before. During the 1970s and 1980s, before a monetary union was created, as well as during the 1990s and 2000s, when the EMU took shape and was implemented, economists and European institutions debated the need and the benefits of an unemployment insurance to go along with the currency area.

This chapter proceeds as follows: First, the history of the EUBS within the institutional structure of the EMU is briefly considered. Then, the proposals of European unemployment benefit schemes are situated within the European crisis experience and the main actors, and their economic and political-economic arguments are presented. Going forward, the chapter will outline support and opposition structures. Finally, the social relations and network-structure in the debate on EUBS are utilized to explain why the proposal for EUBS was ultimately unsuccessful, while a limited version, an unemployment re-insurance, may prove more suitable in the near future.

V.1 FROM THE WERNER REPORT TO THE MAASTRICHT TREATY

Most scholarly accounts note the Marjolin Report of 1975 as the first report which investigated whether and how economic and monetary integration should be accompanied by fiscal integration. The very initial Werner Report of 1970 which had proposed three stages towards monetary integration by 1980 expressed the need for fiscal harmonization as well as budgetary decisions on Community level, but did neither explore any details, nor did it gain significant traction (Danescu 2018:332). The Marjolin Report was an outcome of the study group “Economic and Monetary Union 1980” which the Commission had tasked to lay the groundwork for the move towards a European single currency (Marjolin 1975). Chaired by former Commission Vice-President, French economist, and social democrat Robert Marjolin, it dominantly consisted of university professors for economics and law, some business representatives and one German trade unionist. Marjolin had been a key agent of French economic planning after World War II as well as a strong believer in European political and economic integration (Caldari 2021). The report proposed an ambitious agenda to achieve a European monetary union by 1980 which would require a common monetary, economic, and social policy and outlined five necessary first steps in this direction: (1) industrial policy, (2) energy policy, (3) capital markets policy, (4) budgetary policy, and (5) an unemployment benefit fund. While acknowledging that a replacement of national systems of unemployment benefits would be impossible in the short term, the authors envisioned an approach which would start with fixed “community allowances” and which may later be turned into proportionate benefit payments and would eventually replace national systems of unemployment benefits. The arguments made in favour of an EUBS were three-fold as they were based in economic theory, political economy, and concerns for the unemployed: First, an EUBS was regarded as a justified and helpful policy to deal with increasing inflation in the member states during the 1970s as well as reducing structural and regional imbalances via direct transfers from regions with low to regions with high unemployment. Second, such a policy could increase public support for European integration as it would “prove before public opinion that community solidarity is a reality” and third, it would guarantee all citizens a minimum level of income in case of unemployment (Marjolin 1975:32-34). The question how an EUBS may be designed and financed and how it would compare and interact with national systems is further elaborated in the only annex to the report which discussed different choices for schemes as well as statistical problems with counting the unemployed. Thus, the issue of EUBS was far more prominent than the other four policy

fields, but this may also point to the fact that the Marjolin study group was well aware of its contested nature. Marjolin was not without opposition in his proposition of fiscal integration. Committed to economic planning, he regularly clashed with German ordoliberalists such as economics minister Ludwig Erhard and German Commissioner Hans von der Groeben who favoured a more liberal approach (Seidel 2016:51). In the end, the authors endorsed a scheme which would start with flat benefits and would be co-financed by employers and employees. Two years later, another group chaired by British economist Donald MacDougall, who had been a member of the Marjolin study group, published a report on the role of public finance in European integration which was accompanied by a case studies on public finances in member states and studies on empirical, theoretical and model-based aspects of fiscal federalism (MacDougall 1977). The MacDougall report reiterated the proposal for an EUBS, highlighting that these would not constitute social and welfare services which were regarded as unlikely to be prone to further integration, but were rather seen as “cyclical and structural economic services” (MacDougall 1977:62).

In contrast to the early effort, the discussions and finally the implementation of the EMU during the late 1980s and early 1990s saw little engagement with EU-wide fiscal policy and EUBS in particular by European institutions and policymakers. In 1993, Alexander Italianer and Marc Vanheukelen, two economists who worked in DG ECFIN, published an econometric model for full and limited stabilization (Italianer and Vanheukelen 1993) which did not feature in any policy debates however. It also differed from the Marjolin and Werner reports as it did neither propose nor deem necessary a certain stabilization system but wanted to prove that it would be possible and not too costly. This shift displays an early example of the importance of quasi-neutral economic expertise in the debate on the EUBS. Political arguments or the views of trade union and industry representatives were replaced by pareto-optimal models and cost-benefit estimations (Mudge and Vauchez 2012, Schmidt-Wellenburg 2017:441). The conception of EUBS was notably absent from the Delors Report 1989, which laid the cornerstone for the creation of the EMU with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, even though Alexandre Lamfalussy, General Director at the Bank for International Settlements and later first director of the ECB predecessor European Monetary Institute (EMI), argued that some type of community budget would be a “vital element” for the EMU in the only paper which discussed fiscal policy at all. Any type of community budget, however, would be too small to deal with anticyclical shocks which is why the only suitable form of macro-economic policy coordination existed in European oversight and intervention

of national budgetary policies (Lamfalussy 1989). Lamfalussy, like all proponents of any form of fiscal capacity had intellectual roots in mainstream post-war Keynesianism, i.e. the strong beliefs that government planning was necessary and that economic modelling was the best foundation for planning (Maes 2010:269). He also feared for financial market stability without a meaningful economic pillar alongside monetary integration and was a strong advocate of OCA theory thus favouring a symmetric monetary union (Maes 2016:252-53).

The cost-benefit evaluation “One market, one money” which had been written and published by DG ECFIN in 1990 as a follow-up to the Delors Report did not even entertain the concept of a European unemployment insurance and only mentioned “fiscal stabilization” thrice on 341 pages (European Commission 1990). The idea that fiscal elements were necessary to prevent structural inequality within a monetary union had given way to the perception that the monetary union and the single market in itself would lead to economic convergence, rendering fiscal stabilization useless at best and harmful at worst (Enderlein and Rubio 2014:15-16). The report favoured wage-constraint, budgetary policies and fiscal discipline to deal with asymmetric shocks (European Commission 1990). However, the change in policy objectives was not caused by a change in the empirical economic evidence but a change in policymakers’ perspective and economic priorities. By the early 1990s, economists still agreed that the euro area did not fulfil necessary conditions to enter a monetary union as defined by the OCA theory (De Grauwe 2013:154-55). Additionally, a meta-study of model-driven analyses for different EUBS and fiscal stabilization models from the 1990s showed a relative consensus that the implementation of either system would be necessary to deal with future economic shocks (Pacheco 2000). Thus, during the 2000s, academic debates on fiscal stabilization did not completely disappear, but they did not feature prominently in policymaking, since the concept of a European unemployment insurance was both political unfeasible and outside the mainstream economic thought of European policymakers. The Keynesian dominance in policymaking had been swept away by the Third Way-thinking on the centre-left and the economics professions were more concerned with negative impacts of government intervention. The rise and subsequent mainstreaming of Euroscepticism (Leconte 2015) meant that proposals for further European integration and European solidarity would be unpopular and the coupling of globalization, demographic challenges and high unemployment in some member states led to welfare state retrenchment instead of expansion of coverage (Bonoli and Natali 2012a, Surender 2004).

Dismal growth performances and a lack of competitiveness by some euro area countries which resulted in the fear of euro area exits as well as the non-convergence of national business cycles led to some new interest by the mid-2000s. Working for the think-tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German economist Sebastien Dullien attempted to renew the “traditional old Keynesian-style macroeconomic textbook” model for a stabilization via an unemployment insurance (Dullien 2007). Building on the earlier work of Italianer and Vanheukelen and others, Dullien updated their econometric estimates for a hypothetical unemployment insurance during the 1990s and early 2000s and laid the groundwork for an institutional design based on the US federal unemployment insurance which would stabilize the business cycle and improve economic governance in the EMU. In principle, the European unemployment insurance would partially replace national benefit systems and would only provide short-term relief in times of great recessions to prevent permanent transfers. While Dullien’s analysis did not add substantially to economic theory, it renewed an important feature in the discourse on fiscal stabilization: public appeal. He argued that his proposal would be superior to other models for fiscal stabilization insofar that it “could rather easily be explained to the general voter” (Dullien 2007:5). In a further article, Dullien and his co-author Daniela Schwarzer expanded the political economy aspect of their proposal on behalf of the purely econometric analysis and argued that the unemployment insurance could be kick-started by only a club of euro area countries while acknowledging the legitimization issues (Dullien and Schwarzer 2009). While this change in tone signalled a new push and perhaps a new political strategy which would probably do more to address political instead of economic opposition to EUBS, this academic output predated the GFC and the Great Recession. Austerity policies dominated the European crisis response until 2012 and proposals for an unemployment insurance only returned, once these had failed and the EU had started to acknowledge that the EMU lacked a social dimension (see previous chapter).

V.2 RESTARTING THE DEBATE: THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

After two years of European crisis management, austerity and recession, the Four Presidents' Report kick-started the debate on the future of the EMU. The preliminary report did not mention unemployment insurance by name but referred to "different forms of fiscal solidarity" as an element of the new budgetary framework (van Rompuy 2012:3). In the following weeks, actors within the European Commission and the European Parliament started to push publicly for the inclusion of EUBS in the EU's policy reform package. Both institutions started with initial broad and visionary policy documents but soon acknowledged the need for more in-depth and technical research. In both cases, the initiatives came from the employment side of the respective institutions, unlike during the 1990s, when DG ECFIN produced the relevant Commission output.

Employment Commissioner László Andor and his team had increased capacity in his cabinet and in DG EMPL to tackle analytical questions regarding fiscal stabilization and shock absorption from an economic point of view and to counter the crisis management of DG ECFIN. They criticized that DG ECFIN did not focus on macro-economic issues but took a narrow and technical approach to economic policy (Interview COM-EMPL4). Andor remodelled the unit Employment Analysis, headed by Robert Strauss which was tasked with preparing materials on the benefits of EUBS which should be used to convince sceptics and opponents as well as with engaging the wider European policymaking debate via reports, workshops etc. Strauss, an economist by training, had joined DG EMPL in 2004 and had worked on the EES, the Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 before 2012. This unit produced the following results: It commissioned two papers on unemployment insurance by economists and political scientists (Dullien 2013, Esser et al. 2013), produced a Commission report paper in 2013 (Bountout and Lejeune 2013) and it teamed up with the Bertelsmann Foundation, a German think tank. They jointly organised workshops in October 2013 and July 2014 and the Bertelsmann Foundation published Dullien's study as a book in 2014 (Dullien 2014a). Unlike Dullien's endorsements of EUBS, the Commission report was exclusively concerned with the technical implementation of EUBS. It argued that the implementation of EUBS would fulfil the demand for a shock-absorption function outlined in the Four Presidents Report and then proceeded to outline cost-benefit analyses as well as econometric predictions for different models, sizes, coverage rates etc. However, the report did not explicitly endorse a specific concept. Instead, the authors argued that important

questions regarding the financing base, the eligibility rules and access, as well as the avoidance of moral hazard would need future research (Bountout and Lejeune 2013:49-50). Besides Strauss, Lukáš Veselý had emerged as a key protagonist in support of László Andor's push towards the inclusion of EUBS into the EMU policy agenda. He had joined the Commissioner's cabinet in 2011 after prior stints at the European Investment Bank (EIB) and DG ECFIN and was responsible for drafting position papers on the social dimension of EMU and the EUBS (Interview EP-S&D2). Unlike the career public official Strauss, cabinet members such as Veselý have a more political and strategic role and typically prepare speeches, articles etc., network and organise meetings with stakeholders.

The EP engaged with the EUBS in two ways: First, it drafted and discussed a resolution on the Four Presidents Report and second, it initiated its own research exercise regarding EUBS to be included in the Cost-of-Non-Europe Report 2014 (Del Monte and Zandstra 2014). The parliamentary process went fast on the Four Presidents' Resolution. It took only four and a half months from the appointments of the two rapporteurs, Thyssen and Berès, to the vote in the EP plenary on 20 November 2012. In the end, the resolution did not call for an EUBS, but remained within the boundaries set by the Four Presidents Report from July 2012. It recommended that the EMU should develop into a fiscal union by increasing its own resources and by issuing common public debt only after "enhanced economic governance, fiscal discipline and SGP compliance, as well as control instruments to prevent moral hazard" were in place (European Parliament 2012a:CO). The resolution endorsed a social pact for Europe which would however not contain structural policies but would instead focus on benchmarking and promotion of good employment standards. This minimalist approach to fiscal integration which remained within the legal boundaries of the TFEU, and the political boundaries set by the Four Presidents' Report were not without opposition. The EMPL opinion which passed the committee with support from EPP MEPs, too, called on the Commission to elaborate on the "feasibility and the added value of introducing a minimum unemployment allowance" to counter the economic imbalances in the euro area (European Parliament 2012b:5). Additionally, Berès and five fellow S&D MEPs tabled a motion for the inclusion of a social pact to the final document which would include "a euro-specific unemployment insurance fund endowed with its own, dedicated fiscal resources". Albeit voted down in the ECON committee, this is the first explicit reference of EUBS as part of the EU's social policy response. In addition, the EP tasked the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Parliamentary Research Services (DG EPRS), its research

department and de facto “in-house think tank”, with delivering a report by 2014 which should outline the added value of European integration in various policy fields. DG EPRS’s responsible “Added Value Unit” had been specialised in producing “Cost of Non-Europe” reports to outline the benefits of European integration and to counter the narrative that the EU was a losing bargain. The EMPL committee had requested such a report in May 2013 with the explicit concept of a euro-area-wide unemployment insurance in mind. Just like the Commission, the Parliament then started to gather economic expertise and commissioned two studies, from the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW) respectively, on the feasibility of an unemployment insurance for the euro area which were published alongside the EPRS report in June 2014 (Beblavý and Maselli 2014, Dolls et al. 2014). Unlike the Commission report, the Cost of Non-Europe report did not shy away from a policy endorsement and stated that a euro area unemployment insurance, had it been in place during the euro crisis, would have prevented an EMU wide GDP loss of 71 bn. euros. Additionally, it would have added social and political value to the EMU as it would be a vehicle for European solidarity (Del Monte and Zandstra 2014:22).

In January 2015, the Juncker Commission took office. Jean-Claude Juncker had been the first – and as of recent only – Commission President elected using the *Spitzenkandidaten* framework. Not only was Juncker himself a long-standing proponent of fiscal integration, but he also used his popular mandate to reform the *de-facto* composition of the Commission and to influence the national nominations for Commissioners. Unlike before, the Commission work should be guided by political priorities and should cut across the silo-mentality of single DGs (Kassim 2017, Peterson 2017). In his bid to increase the percentage of women in the Commission, Juncker lobbied the emerging federal government of Belgium to pick Thyssen over their favourite Didier Reynders from the ALDE-associated Reformist Movement (MR) (Crisp 2014). Besides concerns for gender equality, Juncker strongly favoured Thyssen since she, just like him, represented a distinct worldview of Christian Democracy, rooted in Catholic social thought, which sought to balance a market economy with strong social protection and, just like him, had 20 years of experience working on this on a European level. After taking office, Thyssen continued the Commission’s engagement on EUBS, although less outspoken than her predecessor Andor. Additionally, two key advocates for the EUBS left with Commissioner Andor. Robert Strauss did not continue to work on employment, social, or fiscal policy, but was instead moved to lead a unit on service

policy for consumers in DG GROW. Lukáš Veselý meanwhile left the Commission after Andor had not been reappointed as Hungary's Commission member and continued his work on the social dimension of the EMU as parliamentary assistant to Maria João Rodrigues (S&D) who had been elected as a member of the European Parliament in 2014 (see Chapter VI).

Both the Five Presidents' Report and Juncker's first State of the Union speech called for the adoption of a macroeconomic stabilization function as a part of a European fiscal union but neither takes a preliminary decision whether EUBS would be more desirable than other options (Juncker 2015, Juncker et al. 2015). As Commissioner, Thyssen initiated a third research project on EUBS "Feasibility and Added Value of a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme" which however discontinued DG EMPL's prior work by Sebastian Dullien and others. Instead, the project was given to the researchers which had prepared the Cost-of-Non-Europe Report for the European Parliament, when Thyssen had been rapporteur. Miroslav Beblavý of the CEPS headed the project alongside Karolien Lenaerts and the consortium partners included the ZEW of Matthias Dolls et al.⁷⁵ Eric Meyermans organised the research project from the Commission side. A fellow Belgian and economist by training, he had previously worked for DG EMPL and coordinated research projects in cooperation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO) among others on issues including national systems of unemployment benefits (see e.g. Arpaia et al. 2010, Gama, Saget and Eyraud 2015). While working for the Belgian Planning Bureau, he had also authored a little-known study on the possible effects of automatic stabilizers, had they been in place in the euro area from the beginning (Meyermans 2002).

At the same time, this research project went further than the two previous ones insofar that it did not only cover economic modelling, but also legal aspects (Repasi 2017a), the impact on national unemployment systems for unemployment benefit (Coucheir, Strban and Hauben 2016a, Coucheir, Strban and Hauben 2016b) as well as labour mobility, citizens' trust and impact on financial markets (Alcidi et al. 2016). Table 4 provides an overview of the three institutional research projects, their scope and structure as well as the summary reports.

⁷⁵ Further consortium partners were the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), Cambridge Econometrics (CamEcon) who jointly provided the econometric tax-benefit microsimulation model EUROMOD, the private policy analysis institute EFTHEIA, and the University of Leuven

	Initial engagement	Scope and structure	Institutional summary
European Commission DG EMPL (Andor2012)	Four Presidents' Report July/December 2012 (van Rompuy 2012, van Rompuy et al. 2012)	Single research paper (Dullien 2013) Two Workshops in cooperation with Bertelsmann Foundation	Paper on automatic stabilizers October 2013 (Bountout and Lejeune 2013)
European Parliament	Resolution on Four Presidents Report November 2012 (European Parliament 2012a)	Two economic models (Beblavý and Maselli 2014, Dolls et al. 2014)	Cost of Non-Europe Report June 2014 (Del Monte and Zandstra 2014)
European Commission DG EMPL (Thyssen2015)	New Juncker Commission	Research consortium by CEPS, ZEW, ISER, CamEcon, EFTHEIA, KUL Examination of 18 possible options for EUBS (Beblavý, Lenaerts and Maselli 2017a; b) Legal and operational feasibility of these 18 variants (Coucheir, Strban and Hauben 2016a, Coucheir, Strban and Hauben 2016b, Repasi 2017a, Vandenbroucke et al. 2016) Economic modelling of these 18 variants	Feasibility and added value of a European Unemployment Benefits Scheme (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b)

Table 4: Overview on reports on EUBS by EU institutions 2012-2017, own representation

V.3 TRYING TO GENERATE SUPPORT I: THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC EXPERTISE⁷⁶

As seen above, economic expertise played an important role in starting the conversation on a possible EUBS. The European Commission and the European Parliament both chose to ask economists (and some political scientists and legal scholars) to produce reports to analyse benefits, challenges, and trade-offs of this policy. Thus, this chapter deals with the role of economic expertise in the policy process. It takes stock of all journal articles and policy papers dealing with possible implementations of EUBS which have been published between 2010 and 2018 and it shows how scientific knowledge is strategically used in the policy process and how it relates to social capital formation. This section is limited to unique and original discussions of the issue, be it via economic modelling, institutional, or legal design. When authors or groups of authors have republished their findings for different purposes (e.g., as a policy report and a scientific paper) or in different outlets, every publication is counted and checked for new findings. Additionally, this analysis includes contributions to three workshops on the EUBS, the two already mentioned joint workshops by the Bertelsmann Foundation and the European Commission and a third workshop, jointly organised by the Brussels-based CEPS and the German academic institution Leibniz Information Centre for Economics (ZBW). While the contributions to the formers are scattered and sometimes only exist as power point slides, the contributions to the latter have been published in the journal *Intereconomics. Review of European Economic Policy* (Kamps et al. 2017) which is edited by ZBW and CEPS. Additionally, an English-language special issue on EUBS appeared in the Italian economic policy journal *Economia & Lavoro* in 2017 (Faioli 2017) which stands out for a few reasons: Neither are the articles cited by anyone other than the authors themselves nor do the authors' names appear in any other context. Additionally, it stands out in the context of the journal itself: The journal is almost exclusively Italian in terms of its language, its editorial board, and its authors. According to its self-description, it aims to reach policymakers and stakeholders to influence political decision-making. Thus, this special issue must be understood as an attempt by the editors to enter the field of social Europe, however clearly as a failed one. The authors and editors who

⁷⁶ Despite the best efforts, this chapter may often seem technical and hard to understand for an audience without macroeconomic literacy. A very helpful glossary of the respective terminology can be found in the final report by Miroslav Beblavý and Karolien Lenaerts for the European Commission (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017:80-84).

are on the Italian trade- unionist left did not possess any social capital and thus never acquired field membership

To understand, how the studies, their authors, and the respective institutions relate to each other in the social field, four aspects are deemed relevant: First, the type and place of publication, second, the number of publications and the diversity of authors, and third the relationship between the publications and the rest of the social field which includes funding, citations, institutional connections, and the perceived audience. Building on such an analysis, it is possible to identify dominant actors and their social capital endowments as well as network structures in the field. A fourth aspect can be found in the common issues that are discussed in relation to EUBS. While this is related to the authors' field positions, it raises also substantive arguments about the kind of unemployment insurance mechanism favoured by the respective authors and is included in the analysis for clarity and completeness. Questions of substance are also important since substantive changes reveal field positions through supportive and dismissive references, mutual influences, and the diffusion of certain terms and concepts. All studies focus on at least three substantive hurdles which must be overcome to implement an EUBS:

- how to avoid permanent transfers (a political question),
- how to deal with moral hazard (an economic question), and
- how to respect national sovereignty and the limitations of fiscal and welfare policy in EU primary (a legal question)?

Regarding these considerations, two aspects can help to identify three actor-networks in the research environment on EUBS.

First, there are almost no proposals or models which have been published in internationally renowned peer-reviewed journals. Instead, most of the work has been published in the forms of reports, working papers, staff working documents etc. There are some exceptions, however: These are two articles by Matthias Dolls, Andreas Peichl, and Clemens Fuest (Dolls, Fuest and Peichl 2012, Dolls et al. 2015) who are associated with the Centre for European Economic Research (ZEW), the ifo Institute for Economic research (ifo Institute) and the Institute for Labor Economics (IZA) as well as an article by Andrea Brandolini, Francesca Carta and Francesco D'Amuri, all of the Bank of Italy (Brandolini, Carta and D'Amuri 2016). In the first paper, published as a research paper in the prestigious *Journal of Public Economics*, Dolls, Fuest and Peichl (2012) estimate the impact of automatic

stabilizers on national economies after the GFC. In comparison with the USA, they find considerable heterogeneity within European and euro area economies where generous unemployment benefit systems in Scandinavian and some continental countries provide large automatic stabilizers, while stabilization effects in the Southern member states are lower than in the USA. A later article by the same authors, published in *International Tax and Public Finance*, built on their work for the European Parliament in 2013/14 and found that an EUBS could have had a possible cushioning effect of up to 10%, had it been in place during the GFC (Dolls et al. 2015). This article was published under the headline Policy Watch, a journal section which aims to facilitate communication and exchange between academic research and the policymaking community. Meanwhile, Brandolini, Carta and D'amuri (2016) had their work published in the inter- and multidisciplinary *Journal of Common Market Studies* (JCMS). JCMS is one of the few truly interdisciplinary journals as it publishes articles on European studies from fields such as law, sociology, public administration, political science, political economy, and economics. While the latter two contributions without a doubt follow the scientific method including double-blind peer-review, they are policy-driven, and policy related. Finally, two more articles have been published in minor economic journals neither of which has received any significant attention (Davis, Konstantinidis and Tripodis 2017, Farvaque and Huart 2018). Correspondingly, neither of the authors of the latter articles participated in any of the workshops or exhibited any relations to the EUBS-debate beyond their article. While they may or may not be relevant in the field of economics as a discipline (this is beyond the realm of this investigation), they lack relevance for the social field of Social Europe.

Meanwhile, the other studies have been published in policy-relevant journals without or with less meaningful peer-review such as *Intereconomics* (Andor et al. 2014, Dullien 2014b; 2017, Gros 2014, Simonetta 2017), the short-lived *IZA Journal of European Labor Studies* (2017 merged into the *IZA Journal of Labor Policy*) (Andor 2016), as policy contributions by think-tanks as the CEPS (Beblavý and Maselli 2014, Beblavý, Gros and Maselli 2015, Beblavý, Marconi and Maselli 2015, Gros 2016, Lenaerts, Paquier and Simonetta 2017, Thirion 2017, Vandembroucke et al. 2016, Wood 2017), Bruegel (Bénassy-Quéré, Ragot and Wolff 2016, Claeys, Darvas and Wolff 2014, Pisani-Ferry, Vihriälä and Wolff 2013, Wolff 2012), the IZA (Eichhorst and Wozny 2014, Fischer 2017), the DIW (Dullien and Fichtner 2013), the Jacques-Delors-Institute (Enderlein, Spiess and Guttenberg 2013, Fernandes and Maslauskaitė 2013a), and the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (Dullien et al. 2017), as remittance

work for national governments (Dullien et al. 2014, Fernandes and Maslauskaitė 2013a), the European Commission (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b, Dullien 2013, Esser et al. 2013, Jara Tamayo and Sutherland 2014), and the European Parliament (Beblavý and Maselli 2014, Dolls et al. 2014, Pisani-Ferry, Vihriälä and Wolff 2013), as well as research and extensive summaries prepared by in-house staff for either these institutions and the ECB (Koester and Sondermann 2018), the IMF (Allard et al. 2013), or the OECD (Claveres and Stráský 2018).

Second, many authors and group of authors have published multiple different proposals in a short period of time. Correspondingly, there are some authors who have co-(authored) only one publication, but only very few who have mid-sized number of publications. The field is polarized between very regular contributors to the policy debate and those who have never really entered the field. Once, authors had established themselves in the field, they have continued to publish on the issue of EUBS for various outlets. Their respective work has published for different audiences as their research output stretches from model-oriented and data-driven publications to shorter and non-technical policy reports and opinion pieces which popularize the findings. In fact, three lead-authors can be identified via whose publications the field can be structured: Miroslav Beblavý, Sebastian Dullien, and Matthias Dolls.

As outlined above, Beblavý⁷⁷ had been the lead-author for two studies, first commissioned by the European Parliament and then by the European Commission. Thus, he headed the academic team for the study commissioned by Thyssen and produced the final report together with his co-author Karolien Lenaerts. Beblavý obtained a PhD in economics from St Andrews University in 2004 with a study on central bank independence (Beblavý 2007). During the early 2010s, he had three professions. In addition to being a half-time Senior Research Fellow at CEPS, leading the employment and education unit and in whose capacity he studied the EUBS, he was an associate professor for public policy at Comenius University in Bratislava (until 2014) and an MP for various EPP-affiliated parties in the national parliament of Slovakia. Previously, he had gained experience as Secretary of State for the national Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, as consultant for international organisations as the World Bank, the OECD, and the European Commission as well as a journalist. According to his Google Scholar Profile, Beblavý has published some articles in

⁷⁷ See for Beblavý's CV: <https://beblavy.sk/> and for his Google Scholar profile: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=BmuSyBsAAAAJ&hl=de&oi=ao>.

peer-reviewed journals, most often on labour economics, education, and social policy, however the majority of his studies have been published otherwise. His contributions on EUBS rank third, fourth, fifth and seventh in citations. Overall, Beblavý's profile speaks of a man who has lots of EU and international policymaking experience and networks, while he lacks an outstanding academic profile.

Sebastian Dullien⁷⁸ has been the most prolific writer on EUBS. Not only did his work predate the Great Recession, but it was also connected to the topic of his PhD thesis “Interaction of Monetary Policy and Wage Bargaining in the EMU” which he obtained in 2004 from Free University Berlin (Dullien 2004). He had started his career as a journalist for the now distinct *Financial Times Deutschland* with some short-term stints for international organisations as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the DIW and the SWP. In 2007, he became professor for economics at the University of Applied Sciences for Engineering and Economics (HTW) in Berlin where he teaches applied macro-economics. In 2011, he joined the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) as a senior policy fellow and regularly provided analyses on European integration, macroeconomics, and financial markets as well as contributing opinion pieces for German magazines *Capital* and *Der Spiegel*. In 2019, Dullien was appointed as Director of the Macroeconomic Policy Institute (IMK), the trade unionist German macroeconomic research institute. Throughout his whole career, Dullien has associated himself with (post-)Keynesian macroeconomics and German centre-left discourses. A member of the editorial board of the *Review of Keynesian Economics* and the German Keynes Society, he is one of the few well-known Keynesians in the economic discourse, possibly the best-known since he succeeded Gustav Horn as IMK Director. Keynesian economists have routinely dismissed the European crisis response and have called for higher state spending, an end of austerity, higher wages in surplus-countries as Germany and greater fiscal integration on principle (Horn and Watt 2017, Krugman 2013a, Wren-Lewis 2013). A member of the SPD, he has received a scholarship from SPD-associated Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation during his economics studies. His studies on EUBS rank highly in Google Scholar citations, as they are fifth, sixth, eighth, and ninth, respectively. However, his higher ranked contributions also focus on European macroeconomics during the Great Recession. Like Beblavý, his profile for the most part

⁷⁸ See for Dullien's CV: http://dullien.net/Dullien_lebenslauf.html and for his Google Scholar profile: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=mVBCzD0AAAAJ&hl=de&oi=ao>.

lacks peer-review economics journal articles and if they exist, they are in exclusively Keynesian journals. Summing up, Dullien has some EU policymaking experience, but his networks, publications, and employment history point to network limited to other centre-left economists, social scientists, and politicians.

Unlike the other two who have coupled academic with multiple non-academic experiences and employments, Mathias Dolls⁷⁹ has never left the field of academic research unless you count two short internships during his graduate studies. After finishing his PhD in Economics at the University of Cologne in 2012, he has worked for and been affiliated with the ifo Institute, the IZA, and the ZEW in multiple positions. He has published in high-ranked economic journals and his three most cited contributions deal with EUBS and fiscal integration. According to his academic CV (which is more accessible and orderly than the CVs by Dullien and Beblavý), he has led and contributed to externally funded projects on automatic stabilizers in Europe for the Parliament, the Commission, the ECB, the German Finance Ministry, and other governmental institutions. Almost all of these projects and his publications have been co-authored by Clemens Fuest, the President of the ifo Institute (and former President of ZEW), and Andreas Peichl, Head of the ifo Centre for Macroeconomics and Surveys. The ifo institute has been one of the most vocal voices of German ordoliberalism, i.e. a set of ideas that budgets must be balanced, that is sceptical of state intervention, fiscal expansion, and further European integration (for a good overview and articles by some of the most prominent ordoliberals see Dold and Krieger 2019; 2021). It were ordoliberal economists and even more so politicians motivated by ordoliberal beliefs such as Wolfgang Schäuble who have resisted all forms of fiscal integration before and during the Great Recession (Matthijs and McNamara 2015, Matthijs 2016, Ryner 2015). While the existence of ordoliberalism in the present day as well as its influence in the (German) economic mainstream is sometimes neglected, its powerful roots can be found in the omni-present demand that economic decision-making should remain in the national domain or transferred to technocratic institutions, but never to democratic ones (Becker and Fuest 2019:148).⁸⁰ Thus, Dolls and Dullien *pars pro toto* represent two competing economic

⁷⁹ See for Dolls' CV: <https://www.ifo.de/dolls-m> and for his Google Scholar profile: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=eYC0ITcAAAAJ&hl=de&oi=ao>.

⁸⁰ Dold and Krieger (2021) correctly argue that most writings on ordoliberalism suffer from one of two misperceptions. Many critics of ordoliberalism oversimplify the ordoliberal way of thinking (Weltanschauung)

schools of thought in their analysis of the euro crisis. Dolls is the standard-bearer of new German ordoliberalism, Dullien represents the post- or Neo-Keynesian tradition, while Beblavý is ideologically neither affiliated to either one. Research in this field is almost exclusively driven by governmental interest and governmental funding. As outlined above, both the European Commission and the European Parliament started to fund research in 2012 and have in total funded three research projects. Additionally, the Austrian Federal Chancellery under social-democratic Chancellor Werner Faymann requested studies by Dullien and authors, so did the German Finance ministry which ordered a study by Mathias Dolls and his co-authors. Additional funding, albeit on smaller scale, comes from research institutes, such as the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation or the Bertelsmann Foundation which may also provide venues for discussion.

V.3.1 The Keynesians

Keynesian economists and their political and institutional allies have been long-standing supporters of a common European unemployment insurance. From their point of view, such an instrument would be necessary to stabilize the economy against cyclical downturns as there is “virtually no serious assessment of the functioning of the euro area that would see a chance of long life without fiscal capacity and risk-sharing” (Andor 2016:11).

While Sebastian Dullien is undoubtedly the leading economic voice for the Keynesian perspective on EUBS, Commissioner Andor is the political counterpart. As seen above, Andor had introduced Dullien to the European field in requesting his expertise for DG EMPL and had established research units DG EMPL as counterparts to DG ECFIN and their austerity policies. After leaving office at the end of 2014, the economist-turned-politician emerged as one of the leading centre-left figures in the European think-tank sphere. His academic engagements include, among others, fellowships at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin, the Free University of Brussels (ULB) and Sciences Po Paris and his think-tank affiliations include the European Policy Centre (EPC), FoE, RAND Europe,

in order to make strawman-arguments and propose their own ideological narrative, while many proponents on the other hand do not thoroughly engage in macroeconomic debates, but simply repeat ordoliberal trueisms such as the existence of moral hazard or subsidiarity principles to shut down policy proposals. They argue that ordoliberalism can offer substantial policy advice when it instead engages in institution-building and emphasizes core principles such as citizen participation and legitimacy. For a lack of a better word and in need of differentiation, I will call this emerging economic school of thought New Ordoliberalism.

the IMK and most notably the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). Starting out as a Senior Fellow, Andor became the organisations general secretary in 2019. FEPS is an umbrella organisation of European social-democratic think-tanks and research institutions which aims to inform progressive politics and policies through expertise, training, policy advice, training etc. The organisation affiliates with yet claims intellectual independence from the S&D group in the European parliament as well as with the Party of European Socialists (PES) and their subdivisions for youth, women and regions (Foundation For European Progressive Studies (FEPS) 2020). Andor is also a regular contributor to the Social Europe Blog (Social Europe 2023). Additionally, Dullien has singled out political scientist Daniela Schwarzer as an important voice who had “probably the most important role in the development of the concept of European unemployment insurance” (Dullien 2014a:22). Schwarzer and Dullien have worked on broader proposal for a common euro area budget (Dullien and Schwarzer 2009), but she did not participate in later debates on the unemployment insurance. Apart from Dullien and Andor, only a few academics can be put safely in the camp of Keynesian enthusiasts. Dullien’s studies have a very limited number of co-authors as he usually works alone and there are only two examples of minor importance. First, a Spanish-German proposal in cooperation with the FES lists Daniel Pérez del Prado, a professor of law with mostly Spanish publications, the head of the FES Madrid office Gero Maaß, and the two S&D MEPs Jonas Fernández and Jakob von Weizsäcker (Dullien et al. 2017). Second, a study commissioned by the Austrian Ministry for Employment, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection was co-authored by Ferdinand Fichtner and others from the DIW and resulted in a few DIW policy publications (Dullien and Fichtner 2013, Dullien et al. 2014). Fichtner also published a summary of this study in the annual ETUI and OSE book on the development of Social Europe (Fichtner 2013). However, this did not result in further cooperation with the DIW, even though DIW Director Marcel Fratzscher shares some characteristics with Dullien, as he is close to the social democrats, often in favour of fiscal expansion and a public economist who intervenes in policy debates.⁸¹ Andor, meanwhile, is definitely better connected in the European field, but his writings on unemployment insurance, too, were single authored. When publishing together with other high-profile policymakers, EUBS is usually not endorsed. Exemplarily for this is Andor’s participation in “Unequal Europe” report by FoE, which was chaired by

⁸¹ For Fratzscher’s CV see <http://www.fratzscher.eu/en/cv.php>.

Frank Vandenbroucke and was based on his earlier report on Social Europe (see the previous chapter for a more detailed discussion). Here, Vandenbroucke raised the question, whether EUBS would be feasible from a political rather than technical point of view (Vandenbroucke and Vanhercke 2014:67), however the final report shied away from this very question. While it acknowledged the important role, unemployment insurances played as automatic stabilizers in member states, it stated that the participants of the working group did not have the time to study the feasibility and impacts of a European adaption (Vandenbroucke et al. 2015:25) All in all, the camp of Keynesian enthusiasts is rather small and Dullien in particular did not successfully reach out to similar-minded economists or policymakers in an attempt to extend the audience, while Andor failed to get endorsements of EUBS into his co-authored work with others.

Nonetheless, Andor, Dullien and their relatively small number of original allies targeted a wider audience in search for support in two ways. First, they went beyond supporting arguments found in technical macroeconomic models and linked EUBS to aspects of the European polycrisis, namely the crisis of welfare states and the crisis of European democracy. Thus, they included both the political-economic and the welfare function of EUBS into their otherwise economically driven arguments. They linked the proposal to the social dimension of EMU and the social agenda of the EU, and they argued that it would help to address the democratic deficit of the EMU, e.g., by involving social partners in the administration and by speculating that it would increase popular support for EU economic governance. While Dullien speculated that his proposal could easily be explained to the average voter (Dullien 2007:5), Andor argued that a common unemployment system “would provide an answer to the simple question of a disillusioned European voter: ‘Where is Europe when we need it most?’” (Andor 2014:189). Second, they engaged with the three most-frequent economic criticisms of EUBS: that it would lead to permanent transfers between member states, that moral hazard was unavoidable and that legal challenges made implementation impossible. From their perspective, permanent transfers could be avoided, when the EUBS would only cover short-term unemployment and would only pay out benefits for a maximum of twelve months – after all, its main purpose would not be to solve long-term and structural unemployment in European economies but to stabilize the economy against anticyclical shocks. Dullien further argued that permanent transfers were unlikely to appear in the long run since all economies would sometimes over- or underperform the average of the euro area over the duration of multiple business cycles and an unemployment

insurance would help to synchronize employment shocks (Dullien 2014a:86-90; 115). In the rare case that a country would be a net-payer over a long period of time – something only the Netherlands would have been in Dullien’s counterfactual calculations – a clawback mechanism could be introduced which would automatically reduce the contributions of net payers. While this mechanism would limit the effectiveness of the instrument and would add an additional layer of complexity, it may help with political acceptance in possible net-payer countries (Dullien 2014b:193). The short-term function would also help to prevent institutional moral hazard, i.e., the threat that national governments would refrain from necessary labour market reform because the European unemployment insurance would cover the costs of non-reform. Dullien argued that a short-term shock absorption effect of EUBS would have the opposite effect. The more flexible labour markets were, the more severe would the impact of exogenous shocks be. Thus, the EUBS would incentivise governments to bring more, not less, flexibility into their labour markets because they know that the costs of flexibility are covered by the European instrument (Dullien 2014a:118-19).

Finally, the question of legal feasibility is clearly underrepresented in the writings of Dullien, Andor, and others. In fact, they treated the legal provisions and challenges that the European treaties pose as merely political problems. Solutions are not searched for and found in interpretations of the law but in different politics, be it via ideational or electoral change. The legal provisions were not seen as a problem *suis generis* but as a secondary problem which hinges on political factors. Dullien and Ulrike Guérot e.g., criticized the German political parties for their “rigid legal approach to treaty change” (Dullien and Guérot 2012:1). Andor meanwhile often stated that some applications of EUBS would not require treaty change, also implying that the implementation is a question of political will rather than legal ability, as seen here:

Such measures do not require a federal leap or treaty change. Political leaders must convince the public of the necessity of repairing the EMU and preparing it for the next downturn by adding effective shock-absorption tools. (Andor 2019a:236)

Typically, they referred to the ESM and its predecessor, the EFSF, as examples for possible implementations. Here, too, governments circumvented the boundaries of European law (no bail-out) by setting up extracontractual institutions (Tomkin 2013).

V.3.2 The new ordoliberalists

As stated above, Dolls, Fuest, and Peichl are the core group of new ordoliberal authors who have studied and developed EUBS proposals. Intellectually and organisationally, Fuest is the head of this group and perhaps of the new ordoliberalism in general. He was supervisor to both Dolls' and Peichl's PhD theses and their careers from the University of Cologne via the ZEW and the IZA to the ifo institute follow his. Their occasional co-authors such as Friedrich Heinemann and Dirk Neumann, too, are associated with ZEW, IZA and ifo, and are former PhD students of Clemens Fuest. Not only do they all have remarkably similar career characteristics, but all economists in this group are German and male. Within the group, a division of labour can be observed. Dolls is the main author of studies, articles, and policy contributions which focus exclusively on the on EUBS, while Fuest is responsible for networking within the discipline of economics and bringing the results in discussion with other internationally renowned macroeconomists.⁸² On the one hand, Fuest has been a member of a group of French and German economists who co-authored multiple contributions on the broader issues of fiscal reform in the EMU after 2017. On the other hand, he is well connected in traditional bastions of German ordoliberalism: He has been a member of the Kronberger Kreis, the scientific advisory council of the *Wirtschaftsrat der CDU e.V.*⁸³ and the Advisory Council at the German Ministry of Finance. Additionally, Fuest has been consistently ranked as one of the five most influential German economists by the prestigious newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (FAZ 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2020; 2021).

Perhaps surprising to readers familiar with the German ordoliberal tradition, these authors did not condemn the mere thought of a European unemployment insurance, Dolls even jokingly called it a “revolutionary idea” (Dolls 2021). They argued that EUBS possessed both chances and risks for the euro area going forward. The well-known risks – distributional effects and institutional moral hazard – needed to be considered against the benefits that they find in the counterfactual analysis, i.e. interregional and intertemporal stabilizing effects in the economy (Dolls et al. 2018). Thus, Dolls et al. emphasized that an unemployment

⁸² For Clemens Fuest's CV see: <https://www.ifo.de/fuest-c>.

⁸³ The organization self-elects to translate into Economic Council, while a precise translation is Economic Council of the Christian Democratic Union. The *Wirtschaftsrat* emphasizes its political and legal independence but is connected and interwoven with the CDU and to lesser extent with the liberal party FDP (Schröder and Schreier 2017:377).

insurance should be accompanied by further European regulations to prevent both never-ending transfers between member states and an increase in the debt burden of the unemployment insurance fund and the member states, respectively. They were specifically concerned with the fiscal debt of these euro area countries which were predicted to profit the most from an EUBS, namely those with underdeveloped national insurance systems. An estimation had shown that the shock absorption effect of national insurance systems in the EU on average exceeded the effect in the United States, but that the EU experienced severe heterogeneity. Eastern and Southern European countries experienced significantly less absorption effects during the Great Recession than North-Western countries (Dolls, Fuest and Peichl 2012). The implementation of a sovereign insolvency procedure for euro area countries would shift the burden of covering possible debt default from other sovereigns to private creditors. This, in turn, would guarantee that the EUBS would only cover costs which were the results of larger-than-average shocks and that countries could not use it to pile-up debt eventually.

“We have argued that, if the rules of both institutions are respected, there is no trade-off between stabilization and market discipline. To the contrary, our proposed insurance mechanism and sovereign insolvency procedure mutually reinforce each other. A stabilization mechanism such as a common unemployment insurance system would simplify the transition towards the new regime with an orderly sovereign insolvency procedure by supporting member states in times of economic distress. At the same time, the sovereign insolvency procedure would increase the acceptability of an automatic fiscal stabilizer at the central level as it would ensure that such a mechanism cannot easily be transformed into a system of permanent transfers” (Dolls et al. 2016a:227-28)

Discussing possible moral hazard concerns, the new ordoliberalists typically refrained from normative arguments in favour or opposition of specific policy solutions. Instead, they emphasized the trade-off between possible solutions for moral hazard and the effectiveness of the instrument. Typical solutions to the moral hazard problem as the claw-back mechanism or experience ratings⁸⁴ which would automatically decrease contributions by net contributor countries over the medium or long term would also decrease the system’s ability to smooth shocks across different countries. The more a specific implementation of EUBS was designed to prevent moral hazard, the less effective it would be. Having said that, Dolls and his co-authors have made one very concrete and precise proposal to minimize moral hazard. Their preferred model for EUBS would be triggered if the unemployment shock in

⁸⁴ Dolls et al. did not clearly distinguish between these two concepts, unlike Beblavý et al. (see next chapter). Instead, they use the term claw-back mechanisms based on experience ratings to describe, what is otherwise distinguished as an experience rating mechanism (see e.g., Dolls et al. 2016b: 56).

one country would be significantly higher than in the euro area in general and if the surge in unemployment would increase beyond a pre-defined threshold. Additionally, the system would include a waiting period, so that seasonal unemployment would not be covered:

Transfers from the EMU-UI system would need to be co-financed by member states. Precisely, if transfers from the EMU-UI system were triggered in a member state, the EMU-UI system would pay part of the benefits according to the minimum standards monitored by the European Commission. That is, the EMU-UI system would pay 50% of the benefits to the short-term unemployed with an unemployment spell no longer than 12 months. A waiting period of 2 months following job loss would exclude seasonal unemployment (like in tourism) from coverage by the EMU-UI system. The rationale for EMU-UI to be based on co-financing and focussing on short-term unemployment including a waiting period is that these elements should minimize the risk of permanent transfers, moral hazard, and administrative manipulation. (Dolls et al. 2016a:221)

However, there was considerable disagreement in the ordoliberal camp. No other than Lars Feld, professor for economic policy in Freiburg, Director of the prestigious Walter-Eucken-Institute in Freiburg and a member of the German Council of Economic Advisors⁸⁵ from 2011 to 2021, who otherwise shares memberships with Clemens Fuest in most ordoliberal organizations, opposed any form of unemployment insurance on the grounds of moral hazard, permanent distributional effects, and the heterogeneity in existing national systems of unemployment benefits which would make harmonization and implementation almost impossible. In place of a fiscal capacity, Feld argued, the EMU should focus on the integration and harmonization of its banking supervision (banking union) and on national fiscal discipline and consolidation, so that euro area countries would have fiscal space to react to shocks in the future. He concluded an analysis of fiscal integration policies with the following paragraph of which the second to last sentence describes the classical ordoliberal counterargument to every proposal for European fiscal integration: Moral hazard occurs.

It should be noted that the establishment of a fiscal capacity does not only provide for at best a rather small risk-sharing mechanism. It also induces negative incentives for member countries to reduce the probability of being affected by economic shocks adversely. Reforms of labor and products markets aiming at higher wage and price flexibility will be postponed. Consolidation efforts will wane. Moral hazard occurs. Given this downside of a fiscal capacity, its introduction cannot be advised. (Feld and Osterloh 2013:20)

In line with Feld, two more ifo-affiliated public finance economists from a German university, Alfons Weichenrieder and Shafik Hebous, rejected the proposal for clawbacks on the ground that they would nullify the insurance mechanism. Instead, they proposed an exit option which would allow net contributor countries to leave the euro area, if the EUBS

⁸⁵ Often called the *Wirtschaftsweisen* (economic wise men) in the press and public life.

would have long-term distributional effects (Hebous and Weichenrieder 2016:391-92), yet this proposal did not get traction with other ordoliberals.

Finally, the legal challenges of EUBS were not discussed by the new ordoliberals who limited their contributions to the findings of their respective modelling and available data. This, too, puts them at odds with the classical ordoliberals who typically employed legal arguments and references to the TEU and TFEU in their opposition to any form of fiscal integration, following Eucken's doctrine of *Ordnungspolitik* as a rule-based and self-restraining system of governance (Feld 2012, Schnellenbach 2021).⁸⁶

V.3.3 The Europeanists

Finally, there is a third group of economists which does not fall into the neat distinction of fiscally prudent ordoliberals on the one side and spending-friendly Keynesians on the other side. Instead, this group is characterized by a specific trait which is its Europeaness. Unlike both Keynesians and new ordoliberals whose career trajectories, political and research affiliations are organized along a traditional centre-left/centre-right division, the Europeanists' positions and associations align with the specific European capital in the social field. They are typical representatives of the specific and distinctive European elite. Here, the centre-left/centre-right divide is less important and so is the distinction between Keynesian and ordoliberal economics. Instead, the distinction between integrationists and Eurosceptics is more pronounced and politicians and economists from the centre-right and centre-left are often on the same, broadly pro-integrationist, side. This group is usually overlooked by accounts which explore ideational explanations for EU economic policymaking, e.g. the battle of ideas between Keynesianism and ordoliberalism, but their importance in EU policymaking is highlighted for various policy fields, including regional, economic, and social policy (Büttner and Mau 2014, Robert 2013, Schmidt-Wellenburg 2017). Schmidt-Wellenburg (2017) points out that economics as a profession has increased its importance within EU policy field over the last 30 years. Coman (2020:989) has showed that Brussels-based think-tanks such as CEPS are central venues for economists to discuss

⁸⁶ Lars Feld's article is one example among many that can be found in the ordoliberal scientific journal *ORDO* which has published numerous articles on ordoliberal perspectives on the euro crisis and reform programmes since the Great Recession.

policies and serve “as mediators of ideational battles, seeking to analyse what went wrong and why before and after the crisis.”

Accordingly, the co-authors and other involved scholars who worked alongside Beblavý have similar career backgrounds. Ilaria Maselli had worked at CEPS since 2007, covering policy issues such as European labour markets and flexicurity; additionally, she is a member of the Italian centre left Partito Democratico (PD) and has been active in its Brussels party chapter. Lenaerts had just graduated with a PhD in Economics from Ghent University before joining CEPS. René Repasi who wrote the study on the legal feasibility had clerked for the Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers (DG JUST) and the ECJ and had been employed as scientific coordinator for a European research project. He has since been elected to the European Parliament as a member of the SPD.

While both the Keynesians and the new ordoliberalists contributed bits and pieces to the economic and political debate, the Europeanists around Beblavý were tasked with providing a much more systematic overview of eighteen different variants, their legal and operational challenges as well as their economic effects, taking into effect possible ramifications on EMU and member state level. These 18 variants had been pre-defined by DG EMPL in consensus with the European Parliament and differed on issues such as replacement rates, triggers, conditions, eligibility etc. (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b:1-2).⁸⁷ The main difference, however, is between 14 *genuine* and four *equivalent* or *reinsurance* variants. The former would establish a genuine relation between European citizens and businesses who pay into a European insurance fund as part of their wages, while the latter would collect contributions from national unemployment benefit systems which would serve as intermediaries between contributors and the European insurance. Member states would in turn receive pay-outs from this fund to support their national unemployment systems in times of an extraordinary exogenous economic shock (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b:17-25).

Overall, this group of researchers concluded that an EUBS would bring added value for the EMU and would complement, rather than substitute, other reform projects such as banking union, the ESM, and the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure (MIP). While some already existing instruments and policies had stabilization effects, neither combined the stabilization and prevention function as good as an unemployment insurance which would also not suffer

⁸⁷ See Beblavý and Lenaerts (2017b) for a short and result-orientated version of the final report.

from delay caused by political decision-making (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b:3-4) Finally, the authors concluded that EUBS would bring benefits beside the limited stabilization effect:

Besides stabilization, an EUBS could also contribute to other areas: it might boost labour mobility by making EUBS benefits portable, contribute to upward convergence, enhance the protection of the unemployed, contribute to social cohesion, help to address unemployment and poverty while ensuring that moral hazard is addressed. It could be a clear sign to Europe's citizens that the EU cares about their well-being, which especially in the current context, would be a meaningful signal. An EUBS may also be a stepping stone towards a deeper and fairer EMU, if policy-makers decided that it is a viable option to consider. (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b:78-79)

The study discussed both experience rating and clawbacks as possible instruments to prevent permanent transfers based on the results of their EUBS models. It found that a combination of both would be redundant since they had the same goals, but experience rating would be a favourable policy solution. Clawbacks may lead to situations where countries with permanent higher than average rate unemployment would theoretically be mandated to pay additional clawback contributions, but would functionally never do so, because their unemployment rates stay high (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b:26-27).

Experience ratings and conditional triggers were also mentioned as possible solutions to mitigate moral hazard, but unlike Keynesians and new ordoliberalists, the Europeanists did not approach the issue of moral hazard from the standpoint of economic theory alone. Instead, led by Frank Vandebroucke, one article explored country case studies of eight multi-tiered unemployment insurance or social assistance benefit systems to shed light on the empirically observable appearances of moral hazard as well as possible solutions. They found that minimum activation requirements for national unemployment systems would be necessary. Vandebroucke and his co-authors argued that any implementation of EUBS must be accompanied by further labour market convergence efforts which may build on existing soft-law governance tools as the Social OMC and the EES. While they did not use the term 'social investment' explicitly, they argued that these policies would reduce institutional moral hazard as they would help jobseekers to find employment. Moreover, the Europeanists with Vandebroucke at their helm concluded that the threat of moral hazard was often overstated. They argued that moral hazard was a natural element of every insurance mechanism, that there was a difference between moral hazard as objective reality, the public perception of its presence and the public concern for it, and that the challenge to find the equilibrium trade-off was as much a question of political beliefs and mutual trust as it was one of economic modelling (Vandebroucke et al. 2016:33-34), thus reframing moral hazard from a purely

economic to a political problem. Vandenbroucke expressed this view best in a research paper written during his time as DG ECFIN Fellow in 2016-2017⁸⁸:

Moreover, the possibility for member states that benefit from a European support for their unemployment benefits to become 'lax' with regard to the activation of the unemployed and (re)employment policies at large, generates an obvious risk of institutional moral hazard. We should not become totally obsessed with moral hazard. Moral hazard is unavoidable in any context of insurance. If you're obsessed, and you want to eliminate the faintest possibility of moral hazard, you'll never be able to organise insurance and reap the benefits of collective action. On the other hand, we should not dismissive about moral hazard: we should address it, and find solutions to minimise it. The risk of moral hazard can be reduced through financial mechanisms. (Vandenbroucke 2017c:24)

Due to the nature of its interdisciplinary research consortiums, this group elaborated the legal challenges in greater details than the other two. René Repasi (2017a:61) argued that both genuine and reinsurance variants which included some form of pay-back mechanism, i.e. clawback or experience ratings, may be implemented without the need for treaty change as the respective legal acts could be based on Article 352(1) TFEU. Article 352(1) TFEU states that the EU can adopt legislation beyond the scope of its powers and resources, if this proves necessary to achieve policy objectives defined in the treaties. The necessity may stem from the EU's objectives to advance social cohesion and promote macroeconomic stabilization. Furthermore, minimum requirements for national systems could find a legal base in the necessity to provide social protection and social security. Crucially, Beblavý and Lenaerts argued that reinsurance/equivalent variants would be easier to implement as they leave national systems intact and would not interfere with national legislation. Their analysis of legal challenges went beyond the scope of European and national law and included operational challenges such as the interplay of EUBS with other national forms of social protection or social partner involvement in unemployment funds. The following citation clearly shows the preference for re-insurance variants of EUBS (bold in original version):

Reinsurance schemes, by design, essentially leave the existing national schemes unaffected. Funds are not disbursed to the qualified unemployed directly. Instead, financial transfers occur between the supranational fund managing the EUBS and the Member States. **Equivalent EUBS variants are therefore not very demanding to implement at the Member State level in legal and operational terms.** [...] Genuine EUBS (at least partly) replace the existing national unemployment insurance schemes (as contributions are collected from employers and employees and benefits are paid out directly to the unemployed). As a consequence, they have a substantial impact on the NUBS and on Member States' legal and operational frameworks. Genuine EUBS variants would require much more harmonisation than reinsurance EUBS variants among the NUBS. For these reasons, **legally and especially operationally, genuine EUBS would be very demanding to implement.** (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b:63-64)

⁸⁸ A short, preliminary, but more frequently cited version of this article has been published in *Intereconomics* the same year (Vandenbroucke 2017c).

V.3.4 The academic debate revisited

The comparison has shown that all three groups of researchers supported the idea that EUBS may bring macroeconomic stabilization to the euro area in principle. While the Keynesians stand out with their enthusiasm, both the new ordoliberal and the Europeanists appear more sober in their evaluations. The differences between the groups become more pronounced when the three important challenges to EUBS implementation are considered. There is relatively high agreement on the issue of permanent transfers which should be avoided for the sake of political legitimacy. Capping the maximum duration of benefit coverage and instruments such as clawbacks (preferred by Keynesians) and experience rating (preferred by the other two) are manageable solutions. The legal challenge is side-lined in both the Keynesian and new ordoliberal argument as their sub-fields are almost exclusively populated by economists. The Europeanists on the other hand have argued that some variants of EUBS would not require treaty change, especially equivalent/reinsurance variants. Finally, the most pronounced differences can be found in the discussion of institutional moral hazard. Moral hazard would appear when national governments would refrain from labour market and social security reforms because they know that future costs would be covered by the European insurance framework. While Keynesians argue that the EUBS may not lead to moral hazard but, in turn, would incentivize national labour market reform towards flexibility, the new ordoliberals take this much more seriously. Acknowledging the trade-off between moral hazard concerns and the effectiveness of automatic stabilizers, they argue that time-limited transfers, waiting periods, ex-post conditionality towards structural reforms, and the combination of an EUBS with a sovereign insolvency instrument may all limit the effects of moral hazard. In doing so, they split from classical ordoliberal positions which see moral hazard as a challenge that makes EUBS as a whole undesirable or which would allow contributor countries to leave the euro area when beneficiaries do not implement structural reforms. The Europeanists finally approached the issue of moral hazard from a position nested in the empirical reality of multi-tiered social security systems rather than economic modelling and argued that the perceived threat of moral hazard was often overstated. Table 5 shows how the three groups approached the main challenges to EUBS.

Economic School of Thought / Questions	How can permanent transfers be avoided (political problem)?	How can moral hazard be minimized (economic problem)?	How is a legal implementation possible (legal problem)?
Keynesianism	Permanent transfers are not certain (business cycle) Time-limited transfers Claw-back mechanism	Time-limited transfers EUBS may not lead to moral hazard at all	Political solution bypassing legal barriers, role model: ESM Treaty changes not needed
New Ordoliberalism	Combination with a Sovereign insolvency instrument Time-limited transfers Experience ratings	Time-limited transfers waiting periods Ex-post conditionality Trade-offs between moral hazard and effectiveness	Not discussed
Europeanism	Experience ratings	No obsession over moral hazard Common minimum standards for national systems Social Investment policies Time-limited transfers	Art. 352(1) TFEU Preference for equivalent/reinsurance variants

Table 5: Proposals for the solution of political, economic, and legal challenges to EUBS, own representation based on the literature cited in this chapter.

The structure of the social field which is a division of economists into three camps means in turn that actors who can connect these different sub-fields will have high degrees of centrality – they are the possible brokers of compromise and policy progress. From the Keynesian side, Jakob von Weizsäcker is such a central figure. His career shows an outstanding degree of multipositionality: He had worked at an economist at leading academic institutions in Germany, France, and the United States, worked in a high position in the German Ministry of Economics before joining the Brussels-based think-tank Bruegel in 2005. He then went back to national, even state politics before he was elected to the

European Parliament in 2014 for the SPD.⁸⁹ As seen above, he co-authored a study with Dullien and others, but he also appeared alongside the powerbroker of the new ordoliberal Clemens Fuest, Bruegel Director Guntram Wolff (and Dullien's co-author Daniela Schwarzer) as the co-author of a 2013 opinion piece on euro area reform, published in German weekly DIE ZEIT. This short-lived group of economists, lawyers, and political scientists, which called itself the Glienicke Group, proposed further integration as a solution to the euro crisis and explicitly endorsed EUBS without any caveats or reservations:

“The monetary union cannot be permanently stable without a controlled transfer mechanism. Situations in which a euro-area country suffers an acute liquidity emergency and is forced to enact draconian austerity measures on its population must remain exceptional. To prevent such extremes, we need a euro-area insurance mechanism to cushion the fiscal consequences of a dramatic economic downturn. The euro area could therefore establish a common unemployment insurance system, to complement national systems; all countries that organise their labour market in line with the needs of the monetary union could be eligible for participation. This would create a mechanism to counteract deep recessions with automatic European stabilizers. Thus, the macro-economic cohesion of the euro area could be strengthened and the integration of the European labour market accelerated.” (von Bogdany et al. 2013)

Frank Vandebroucke is another prominent example of someone who may bridge the gap between the research clusters. As a longstanding minister in coalition governments with differing portfolios in Belgium, he has a proven record of compromise-building and knowledge of public affairs. He was a key actor during the launch and implementation of the Social OMC, when Belgium held the EU Presidency in 2001 (Zeitlin 2005:7). As a professor at KU Leuven, the University of Antwerp, and the University of Amsterdam, he had worked contributed to the research debates on Social Europe and European integration. Vandebroucke had participated in the debates on EUBS early on. He participated in both Bertelsmann Foundation workshops in 2013 and 2014, where he gave presentations on moral hazard and ALMP, respectively. While his status as a social democratic academic as well as his principled support for EUBS may put him in the Keynesian camp, Vandebroucke is indeed firmly rooted in the social sub-field of Europeanists. His engagement does not stem from a macroeconomic perspective, but from a long-standing commitment to Social Europe which is clearly present in his academic and political work. Unlike someone like Dullien who sees EUBS primarily from the viewpoint of fiscal policy, Vandebroucke arrives at the

⁸⁹ In 2019 Jakob von Weizsäcker became chief economist in the German Ministry of Finance and brought former Social-Europe-Editor Henning Meyer as his close personal assistant. In 2022, von Weizsäcker became Minister of Finance in the Saarland and Meyer joined him as the head of his private office.

debate from the normative standpoint that the EU must include social policy issues and must become a social union (see Chapter IV.3). Both his own political engagement as well as his ideational understanding of Social Europe go back to the tenets of European social policymaking in the early 2000s: social investment, soft governance, and political centrism (for a good presentation of his normative argument see this introductory chapter on a social union: Vandembroucke 2017a). Both von Weizsäcker and Vandembroucke participated in the academic debate among their professional peers, but at the same time they were deeply political, i.e., they had political roles. Additionally, they both embody a centrist and so-called non-ideological approach to politics, committed to compromise and consensus which gaps different political camps. Thus, they were well positioned to function as arbiters of compromise on EUBS. Clemens Fuest, meanwhile, had showed that he would be interested in bridging the gap by participating in the Glienicke Group. This departure from classical ordoliberalism and the new ordoliberals' general willingness to discuss cost-benefits of EUBS moved their field positions towards the Europeanist mainstream.

V.4 LOOKING FOR SUPPORT WITHIN: TRADE UNIONS, THE EUROPEAN AND GERMAN LEFT AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

As seen above, the Keynesians economists were the real enthusiasts who wanted the implementation of EUBS. Neither Andor who had a political position anyway nor Dullien saw their role as apolitical academics or as economic advisers who would only present possible policy solutions and their trade-offs, while staying indifferent regarding their own preferences. Not only their repeated appeals to public opinion, and concepts of legitimacy and trust prove this, but Dullien also states this very clearly at the end of one of his books:

“Of course, as readers might have noticed, I personally think a European unemployment insurance would be a good idea. Therefore, I hope that I have convinced readers that among the proposals on the table for introducing a fiscal capacity to deal with diverging national economic cycles, a European unemployment insurance has the most appeal.” (Dullien 2014a:125)

This chapter discusses how institutional and individual actors from the Keynesian side reached out to possible allies for their cause, especially to trade unions and centre-left political forces. Particularly, they tried to convince German interest groups and political parties as they saw the German government as the main adversary to create any form of automatic stabilizers. In fact, German governments had always opposed fiscal integration, even more so when proposals included redistributive elements (Howarth and Schild 2021).⁹⁰ A remarkable example of the importance of Germany and of how much the German government was on everyone’s mind regarding EUBS can be found in a Q&A, Andor did with members of the Employment Committee (EMCO) in September 2014. Out of ten questions overall, two are directly linked to German opposition. Asked, whether this was a French idea (and thus by design fiscally imprudent), Andor pointed out that a number of academic experts in favour of EUBS were German, while a second question directly asked how Germany would benefit. Here, Andor referred to Dullien’s models which showed Germany as a possible beneficiary, had the EUBS been in place during the early 2000s (EMCO 2014).

From the get-go, European social partners participated in the debate on EUBS. This is hardly surprising: Not only do they represent the two groups which would bear the costs and reap the benefits of such a system, but trade unions and employers often co-manage national

⁹⁰ This contribution is part of a Special Issue on Germany and the Integration of Core Powers in the Journal of European Integration which provides a good overview over the German *Sonderweg* during the euro crisis, especially for readers unfamiliar with the vast literature on German preference formation (for the introductory article see Freudlsperger and Jachtenfuchs 2021).

unemployment insurance systems. Accordingly, many proposals discussed whether their European representatives could play a similar role for any model of EUBS (Beblavý, Lenaerts and Maselli 2017b:34-35). However, the two smaller cross-industry employer representatives did not voice any official position, so that this chapter mainly discusses ETUC and BE. The latter were quick to denounce the plans. In reaction to Dullien's first paper on automatic stabilizers for the European Commission, BE Director of Social Affairs, Maxime Cerutti, called automatic stabilizers "unfeasible, unacceptable and impractical" (BE 2013b). BE criticized that any form of EUBS would require a significant transfer of sovereignty from national governments to the European level as well as the harmonization of national systems of social protection and labour market regulation. Additionally, the proposal – and frankly any form of fiscal integration – would contradict EU Treaties and would therefore be politically unfeasible. Finally, BE argued, any form of EUBS would be harmful to the euro area economy. Without using the term moral hazard, Dullien's proposal was criticized because it would take away incentives to reform national labour markets and would lead to permanent transfers between member states. The BE response directly engaged Dullien's research article and further criticized it from two angles: First, it questioned the reliability and usefulness of the assumptions made in the model and second, it called out implicit normative foundations.

On the first point, BE argued that Dullien neglected the timeliness of unemployment benefits. They argued that the time-lag between the economic shock and the transfer payments would render the stabilization effort ineffective. Quite remarkably, at a time, when the EU was still in the midst of the Great Recession, BE warned that unemployment transfers could "destabilize an economy by further overheating it". Further criticism was brought against the harmonization of national unemployment systems in the empirical model which were not appropriate to represent the real-life diversity of European social security systems.

Then, there are two examples for the second type of criticism. In the first one, an underlying ambition to use EUBS as a possibility to make overall unemployment benefit compensation more generous was identified. The second example criticised that Dullien argued that sufficient contributions must be made before citizens could receive benefits, because the definition of sufficiency would greatly differ among countries (BE 2013b). Overall, the criticism was damning and BE flat-out opposed any proposal, a position in line with their long-standing policy position to oppose fiscal and social integration in the EU and the euro area (Platzer 2017).

Thus, when DG EMPL and Andor came forward with the first proposals for a European unemployment insurance, they sought out support from European trade unions. As seen in the preliminary chapter, trade unions had opposed European crisis management in the early 2010s and had been one of the most vocal supporters of a social dimension for Europe. In 2012, the relations between the European trade union movement on the one side and employers and the European Commission had come to a low-point, and the ETUC even supported European-wide strike movements against policies of austerity in countries which had received a bail-out by European institutions (Lindner 2022b). The Keynesian camp saw them as a logical ally for their case. In his speech to the ETUC Congress in Madrid in January 2013, Andor introduced the proposal to European trade union delegates and made the point that European social partners could be involved in the governance framework (Andor 2013). However, trade unions did not react with support but with scepticism. In the following two years and in parallel to the developing economic debate, the ETUC and national trade unions with support from the ETUI discussed the benefits and drawbacks of the EUBS.

Supporters within DG EMPL and the Andor cabinet placed particular hope in Reiner Hofmann who was elected chairperson of the German Trade Union Association (DGB) in 2014. Hofmann had a rather untypical career for the leader of the German trade union movement.⁹¹ After a diploma in economics, he had worked for the EESC before he became the Director of the ETUI for ten years starting in the mid-1990s. This familiarity with the European economic and social policymaking made him approachable for the early supporters of the EUBS. They speculated that he would be a valuable asset in overcoming German opposition which did not only exist in business circles and centre-right political parties but extend to trade unions as well as the governing social democrats.

“We thought, there was a strong political case that people were actually looking for a sign that Europe mattered. We thought, if we could get the trade unions on board, this would be positive – but the German trade unions were far from enthusiastic. One of our more positive moments was, when Reiner Hofmann was made head of the DGB, because he had more nuances about it, he was a Brussels based trade union leader, but at the end of the day, he never came out in favour. We had hoped that we could convince him and that he could convince the German trade unions and then the German socialist party.” (Interview COM-EMPL4)

However, as this interviewee already acknowledged the approach to win over Hofmann and via him the German centre-left, the German government, and eventually the opposition in the European Council did not go as planned. Hofmann expressed his disagreement with

⁹¹ For Hoffmann’s CV in German see: <https://www.dgb.de/uber-uns/bewegte-zeiten/vorsitzende>

EUBS during an event, co-organized by ETUI and its German counterpart WSI in 2015 (ETUI 2015). In response to Andor's outline, Hofmann argued that the diversity of national systems of unemployment insurance would make this proposal undesirable for trade unions who were often involved in the governance structures and who feared social dumping as a consequence of harmonization.

One reason the Keynesians failed to find support among their theoretical allies was that they approached them after the fact, i.e., after they had gone public with their proposals for EUBS. Apparently, they did not understand the implications or did not have the networks to discuss this issue informally before putting it out. During peak austerity, trade unions understood Europeanization of any form social security or labour market policy as a threat to their members and to their economic well-being. It is easy to imagine how the Commission's discussion of European unemployment insurance must have been received in national trade union headquarters. One interviewee from the workers group in the EESC explicitly acknowledged how that approach antagonized the German trade union movement in particular and they criticized that Commissioner Andor did not understand European politics:

“There were not enough committee members who were in favour. So, we just said we need to discuss this further. From the very beginning, the way how the Commissioner [Andor] proposed this had led to a very unfortunate debate. In my opinion, he lacked the grasp how to start such a debate. We had very controversial debates within the DGB, depending on whether you were a European, just like me, or whether you were a national labour market expert who had a very different view. They had misunderstood the proposal and feared that the proposal for EUBS would be a threat to national systems of unemployment benefits.” (Interview EESC)

In the end, the ETUC publicly expressed their opposition to EUBS at the end of 2015. Not only did they fear that further flexibilization of labour markets and social security systems would be forced upon beneficiary countries, but they argued that EUBS would interfere with national systems and would not be an adequate fiscal policy response to longer crises:

“Moreover, a European unemployment benefit system would interact with national benefit systems and could have important repercussions on national labour market institutions, on workers' rights and standards such as job protection and, importantly, on trade union membership. Finally, a European unemployment benefit system would support economies only temporarily. It would not provide an adequate policy response to shocks of a longer duration which had more to do with an economy's structural characteristics such as its capacity to upgrade itself on the ladder of global trade and innovation. The ETUC is therefore of the opinion that other options to define a euro area fiscal capacity, such as a Euro Treasury (see below) need to be pursued.” (ETUC 2015b)

Andor and his team also tried to rally support from within the European Parliament. As shown above, the social democratic MEPs Pervenche Berès and Jakob von Weizsäcker were early supporters. While the centre-left forces did not have a majority in the EP, even if the Greens/European Free Alliance (Green/EFA) and The Left in the European Parliament (GUE/NGL) were included, the Keynesians once again hoped to use supporters like Berès and von Weizsäcker as brokers to build supporting coalitions. Heading the French socialist delegation, Berès should link the Keynesian proposals to the French Presidency of Françoise Hollande and the Minister for Economy and Finance, Pierre Moscovici. Von Weizsäcker was seen in a similar role *vis a vis* the German government and together, they thought, they could build coalitions in the European Parliament. However, there is no evidence that Andor, Dullien or anyone from their team actively sought out these or similar actors with the goal to discuss these strategies openly. Accordingly, the advocacy for EUBS was heavily linked to Andor personally who left office at the end of 2014: it was his personal project. Had he built a coalition of actors in various institutions, they could have continued to support this specific version of fiscal integration. Instead, the Keynesians focussed on what they thought was a convincing case for a Social Europe that delivered benefits to all citizens, in short: Their strategy was all policy, but no politics. Likewise, both Berès and von Weizsäcker did not endorse the Keynesian proposal for EUBS. Berès favoured a euro area budget over unemployment insurance and was co-rapporteur for a parliamentary report with German EPP MEP Reimer Böge (Berès-Böge-Report) which was adopted with support from all S&D and Green/EFA MEPs and majorities of both the EPP and the ALDE group (Böge and Berès 2017). The report discussed various proposals for fiscal stabilization including EUBS and referenced the European research project led by Beblavý. It criticized the original version of EUBS citing moral hazard concerns in addition to the unlikely labour market integration that would be necessary. Re-insurance mechanisms on the other hand would have only limited effects and both variants would not completely avoid transfers between member states. The necessity of further labour market harmonization had also been recognized by Agnès Bénassy-Quéré, professor of economics at SciencesPo and CESifo and IZA affiliate, who was then Chair of the French Council of Economic Analysis. She argued that EUBS could be a complement of banking union, financial stabilization efforts, and the completion of the single market for labour in the long-run, but would be hard to achieve and ineffective if done without any of this (Bénassy-Quéré, Ragot and Wolff 2016). Likewise, Macron who Berès

supported over the socialist candidate Benoît Hamon in the 2017 presidential election campaigned on the platform of a federal budget for the euro area, not on EUBS (Clegg 2022).

To make matters worse, opposition came also from within the European Commission, namely from Rehn and DG ECFIN. During the Barroso Commission, other DGs and Commissioners did not care for any models of EUBS at all. In fact, Rehn did not comment on this while in office, but later explained his rejection in a book on European crisis management, written in defence of austerity and the Commission's muddling-through approach. However, even here, despite all the studies and the academic engagement, and even though some of them were undertaken by economists ideologically close to the Finish liberal Rehn, he only mentioned this idea briefly in the conclusion, once again showing his lack of engagement.

“This certainly has intellectual merit from the macroeconomic point of view. At the same time, there are analytical and practical counter-arguments. Many argue that the already existing “automatic stabilizers”—or national budgetary expenditure such as unemployment benefits that automatically increase once the economy is hit by a recession—already play a significant counter-cyclical policy role, and do so more strongly in the EU than in the United States, as the welfare state is generally stronger in Europe. Others point to implementation problems related to fine-tuning of counter-cyclical policies, which is a problem in general in fiscal policy even in sovereign states, not to speak of a 19-member euro area, which does not have a central fiscal authority, but only weak coordination. Still others are worried of a more fundamental issue, which is that the well-meant social transfers intended for stabilization in the trough of the economic cycle would risk turning into permanent transfers, thus eroding the legitimacy of EU policy as has happened in many member states that have large inter-regional transfers, like Italy (Mezzogiorno), Spain (Catalonia) or Belgium (Flanders/Wallonia). An alternative to a fiscal capacity as stabilization function is a specific competitiveness and convergence instrument, which would support member states in the pursuit of economic reforms and improved competitiveness, but not provide social transfers.” (Rehn 2020:349-50)

His arguments against EUBS were mostly technical, referring to implementation problems, but also considered long-term redistributive features and the already existing automatic stabilizers in existing euro area countries. Both the peripheral position of the argument in Rehn's book and his confusion of EUBS with “social transfers” show that he did not participate in the debate in a meaningful way. Remarkably, Rehn only mentioned Andor, his colleague in the Commission for five years by name once throughout the book – further proof that he with support from Commission President Barroso effectively side-lined Andor and the DG EMPL from all matters concerning euro area macroeconomic policy (Lindner 2022b:244).

However, even those within DG ECFIN who understood the need for a euro area stabilization fund and who were in general sympathetic to readjusting the balance between economic prudence and social spending did not endorse the unemployment insurance – for

economic as well as strategic reasons. From an economic perspective, DG ECFIN did not commit to EUBS as the best possible stabilization facility but acknowledged different approaches and from a strategic perspective, they disagreed with Andor's approach. They argued that an agreement on the need for fiscal stabilization in principle within ECOFIN and the Eurogroup must be reached before the nuances of policy should be discussed. Pushing for EUBS in a political climate where the majority disagreed on principle was described as making the second (or even third) step before the first:

“DG ECFIN did not come out in full support for the unemployment variant. In some sense, we were neutral on this. You need a stabilization function, but we will talk about its design once we reached unity that we need one. Three quarters of all finance ministers say, one does not need a stabilization function if one follows the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact. Thus, it was a strategic consideration to engineer consensus on a stabilization first before one could go in the details.” (Interview COM-ECFIN)

V.5 LOOKING FOR SUPPORT ABROAD: EUBS AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS

Accordingly, the incoming Juncker Commission took the advice and prioritized the gain of intergovernmental support for any form of fiscal stabilization over policy details. When the Former French Finance Minister and social democrat Pierre Moscovici became Commissioner for Economy and Finance in 2015, he put two economists with different backgrounds in his cabinet to work on fiscal stabilization efforts. While Moscovici supported any form of euro area budget in principle, he wanted to approach the reform in a way that could persuade German ordoliberals. Reinhard Felke came from within DG ECFIN and had been delegated to the German Ministry of Finance 2012-2014. Thus, he was very aware of the policy debates on the Commission's side as well as the debate in German mainstream economics and would represent the new ordoliberal viewpoint in internal debates. Fabien Dell on the other hand had joined with Moscovici from the French Treasury and had gained his economics PhD with Thomas Piketty, one of the leading voices of Keynesianism in Europe. This French-German couple provided the link to Juncker's and Vice-President's Dombrovskis' respective cabinets as well as to DG ECFIN and the respective German and French governments (Mérand 2021:200).⁹²

DG ECFIN's renewed interest in fiscal stabilization for the euro area was two-sided from the Keynesian perspective. For one, it meant that the Keynesians had some success in promoting their proposal for EUBS, but on the other hand, they lost their already fragile position in the field. While unemployment and unemployment insurance could clearly be discussed from an employment perspective and could be institutionalised in DG EMPL, technical questions of fiscal stability belonged to DG ECFIN and the intergovernmental institutions which were responsible for euro area economic governance: the Eurogroup and ECOFIN, perhaps even the ESM. That meant that EUBS circled back to the guardians of economic orthodoxy, which the Keynesians surrounding Andor had tried to circumvent or persuade – the German Ministry of Finance which was the main antagonist in the member states.

⁹² Frédéric Mérand's ethnography of his time as an embedded sociologist in Pierre Moscovici's cabinet is an invaluable source to understand the proceedings not only within Moscovici's staff, but in the European Commission in general. Chapter 7 analyses euro area reform proposals and shows how important the framework of ordoliberals vs. 'solidaristes' has been for the strategic reasoning (Mérand 2021: 199-234).

In the absence of French President Hollande from this field⁹³, the Italian Ministry of Finance was the main supporter among the member states. During the Renzi government (2014-2016), the Italian Ministry of Finance produced three principled publications in favour of EUBS. Renzi who came from the social-democratic PD had moved his party towards the centre in an attempt to build a lasting pro-EU coalition. This included labour market reform which combined deregulation with expansion of entitlements for precarious workers (Bulfone and Tassinari 2021:530). Liberalisation and structural reforms at home were seen as necessary preconditions to achieve compromise on fiscal integration in the euro area. A September 2016 paper by the Italian Ministry of Finance (MEF) offered “nine clarifications” on the Italian concept for an EUBS which addressed the most frequent criticisms from opponents in the Council (MEF 2016a). While the paper did not cite any literature, its proposals were similar to those proposed by Beblavý and the Europeanists.⁹⁴ It argued that moral hazard and permanent transfers could be avoided with the inclusion of pay-back mechanisms, time-limited transfers and the partial use of EUBS funds for ALMP. The cyclical nature of the triggers that would activate the fund would guarantee that structural unemployment would not be funded via long-lasting transfers between member states and that no country would receive financing from the fund over a prolonged period. As for legal issues, the MEF, too, referred to Art. 352 TFEU as a possible means to avoid the need the need for treaty change (MEF 2016a). Similar to the studies undertaken by all economists, the MEF also developed an econometric counterfactual model to prove that neither country would profit long-term. According to their calculations, Italy’s net benefit would be slightly positive over the period 1999-2015, however slightly less so than the fiscally conservative Netherlands. Germany on the other hand would have been a slight net-payer but would have greatly profited from an existing fund during the late 1990s and early 2000s (MEF 2016b). Here, the MEF’s approach to convince especially the German government was similar to the one which was highlighted by the Keynesians early on. They argued that a fiscal stabilization

⁹³ Hollande’s approach towards EMU reform had been characterized by the disagreement between Moscovici who favoured a mix of Keynesian stimulus and sound public finances and Minister of Industrial Renewal Arnaud Montebourg who favoured a dirigiste and interventionist European industrial policy without consideration of public debt levels. The government infighting between these two approaches had cost the Hollande government much of its political capital until 2014 (Clift 2014). After losing the regional elections in 2014, Hollande had performed a policy turn to the right and had nominated Manuel Valls from the right-wing of the Socialist Party to build a new cabinet which – in a surprising turn of events – did not include Moscovici. However, the Valls government did not follow-up with any new initiatives on fiscal integration.

⁹⁴ This includes the use of the abbreviation EUBS which was popularized by Beblavý et al.

facility, and EUBS in particular, would not lead to a transfer union but could instead help Northern countries, too, whenever they faced asymmetric shocks. However, this did little to change opinions in the German government and it is unclear, if the Italian proposal was at all considered seriously. Two months after its publication, the Scientific Council at the German Ministry of Finance – an independent advisory body and ordoliberal stronghold – published its own study on EUBS in which they declared their opposition (Wissenschaftlicher Beirat / Scientific Council 2016). The authors reproduced the standard ordoliberal objections and argued that the introduction of EUBS would lead to significant transfer effects between member states and would reduce incentives for national governments to undertake labour market reforms. Mechanisms designed to mitigate these effects – namely claw-backs and experience ratings – would not help to solve this problem. They would transform the stabilization payments into a form of credit and would significantly reduce the stabilization impact. Finally, a partial Europeanization of unemployment insurance would violate the principle of solidarity and diffuse political accountability. Financial instruments were not the solution for the structural problems in many euro area countries. These statements are not surprising as they represent long-held convictions of German economists and policymakers, however the study is noteworthy for its representation of EUBS proposals. Only Dullien’s proposal was cited and discussed as a reference point in favour of EUBS, while the works by Lars Feld and Alfons Weichenrieder, who was among the authors in the Scientific Council, were cited as evidence to the contrary. Neither the Europeanists’ studies, nor those by the new ordoliberals are recognized by the study authors. The exclusion of the new ordoliberals is especially puzzling as Clemens Fuest had been a member of the Scientific Council and it is unlikely that the authors were not aware of the publications by him and his co-authors on the issue of EUBS, even more so because Weichenrieder had previously cited the studies by Matthias Dolls. By referencing only Dullien – an outsider in the German profession of economics – the study’s authors painted the general idea of an EUBS as an exclusively Keynesian and centre-left issue which otherwise faced wide-spread opposition from mainstream economics. Including the work by the Europeanists and especially the less sceptical new ordoliberals on the other hand would have led to a more nuanced conclusion on the feasibility of EUBS. By structuring their work around the antagonism of Sebastian Dullien, the principled Keynesian, the principled ordoliberals in the Scientific Council advocated against the search for compromises, so that

the MEFs contribution could not lead to meaningful deliberations in ECOFIN or the Eurogroup.

The ideas and conclusion presented in this research paper are clearly visible in the position of the German Ministry of Finance on EUBS, expressed in a non-paper on stability union in October 2017. Shortly after the German elections and amidst coalition talks between CDU/CSU, Greens and liberal FDP, the paper reiterated the position that any form of countercyclical fiscal capacity would be harmful, and that the EMU should instead focus on structural reforms and competitiveness:

A macroeconomic stabilization function e.g. through a new fiscal capacity or unemployment insurance is economically not necessary for a stable monetary union. Countercyclical public spending is never in time and a Euro zone-wide unemployment insurance would have to deal with very different income levels in the Euro area. [...] Decreasing convergence is often due to national structural factors and cannot be overcome through a fiscal capacity. A new stabilization function in form of a new Euro debt capacity would only buy time and repeat national mistakes of the past.” (German Ministry of Finance 2017)

In 2017, the Keynesians had to admit defeat and they had to acknowledge that social partners, and trade unions in particular were not giving up their opposition:

Finally, social partners in some countries fear that the introduction of a European unemployment insurance might weaken the tripartite governance structure of successful national unemployment benefit systems. (Dullien et al. 2017:6)

Going even further, Dullien framed resistance from social partners as a political problem which they were not able to overcome (Dullien 2017:161). This shows a technocratic understanding of policymaking as well as a misunderstanding of both national and European politics. The supporters of EUBS lacked the forms of social capital – the variety of professional positions, the decades of policymaking experience and the social ties and relations to central actors and institutions – short: the networks – to situate their proposal at the centre of the field ‘Social Europe’.

V. 6 TRY ONCE, FAIL ONCE – TRY AGAIN, FAIL BETTER: FROM EUBS TO RE-INSURANCE

Proponents and opponents of EUBS had exchanged views and their related proposals in numerous publications, at conferences, formal and informal venues between 2012 and 2017. When the final report on “Feasibility and Added Value of a European Unemployment Benefits Scheme” was published in 2017 (Beblavý and Lenaerts 2017b), it was clear that a genuine version of EUBS would not find enough support to move towards the legislative arena. Neither economists nor politicians outside the small core of centre-left Keynesians saw this as a feasible alternative. European trade unions opposed it on the grounds that it may pose a threat to national systems of unemployment insurance and trade unionist involvement in many countries. Question marks from legal, political, and economic viewpoints remained. Moral hazard was a problem in most minds despite Dullien’s best effort to imply the opposite and the transfer of sovereignty from the national to the supranational level was seen critical by national policymakers and perhaps even more so by national courts. Once more, a European unemployment insurance was not an idea whose time had come, but just a Keynesian brainchild, unlikely to ever be institutionalised. However, there was another development. Despite all the criticism, most economists had argued that an automatic stabilizer could in principle bring added value to the EMU and that the euro area economy would have fared better, had such an insurance been in place during the Great Recession. With the exception of classical ordoliberalists like Lars Feld, they agreed that fiscal discipline and banking union alone would not be enough as a stabilization effort and that simply calling ‘moral hazard’ should not be the end of a substantive policy debate, but its starting point. Additionally, the ECB had introduced penalty rates on large deposits in June 2014 and reduced its key interest rate to 0% in March 2016. Beginning in March 2015, the Public Sector Purchase Programme (PSPP), too, had aided countries affected by the euro crisis to keep their refinancing costs modestly low. The possibilities of non-standard monetary policy to “buy time” began to be exhausted which further highlighted the need for some European fiscal capacity and structural reform in the euro area (Fiedler, Gern and Stolzenburg 2020, Schoeller 2018, van Riet 2018).

The political climate and some actors had also changed. Emmanuel Macron was elected as President of France on 7 May 2017. He had offered the French population the same political bargain, Moscovici and Renzi in Italy respectively had already proposed but he had the electoral support to back it up: supply-side reforms at home in exchange for further fiscal

and social integration in the EMU. Among his many policy proposals was an unspecified stabilization mechanism embedded in a euro area budget (Clegg 2022:189). After lengthy coalition talks, a new German government had taken office in March 2018. Another grand coalition led by Angela Merkel; it may have looked like a continuation government but importantly Wolfgang Schäuble (CDU) was replaced as Minister of Finance by social democrat Olaf Scholz. Scholz's approach to European fiscal integration was more open than Schäuble's, and on January 2019, long-time EUBS supporter Jakob von Weizsäcker moved to the German Ministry of Finance as chief economist. Consequently, the German government shifted its position and publicly supported a fiscal capacity for the euro area in the joint French-German Meseberg Declaration (Jones 2022). The proposal for a European Unemployment Stabilization Fund was also mentioned, however, once again, relegated to a working group. In principle, the document lacks details besides the fact that the must not lead to permanent transfers between member states (Macron and Merkel 2018).

Already in early 2017, when it became clear that the original ideas for EUBS would not find sufficient support among member states and stakeholders to move from economic debates to a clearly communicated policy proposal by either the European Commission or the European Parliament, the concept of a re-insurance of national systems had started to gain traction. Responding to the rise in anti-EU sentiments and particularly the Brexit vote, the EU had published a White Paper on the future of Europe which mapped five different scenarios for the future integration process – from full-fledged fiscal and political union over muddling through as before to forced disintegration and the reduction of the EU to a single market (European Commission 2017d). These were later accompanied by reflection papers on selected issues. The reflection paper on the social dimension of Europe did not mention EUBS at all, while the reflection paper on deepening the EMU entertained the idea of a European unemployment reinsurance scheme. It argued that reinsurance could be one option among many but would require of labour market convergence (European Commission 2017c:26). This shows that after Andor's departure the issue had become less important from a social policy perspective and was now presented as one of many possibilities for fiscal stabilization from a macroeconomic perspective. As shown above, the Europeanists favoured the reinsurance variant as it would be possible to achieve without treaty change and it would limit the risks of moral hazard and permanent transfers. The Keynesians, guided by Jakob von Weizsäcker, had accepted that the only chance to achieve political results would come via a compromise solution (Dullien et al. 2017). However, neither Dullien nor

Andor contributed to the debate on unemployment re-insurance in a meaningful way. Dullien acknowledged reinsurance as a feasible implantation in an article in *Intereconomics* in 2017. Among five lessons from the EUBS debate, he found that reinsurance may be easier to achieve for technical, legal, and political reasons. Technically, it would avoid problems that arise from interactions with national systems, legally, it avoided the necessary changes to European treaties and national constitutions which genuine systems would bring and politically, it would circumvent opposition from both social partners. Regarding these lessons, Dullien cited the relevant articles by Beblavý and co-authors (Dullien 2017:161). Andor endorsed the proposal as late as 2020 in an article on the European short-time-work programme SURE (Andor 2020a).

Additionally, a group of respectively seven French and German economist had published a joint proposal for euro area reform which included fiscal integration (Bénassy-Quéré et al. 2018). The group of co-authors appears to be carefully selected to cover different ideological and professional groups: Clemens Fuest was one of the co-authors, as was DIW Director Marcel Fratzscher, alongside leading French economists as Agnès Bénassy-Quéré and the two doyens of European public policymaking Jean Pisani-Ferry and the late Hendrik Enderlein. While the debate on EUBS had been fragmented into different camps before 2017, this group of economists achieved to overcome this fragmentation as it included leading figures of both the new ordoliberal, and the Europeanists camp alongside representatives of Keynesian ideas.

This widely recognised and cited policy paper, often dubbed the 7+7 proposal or manifesto, anticipated the Meseberg Declaration since the authors declared their intent to break the deadlock between those who wanted more European risk-sharing and more flexibility for member states and others who advocated for a return to strict fiscal discipline and structural reforms (Bilbiie, Monacelli and Perotti 2021:91). The 7+7 manifesto identified France and Germany and their respective allies as the two protagonists of these differing euro area reform agendas, thus building on the popular theory that euro area politics is a “battle of ideas” (Brunnermeier, James and Landau 2016) as German economist and one of the co-authors Markus Brunnermeier had previously put it. While many contemporary economists argue that their research was not based on ideological beliefs but on methodological, empirical, and theoretical scrutiny, Brunnermeier, James and Landau (2016:63-64) acknowledged the prevalent influence of ordoliberalism on German policymaking and their deep roots in the Bundesbank, the Ministry of Finance and conservative newspapers and

think-tanks.⁹⁵ French economic thinking, on the other hand, was characterized by central planning and statist engineering (Brunnermeier, James and Landau 2016:67-69).

With this distinction in mind Bénassy-Quéré et al. (2018) argued that both camps made valuable points which must be considered and that the two principled policy options – fiscal integration or a return to fiscal rules – were accompanied by serious trade-offs. Thus, any serious attempt to overcome the deadlock must include the economic benefits from each position, while being aware of the problems associated with it. It must guarantee fiscal stabilization while avoiding permanent transfers between member states and must not lead to disincentives for countries to delay structural reforms, “in other words, solidarist [i.e. Keynesian] ideas are inserted into an ordoliberal straitjacket” (Mérand 2021:211).⁹⁶ On fiscal stabilization, the 7+7 manifesto stated the following:

We hence propose a fiscal stabilization scheme that would offer one-off transfers in case of large downturns affecting one or several member states. It would be designed as a reinsurance fund for large shocks affecting the labour market in euro area countries, and could be conceived as a line in the EU budget, or as a subsidiary of the ESM. ‘Reinsurance’ means that covering the ‘first loss’ associated with a particular shock remains the responsibility of the country itself. The fund would therefore be activated only if the shock exceeds a specified level, and cover only a portion of the losses above that level. In insurance terms, this is akin to ‘catastrophic loss’ insurance with a large deductible. This approach makes sense for two reasons: first, the welfare gains from insurance against small shocks are small, and grow disproportionately with the size of the shock; second, countries would continue to have strong incentives to prevent a downturn (Beblavý et al., 2015). (Bénassy-Quéré et al. 2018:14-15)

So, the authors explicitly called for a European unemployment reinsurance scheme with reference to a study by Miroslav Beblavý and his co-authors. That is the exact point where the mediating effect of the Europeanist work on the irreconcilable opinions of Keynesians and ordoliberals becomes obvious. This policy paper also highlights the rift between new and classical ordoliberal thought. Lars Feld had originally been part of the group but resigned because he disagreed with this proposal for a euro area fiscal capacity. He argued that the compromise solution of a reinsurance scheme would still lead to moral hazard and that any implementation of a fiscal capacity via an unemployment insurance would add social policy components where the EU effectively lacked legal competences (Feld 2018).

⁹⁵ This argument is supported by Thomas Biebricher (2021:294-295) who claims that ordoliberalism may have been marginalized in German economics departments, but it stays institutionally embedded in the Bundesbank and the Ministry of Finance. Socialization effects mean that new hires will very likely be exposed to and influenced by ordoliberal thought.

⁹⁶ “En d’autres termes, les idées solidaristes sont insérées dans un carcal ordoliberal.”

While the proposals for a euro area budget or an unemployment reinsurance scheme did not lead to immediate success – much to the disappointment of Commissioner Moscovici and his cabinet – the principled understanding that such a policy proposal would not immediately meet opposition from the German government, or the mainstream of German economic thought had once more moved the debate forwards. In 2020, the European Commission included a legislative proposal and an impact assessment for a “European Unemployment Reinsurance Scheme” in its work programme and promised to deliver on this during the last quarter of the year (European Commission 2020b). Following the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the updated version regards the European short-time work scheme SURE as a temporary instrument into this direction (European Commission 2020a). In fact, the SURE programme which is now cited as the first step towards unemployment reinsurance is anything but. It is a loan-based facility, similar in style to credit lines from the ESM, however without the strict fiscal conditionality (Lindner 2022a). Whatever this means, is unclear. As of 2022, Fabien Dell who started to work on this policy issue when Pierre Moscovici became Commissioner is now in charge of European unemployment benefit reinsurance as a member of Employment Commissioner Nicolas Schmitt’s cabinet and the general opposition to any form of fiscal stabilization mechanism seems weaker than at any time during the past ten years. Once again, the time for some kind of European unemployment benefit scheme may have passed and may just come.

V.7 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION: FIELDS AND NETWORKS FROM EUBS TO UNEMPLOYMENT RE-INSURANCE

This chapter has asked a two-fold question: Why was a European Unemployment Benefit Scheme proposed in reaction to the Great Recession and why did it ultimately fail to be considered by European legislative institutions and national governments? It approached the issue from a theory of social fields and political networks which has showed that the early economic debate was divided into three ideological camps which did not link up. Figure 2 depicts the fragmented field. The Europeanists and new ordoliberalists are depicted relatively close to each other as they have cooperated in the consortium. The Keynesians meanwhile are far away and actors such as Pervenche Berès and Jakob von Weizsäcker are not really committed in this sub-group as they have typically sought compromise and moderate positions. Importantly, the figure does focus on economic/academic debates and not show relations with other stakeholders.

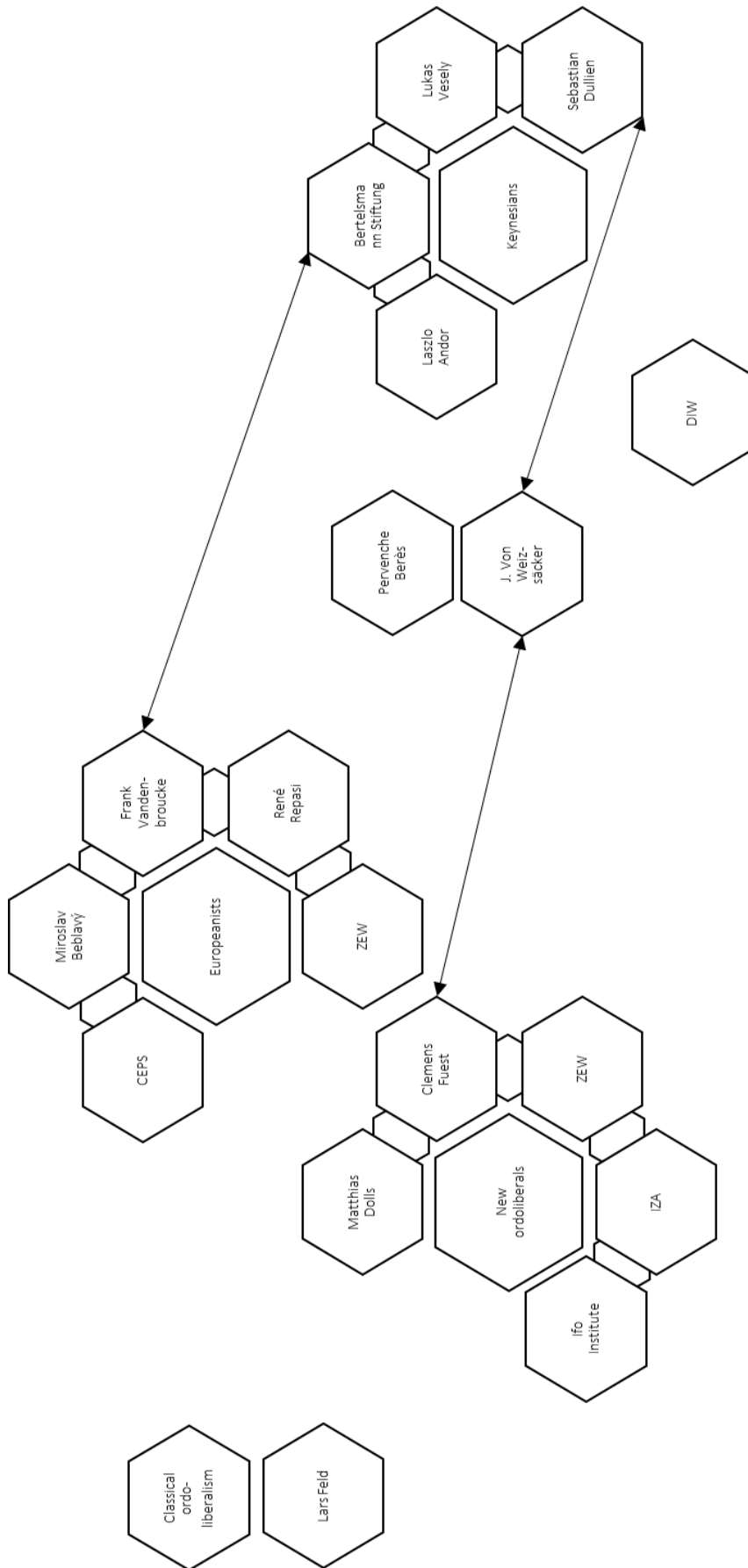


Figure 2: Actors and relations in the debate on EUBS, own representation

Additionally, the Keynesians failed to rally support among their most probable allies: trade unions and centre-left politicians. The analysis has shown that they lacked the field-specific European capital to build suitable and lasting coalitions. The Keynesian approach towards the promotion of EUBS had sought to rally public support, but it would have been more important to include as many allies as possible before going public with any proposal. While collective actors such as think-tanks and European institutional compartments can be identified, the social field is structured by individual actors who switch between positions. The question whether certain economists and research institutions are chosen for work on EUBS is better explained by the policymakers' political and ideological position than by academic reasoning such as research output and relevance or long-standing historical-institutionalist relations between institutional and non-government actors. The dominant actor-type is the think-tank-affiliated academic-politician. Characteristics are professorships, think-tank affiliations as fellow, researcher, stays in national governments, European and global economic institutions etc. and elected and time-restricted offices. This type switches between these or holds more than one simultaneously. These career characteristics provide the social capital to be central in the field of European policymaking as an expert as they provide multipositionality which allows them to provide expert opinions which take into position the needs and limitations of respective institutions, and which means that their expert status is easier acknowledged by other actors in the field (Robert 2013). Regarding EUBS, Miroslav Beblavý exemplifies this actor-type. Finally, the analysis of EUBS as a contested policy issue in the social field of Social Europe highlights the importance of actors with high degrees of betweenness centrality: brokers who may bridge ideological or other divides. This chapter has discussed the roles of Jakob von Weizsäcker, Clemens Fuest, and Frank Vandenbroucke who have worked on a reinsurance as a realistic compromise solution since 2017.

Alternative explanations, also rooted in political economy, for the failure to adopt EUBS may focus on the limits of European policymaking posed by institutional rigidity and path dependence or governmental preferences and interests. Institutional explanations why neither the EUBS nor other variants of lasting automatic stabilizers have been adopted regularly point to the unequal settings of EU law making. It is unequal for two reasons: First, courts and the ECJ in particular have far reaching competences based on the four freedoms of goods, services, capital, and labour which they use to implement deregulatory and market-making policies. Social protection, and common fiscal policies meanwhile are not within the

realm of any EU legislative, executive, or judicial body, so that the negative integration would not find a positive counterpart (Scharpf 2015a). Accordingly, EUBS simply failed because it was outside the realm of European politics. The second inequality can be found in the decision-making rules in the intergovernmental institutions. The EU typically requires either a Qualified Majority or consensus, so that polarizing issues cannot be sufficiently addressed. If they proposed anyway, this may lead to a politicization of European integration (De Wilde and Zürn 2012, Jabko and Luhman 2019, Schmidt 2019). Francesco Corti (2022:116-52) has recently analysed the EUBS proposals from this angle and found that the overlapping political conflict in Council and Parliament contributed to the failure to achieve a positive result. Finally, historical institutionalists would argue that path dependence and lock-in effects make substantial change, such as EUBS very unlikely. Institutional change and innovation could only occur at critical junctures when path dependencies were weak (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). However, historical institutionalism has already struggled to explain the creation and especially the choice for a specific policy content of completely new institutions such as the EFSF, as Verdun (2015: 276-77) had acknowledged. Institutional, operational, and legal arrangements could be copied from existing institutions and the Keynesians proposed to copy the ESM's intergovernmental framework for the EUBS to circumvent legal challenges. The question of policy choices against an EUBS during a critical juncture remains relatively untouched from this theoretical framework.

Interest-based approaches argue that the failure of fiscal integration in the EU and the EMU is political rather than institutional, or to put it differently: “not just structural, but rooted in politics” (Walter, Ray and Redeker 2020:57). Accordingly, European politics is not deadlocked by the need for big majorities or even consensus but by divergent country-interest profiles which are determined by interest groups. While optimists assume a positive outlook from this analysis – interests and preferences may change after all – pessimists still argue that interest-based bargaining coupled with the necessity for overly big majorities or even consensus will almost always lead to policy solutions of the lowest common denominator. In this perspective, member states interests are one-dimensional and structured along the division of a coalition of countries who advocated for fiscal discipline (led by Germany) and a coalition who advocated for fiscal integration (led by France and Italy) (Wasserfallen et al. 2019). The respective interests of countries were determined by their economic position within the euro area: debtor-countries favoured fiscal integration (see e.g. Italy's proposal for EUBS in 2016), creditor countries as Germany and the New Hanseatic

League strongly opposed these (Armingeon, Guthmann and Weisstanner 2016, Frieden and Walter 2017, Magone, Laffan and Schweiger 2016; 2017, Pérez 2019). Thus, Howarth and Schild (2022) have explained the shift in the German position at Meseberg with reference to Germany's strategic interest in renewing French-German bilateralism in other policy fields. The geostrategic interests and norms of a Franco-German partnership at the heart of European integration had trumped material and traditional ordoliberal economic interests, especially because the German government knew that the newly formed New Hanseatic League of Nordic and Baltic member states would significantly water down proposals for fiscal integration. According to this explanation, the change in the German position regarding fiscal integration and the possibility of a European unemployment insurance was both tactical and the result of an interest assessment within the German government. However, recent research results have questioned the sole focus on economic interests and have emphasized the ideational component of national policy positions (Lehner and Wasserfallen 2019:59), thus connecting the interest-based approach with discursive and ideational explanations. The latter have argued that policy compromise was made impossible by dominant discourses which frame the structural challenges as moral failures of "Southern sinners" and countries who need to do their homework (Matthijs and McNamara 2015, Matthijs 2016). Additionally, Lundgren et al. (2019) have found that closeness to the Commission's positions positively predicts member states' bargaining success on EMU reform, a result which acknowledges the underlying structure of the social field. In line with these newer findings, this chapter has shown that that social relations network effects played a crucial role in moving the debate forward. Neither interests nor ideas are static but instead bound to actors who move beyond institutions and are more or less successful in advancing policy positions – based on their specific social capital. With that in mind, the failure of EUBS may well have contributed to a process of "failing forward" (Howarth and Quaglia 2021, Nicoli 2019) towards European unemployment re-insurance as a more probable variant.

VI. REMAKING AND RECLAIMING SOCIAL EUROPE: THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

“The European Pillar of Social Rights looks very much like a last roll of the dice.” (Esther Lynch, ETUC)

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) was proclaimed in November 2017 in Gothenburg after it was endorsed by the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. As analysed in chapter IV, the term “social pillar” had been used by some actors in the debate on the social dimension of EMU, as an alternative to the incremental mainstreaming of social policy within the European Semester. The European Parliament discussed the “social pillar of the Economic and Monetary Union” on 22 May 2013 and the EESC had referred to the need for a social pillar in their opinions on the social dimension (European Parliament 2013, EESC 2013). Likewise, social rights had featured as a possible element for the renewal of Social Europe in these debates. Jean-Claude Juncker who had become the first President of the European Commission, elected on the *Spitzenkandidaten* process announced his ambition to build the EPSR during his first State of the Union Speech on 9 September 2015 (Juncker 2015). He rooted the need for this effort on three assumptions: First, he linked it to protection and rights of mobile workers. Second, he announced that social partners should play a highlighted role to compile the EPSR and third, he embedded the Pillar in the debates on the deepening of the EMU (Juncker 2015:18). Consequently, the ten priorities, which accompanied the speech list the EPSR as part of “A Deeper and Fairer Economic Monetary Union” (European Commission 2015). This indicates that the development of the EPSR built on debates, which date back to the Four Presidents’ Report in June 2012. Under the leadership of European Council President Herman van Rompuy, the heads of Council, Commission, European Central Bank (ECB) and Eurogroup already made the link between deeper monetary integration and the need to strengthen social welfare and cohesion (van Rompuy et al. 2012). In 2012 and 2013 respectively, the debate would centre itself around the term ‘social dimension of EMU’, which was first used by the European Council in December 2012 (see Chapter IV). This is not to say that social rights were a new item on the European social policy agenda. In fact,

the EU and its predecessors had codified and quasi-constitutionalised⁹⁷ social rights more than once before. The activist Delors Commission had developed the “Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers” (Community Charter). Due to opposition from the UK, the Community Charter was only formally adopted in 2000 and became a part of binding primary law as part of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 as the EUCFR (Dorssemont et al. 2019).

The EPSR has been the most visible initiative on Social Europe since the Great Recession, yet, as of date, recognition and academic debate around the EPSR have focused almost exclusively on questions regarding its effectiveness, scope, rationale, implementation success and political delivery (Deakin 2017, Fischer 2018, Garben 2018; 2019, Hacker 2019, Leoni 2018, Pochet 2017, Rasnaca and Theodoropoulou 2017, Rasnača 2017, Sabato and Vanhercke 2017, Seikel 2017, Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018). When adopted, the EPSR consisted of a preamble, twenty social principles structured in three categories (equal opportunities, fair working conditions, social protection and inclusion) and written in the form of individual social rights and a complementary social scoreboard of twelve headline indicators which replaced the scoreboard adopted in 2013.⁹⁸ With the notable exception of Vesan and Corti’s (2019) analysis of European Parliament proceedings, which found both tensions between creditor- and debtor-countries and high-wage/welfare and low-wage/welfare among centre-right EPP and liberal ALDE groups, the debate has been dominated by policy. The politics of the EPSR, i.e. the actors, advocacy coalitions and social relations, remain relatively unknown. This chapter analyses the key actors and their roles in various stages of the informal and formal consultation process (Chapter VI.1). It is particularly interested in the supporting networks which go beyond singular consultation exercises. Chapter VI.2 shows how input from the opposition to the social dimension of the EMU and new political developments impacted the legal nature and the policy content of the EPSR before Chapter VI.3 analyses why and how the actor-constellation could make the EPSR a political success.

⁹⁷ For a discussion whether the Community Charter and its followers have established a social constitution for the EU see Deakin (2019).

⁹⁸ In 2016, the Commission proposed 14 headline indicators and twelve were adopted in 2017 – 35 indicators in total. Minor changes to the Social Scoreboard have been made after the Porto Social Summit in 2021 to broaden the scope of the scoreboard and to align with the policy goals of Next Generation EU (Rainone and Aloisi 2021).

VI.1 GENERATING CONSENSUS THROUGH DELIBERATIONS

VI.1.1 Coming up with an idea: The intra-Commission working group

During the time of Juncker’s state of the union speech, both the content and the general style of the EPSR were still unclear within the European Commission. In fact, the College of Commissioners only held a first orientation debate on 6 October 2015 – three weeks after the policy announcement (European Commission 2016a). A working group was set-up, consisting of four departments: DG EMPL, the Secretariat-General (SEC-GEN), the Legal Services and Juncker’s cabinet. Notably at this stage, neither DG ECFIN nor the Cabinet of Vice-President for Euro and Social Dialogue participated in the process, yet overall, the process was not particularly different from other Commission initiatives:

“There was a first draft coming from DG EMPL, we took a look and made comments, then we involved the legal service and the political level. We had this ping-pong for quiet while. [...] So, the process was the usual process, where you have internal discussions between services on one side and between services and the political level and then you have the legal service because that needs to be legally sound and that was basically the process – not so different from other initiatives, but with more passion. All the people who contributed really believed in this and there was a lot of passion in this process, which was good, positive passion.” (Interview COM-SEC-GEN)

Nonetheless, the working group clashed as they disagreed on the legal and policy framework of Juncker’s flagship social policy. DG EMPL wanted to commit to clearly defined policy targets and implementation steps which would have a direct impact on European labour markets. They pointed out that *de jure* social rights already existed in the EU yet lacked enforceability. Many aspects regulated by the EPSR had already been enshrined into EU primary law (Community Charter and EUCFR) and the social acquis. Additionally, all EU member states had signed the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe and were members of the ILO whose Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights to Work recognises many social rights (Garben 2018:218-22, 2019:105-06). Instead of a social-rights-manifest, they championed a European commitment for future action on social integration in accordance with the particular understanding of the Better Regulation Agenda which was endorsed by Juncker and Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans. Unlike the Barroso Commission and some member states in the European Council, they argued that Better Regulation should not focus on deregulatory aspects alone but should aim to achieve net benefits for EU citizens (Radaelli 2018:93). However, the Legal Service and SEC-GEN representatives opposed this more radical approach and instead wanted to model the EPSR exactly on the Community Charter and its declaratory and non-binding nature (Interviews COM-LEGAL, COM-SEC-GEN). In their view, it was necessary to start the rebuilding of

Social Europe with an easy-to-understand declaration of political will and not with a rather technical proposal on policy implementation – a position that was endorsed by Juncker.

“There were a lot of discussions about, how to structure, how to combine, how to make it simpler for people to understand. We can talk in technical terms about pay, but then no-one would be able to understand, what we mean. One important aspect is that we had this Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers (1989), which was extremely political, everybody can understand it, so we wanted to do something better. It is a continuation. [...] Yes, this is the best one, the very best one. That was our starting point. We always compared the Social Pillar with that document, which is very well written, very political, and everyone can understand it.”
(Interview COM-SEC-GEN)

VI.1.2 The informal consultation

The intra-Commission working group produced a general outline for the EPSR, but this was not released to the public for the official consultation yet. Instead, the outline went into a second stage informal consultation process, led by Allan Larsson. Larsson, a social democrat and former Swedish Minister of Finance and European Commission Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion (1995-2000), who after retirement from the Commission took up various positions with the ILO and the OECD, had become Special Adviser to Commission President Juncker on January 19, 2016, after he was contracted on December 23, 2015 (European Commission 2016c). In the context of the EU, he is well known as the ‘father of the European Employment Strategy (EES)’ (Weishaupt 2011:160, Zeitlin 2003:6). Also, Allan Larsson’s career has been characterized by positions in the social/labour market as well as the economic/finance field. In addition to his positions mentioned above, he served as Director General of the National Labour Market Board in Sweden and sat on the Board of Governors of the Swedish Central Bank. As special adviser, Larsson shared the Commission’s draft with a group of high-ranking stakeholders, which included the European Parliament, represented by rapporteur Maria João Rodrigues (S&D), the ILO, the social partners ETUC and BE and the Social Platform, an umbrella organization of various social NGOs. Rodrigues has been characterized as the ‘mother of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC)’ during the early 2000s (Zeitlin 2003:17) – the counterpart of Allan Larsson in making Social Europe during the late 1990s and early 2000s. With roles as government minister, adviser, and professor, she had already been analysed as a prime example of an actor who embodied the multipositionality in European policymaking (Robert 2013:151). The strong link between Larsson and Rodrigues as ‘parents of Social Europe’ has often been recognised, but she probably captured it best in her thematic book ‘Europe is still possible’ (Rodrigues 2013). Rodrigues also collaborated with Jean-Claude Juncker as a

special adviser during the Luxembourg Council Presidency, while the later was Prime Minister in 2005. In this book, she described the good relations as result of their cooperation in 1997 and called him ‘one of the most committed European leaders’ (Rodrigues 2013:56,78). In an interview on the occasion of the proclamation in November 2017, Rodrigues pointed to their long joint history, the common trust between them and his commitment to Social Europe as important factors for the success of the EPSR (Stupp 2017). Almost needless to say that Larsson and Juncker were similarly well connected as Juncker toured European capitals to gather support for the EES in 1997 (de la Porte 2011:495). The inclusion of Larsson and Rodrigues at these early stages marks a significant difference to the beginning of the debate on a social dimension which was neither organised by a group of trusting allies, nor directed towards one specific common goal. Overall, the informal consultation process was centred around these three actors who brought decades of experience, vast amounts of political and European capital, a shared vision of Social Europe nested in the policy of Third-Way centrism and the politics of soft governance, and – not to forget – mutual trust to the table.

Additionally, another Juncker trustee, Marianne Thyssen supported the process as the Commissioner of Employment, Labour, and Social Affairs. As shown in Chapter IV, Thyssen had already been a parliamentary rapporteur on the social dimension for the EMU. When Thyssen left the EP to become a Commissioner she was replaced by Tom Vandenkendelaere (CD&V) who became the EPP’s shadow rapporteur for the EPSR resolution (Interview EP-EPP). Finally, Lukáš Veselý who had worked on the social dimension of the EMU in the Andor cabinet became an economic adviser to Rodrigues in November 2014. He worked actively on the draft for the EPSR and helped to coordinate with her work within the EMPL and ECON committees (Interview EP-S&D2). Perhaps even more importantly, he embodied a very direct connection into DG EMPL. Thus, the central actors who invented the EPSR as the ‘something’ which the EU needed to achieve on social policy had already been responsible for the last big leap forward during the late 1990s and they had already participated in the social-dimension-debate. Figure 3 represents the two stages of EPSR drafting and depicts the dense network of actors who worked behind the scenes in late 2015. While the black connections, which are group around the Commission Working Group and the Informal consultation respectively, indicate participation with others during the drafting process, dotted lines mark personal relations between actors.

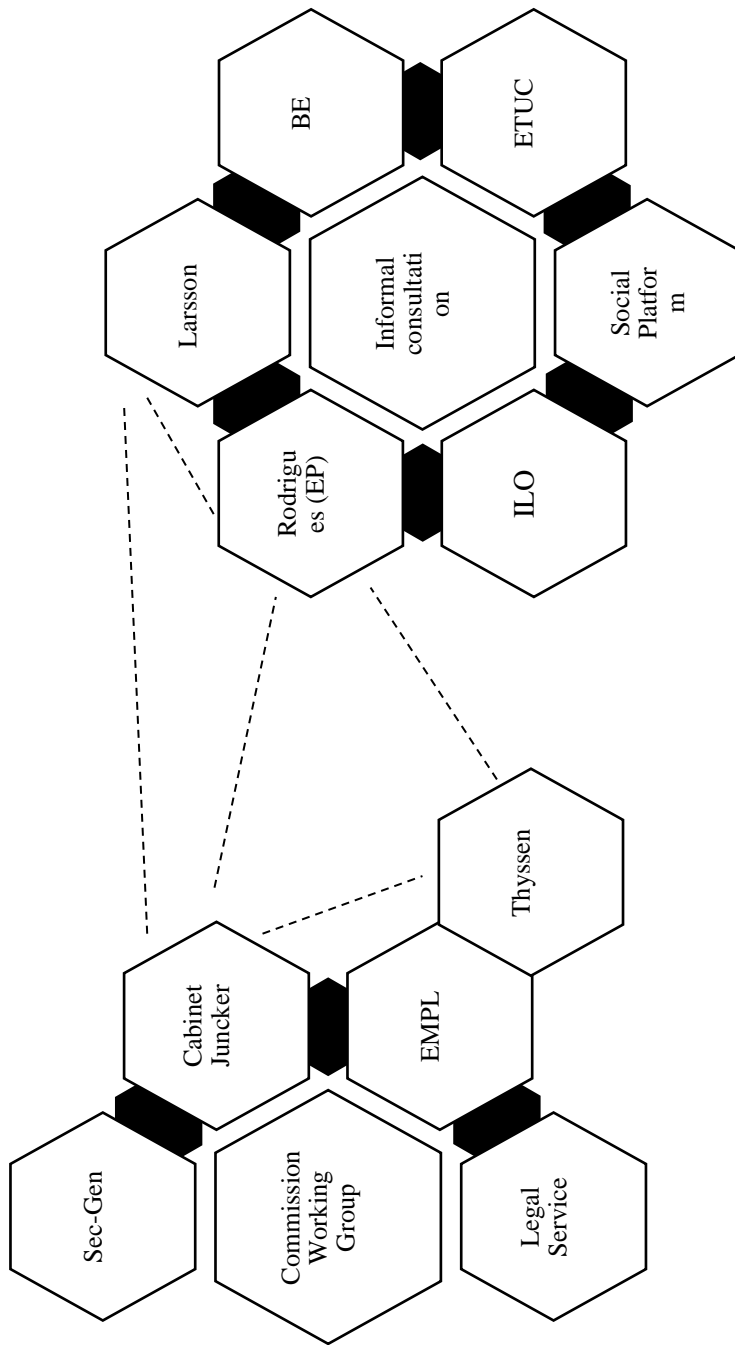


Figure 3: Actors and relations during the informal consultation period, own representation

However, at this early stage, the EPSR was still linked to the EMU debate and Juncker had emphasized in the state of the union speech that he would propose a social policy framework for the euro area. As the social crisis in the euro area was primarily an unemployment crisis, issues of employment, workers' rights, and social benefits were also at the centre of the very early proposals – similar to the Community Charter. The actors consulted early on made it clear that they wished to broaden the scope beyond the narrow structural challenges of (un-)employment in the euro area. At the request of the Social Platform, issues such as social

exclusion, housing, and poverty were subsequently added to the proposal. Nonetheless, the Social Platform would continue to criticise the prominent role of employment and workers as a “biased focus” of the EPSR (Social Platform 2016:9). Additionally, the critique of the EMU-only approach played out in the same way as for the social dimension of the EMU (see Chapter IV.3.2). In general, three arguments were made. First, the social problems as unemployment, poverty, social exclusion etc. were present in both EMU and non-EMU member states, so that the focus on one set of countries would be artificial. Second, the codification of social rights must include all EU citizens, regardless of their countries’ currency and third, the stakeholders emphasized that they had member organizations from all EU member states. Hence, the structural dimension of deepening the EMU, which had been dominant before, was slowly replaced by an approach that focused on social problems and the unity of the European Union (the details of this informal process were mainly covered by these interviews: Interview EP-EPP, Interview EP-S&D1, Interview SOCIAL PLATFORM, Interview COM-SEC-GEN, Interview COM-EMPL3).

This change of priorities was already visible when the Commission published the first draft in March 2016. European Commission Vice-President Dombrovskis promised that non-EMU member states would not be excluded from consultation nor implementation:

“The Pillar of Social Rights is part of our work to strengthen Economic and Monetary Union and is envisaged for the euro area. However, we will make sure that non-euro Member States are fully involved in the consultation process and can join the initiative if they wish to do so.”
(European Commission 2016b)

VI.1.3 The consultation in the EESC

The EESC has played a crucial role in discussing and advocating for Social Europe (for an overview of the EESC as a deliberative body see Chapter IV.1). Since the beginning of the Great Recession, the EESC started to use a more proactive strategy, where it would publish opinions without formal requests, organise and attend conferences and would engage administrative actors early on (Hönnige and Panke 2016). That is certainly observable in the case of the EPSR. From 2013 onwards, the EESC has repeatedly called for greater action to address the social dimension of the EMU, calling upon the Commission to respect and protect citizens’ social rights (EESC 2013). In 2015, the EESC published two opinions on their own initiative on further EMU integration. The May opinion laid out the need for four pillars for the new EMU structure, including a social pillar with an ambitious agenda for greater harmonisation (EESC 2015b). In September 2015, shortly before Juncker’s speech,

it published a second opinion which reacted to the Five Presidents' Report and argued for fiscal integration and common wage-setting (EESC 2015a). The consultation and debate process regarding the EPSR in the EESC are characterized by two steps: First, a study group organised a consultation involving social partners and civil society in all twenty-eight member states, based on the first Commission draft. Second, a study group within the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (EESC-SOC) wrote an opinion based on the final Commission draft of April 2017.

Following the Commission Communication, the EESC set up a study-group for the EPSR consultation on May 11, 2016, and announced Jacek P. Krawczyk (employers), Gabriele Bischoff (workers) and Luca Jahier (diverse) as rapporteurs. Bischoff and Jahier had already authored the September 2015 and 2013 opinions respectively (see Chapter IV), thus building on prior expertise. Additionally, both were well connected and positioned in the European field. Bischoff had been working on EU issues since 2000, first for the German representation in Brussels, then for the German Ministry of Labour, before moving on to the German trade union umbrella organisation DGB as board member with responsibility for the EU.⁹⁹ In 2015, she was elected chair of the EESC's workers group. Likewise, Jahier had been elected to lead the third group within the EESC in 2011, having been a member since 2002. Since 2001, he had worked as a lobbyist for the ACLI. However, before the start of the consultation process, they were not immediately in agreement with Juncker's agenda of building a social pillar for the euro area or the EU. Instead, the EESC opinion, authored by Bischoff, still argued for a full reconciliation of social policy objectives and the economic governance regime in the euro area.

“The first [school of thought] is based on the assumption that the social dimension of the EMU is an additional, optional and voluntary pillar, in contrast to the mandatory budgetary and economic policy procedures. Others, like the EESC, would point out that some of the economic policy goals are at odds with the EU's social policy objectives under Article 4(2) TFEU and call for these conflicting aims to be made public and resolved.” (EESC 2015a:6)

At the second meeting, the study group decided to start a national consultation process, which should involve social partners and civil society. A questionnaire of six questions regarding content, scope and possible impact should guide the consultation. National consultations were taken out between September and November 2016 in all EU member states, including the UK, which had voted to leave the EU in June 2016. The results of this

⁹⁹ For her CV see: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190424083320/http://old.eesc.europa.eu/?i=portal.en.group-2-president>. As of March 2023, Bischoff's CV is not available on the European Parliament's homepage.

consultation process were discussed at the fourth meeting in November 2016¹⁰⁰, yet the study group did more to take a proactive role. The third meeting in September 2016 featured debates with Commission staff from the DG EMPL as well as with the parliamentary assistant to Maria Rodrigues. The strong relationship to both Rodrigues and to Commissioner Thyssen were emphasized by the someone from the workers group in the EESC:

From the beginning, I have worked very closely with rapporteur Maria Rodrigues. We met on a regular basis and exchanged our views to find out where possible difficulties laid, and which solutions would be possible for us respectively. We also invited her into the committee, and I was invited into parliament and the exchange was really, really good. Together with my co-rapporteur, I met the Commissioner [Thyssen] to discuss the second opinion on the EPSR. (Interview EESC)

The interviewee makes clear how their personal and informal relations mattered more than their institutional positions. They understood the EPSR as a common project to build Social Europe and they understood themselves as close political allies whose main task in the negotiations was not to clarify different positions between the EESC or the EP but to convince others within these institutions of their shared agenda.

Furthermore, the EESC organised an internal panel discussion featuring academics and national employer organisations. In January 2017, the EESC plenum adopted an opinion on the consultation process, which summarizes the main issues (EESC 2017b). According to the introduction, the opinion drew from the discussions in the member states and aimed to represent them. Unsurprisingly, it identified the question of binding legislation as the most dividing between employers and trade unions, while it acknowledged that demands for more social dialogue were favourable among both groups. Finally, it pointed out that employers and trade unions from non-EMU countries alike had called for an immediate integration (EESC 2017a). However, more striking is the relative absence of both employer and trade unionist perspectives from this opinion. The conclusionary section of the report made ample reference to country-specific issues and points of view yet did not refer to differences between the social partners, even when the single reports do so. The term “trade unions” was used only thrice, “employer organisation” four times and the term “social partners” was absent from the description of results. The final paragraph mentioned the EMCO and the

¹⁰⁰ All national reports and participation lists can be accessed here: [Members' Portal v25.9.6.0 \(europa.eu\)](#).

SPC as EESC allies and called upon the Commission to build the EPSR on the EES and the OMC. The Social OMC and the EES had been cornerstones of Social Europe since the late 1990s as the embodiment of elite Third Way centrism (Bernhard 2010, Zeitlin 2011), yet they did not show up in any national debates. The focus on the EES and the OMC points to the importance of political insiders and the importance of specific European capital in policymaking. Actors such as Gabriele Bischoff within the EESC needed to know the discourse around these flagship policies and thus the reference point for the EESC opinion was the European field and its actors, not the national inputs. Devoid of conflict, the opinion passed the EESC plenum with a vote of 247/1/2 (for/against/abstention), indicating overwhelming support from all three groups. With no research on comparative voting patterns in the EESC available, it remains unclear, whether almost-unanimous support is routine in EESC proceedings, but the opinions cited in this article suggest otherwise. As discussed in chapter IV.1, the 2013 report on a social dimension of the EMU was approved by a lesser margin of 161/50/47.

Afterwards, the April 2017 EPSR version by the Commission went into the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (EESC-SOC), where Gabriele Bischoff again became the leading actor, being the rapporteur for the EESC opinion. Hence, it is fair to say that Bischoff who has subsequently been elected to the European Parliament as an SPD member in 2019 was the most active and most influential person in the EESC regarding the EPSR. After initial disagreement and conflict with the Commission, she was able to work alongside Maria João Rodrigues and Marianne Thyssen and shifted the EESC position from scepticism to overwhelming support. BE and ETUC were invited to discuss the EPSR in a third meeting in September 2017 alongside academics and think-tank policy officers. The final version did not refer to national trade unionist input in any meaningful way. Instead, it was critical of the long time, the Commission spent on consultation efforts (EESC 2017b). The wording used here is only marginal more diplomatic than the one, which was used in a prior draft, presented in September 2017 and which argued that the Commission “wasted considerable time for the consultations on the EPSR (1 year)” (EESC 2017c).

The EESC consultation process reveals two major features: First, it was dominated by Brussels insiders from a trade-unionist perspective who started early to engage the Commission and the Parliament and second, national trade unions’ input played little to no role for the EESC positioning. Instead, the EESC was openly critical of the consultation process, and was more interested in engaging Brussels insiders than national interest groups.

The EESC may have maximized its input on legislation, yet it certainly did not include national trade unionist and employer positions beyond issues that are broadly agreeable.

VI.1.4 Social partners consultation

The European Commission consultation started three months after the publication of the first draft in March 2016 and lasted until December. It included seminars, events and meeting on European level and in the EU-28 and inputs from national and regional governments and parliaments, civil society, social partners and EU citizens (European Commission 2017a). The procedure was mainstream for legislative procedures, yet some interviewees from the Commission side described it as the most extensive and inclusive consultative process (Interview COM-EMPL3). Similar to the EESC consultation, it was organised around a set of questions, ten in this case, which were grouped into three dimensions: (1) existing institutional framework; (2) transformations in the world of work; (3) design of the EPSR draft.

Organisation type	National	European	Total number of responses
Employer organization	14 from 7 MS	7	21
Trade Union	12 from 11 MS	7	19

Table 6: Social partner responses in the EPSR consultation process, own representation

Table 6 presents an overview of trade unionist and employer responses in the consultation process.¹⁰¹ The numbers for national responses show that only minorities of member states organisations participated in the consultation process. Despite its relatively higher number, engagement of employer organisations was lower than that of trade unions. The number of European responses is inflated by the fact that three inter-sectional employer organisations exist, yet the ETUC is the only game in town for European trade unionism. Additionally, Swedish employer organisations are overrepresented in the consultation, accounting for four

¹⁰¹ The link to consultation process has been removed from the EPSR landing page and the EMPL publications overview. All documents can be accessed via the Commission Publications catalogue & documents database with the search codes “SocPilSocParEmplOrg” and “SocPilSocParTU” respectively (European Commission 2022 a, b).

of the fourteen responses. One possible reason may be the well-established role of social dialogue and employer organisations in the Swedish economic model. However, in this case, one would expect similar degrees of participation from other Nordic or corporatist countries. The high degree of Swedish participation may instead be explained by the role of the Swedish government, which promoted the EPSR and hosted the Social Summit in Gothenburg, where it was adopted.

As for national participation, Table 7 shows national responses from trade unions and employer organisations. Only in five countries, both trade unions and employers participated in the consultation process. In Ireland, only the youth section of the Irish Trade Union Congress participated. By far the most populated bracket of the table lies in the bottom right. In fifteen out of twenty-eight member states, neither trade unions nor employers participated in the consultation process. Most Central and East European countries fall into this category, but also countries with histories of strong social concertation as the Netherlands, Spain, and Slovenia (for an overview see Ebbinghaus and Weishaupt 2022). Surely, this non-participation of big players is a not a lack of capacity, but a lack of interest.

	Trade Union YES	Trade Union NO
Employer Organisation YES	CZ, DE, FI, FR, SE	BG, IE, LU
Employer Organisation NO	AT, DK, HU, IT, PT	BE, CY, EE, ES, GR, HR, LT, LV, MT, NL, PO, RO, SI, SK, UK

Table 7: National responses in the EPSR consultation process, own representation

This did certainly not feature in the Commission staff-working-document which summarizes the consultation process from a Commission perspective and indicated the most important findings from their perspective (European Commission 2017a). It applauded instead the inclusion of European social partners and the access points for national actors. Understandingly, the document aimed to present a balanced picture. Yet, accounting for national and sectoral social partner organisations besides the big four, showed a skewed picture (see Table 8). No additional employer organisation was mentioned in the text directly and trade unions are quoted more often. Most employer organisations appeared only once in a footnote to a position paper that was co-authored by UEAPME, BE and 11 sectoral employers (European Commission 2017a:11). Finally, UEAPME was quoted with the following statement from their executive summary:

“The better integration of economic and social dimensions is a key priority for a fair and inclusive labour market and well-functioning welfare systems since the two dimensions are interdependent.” (European Commission 2017a:10)

While this indicates support, it was unrepresentative of the general opinion voiced by UEAPME in their contribution to the consultation process. In the two sentences following the exact statement, the organization made it clear that they neither think that Europe lacks social policy, nor that they agreed with gratification of more social rights (UEAPME 2016).

Organisation	Mentioned in text by name	Mentioned in Footnotes	Quoted directly
BusinessEurope	2	10	1
ETUC	5	17	2
CEEP	2	3	1
UEAPME	2	8	1
National/sectoral employer organisations	0	11	0
National/sectoral trade unions	3	20	0

Table 8: Citations of social partners in the EPSR Commission staff-working document, own representation

Three national trade unions, on the other hand, were named in the text, yet they were not linked to a policy position. The document used the case of Italian unions’ attempt to organize atypical workers as an example, how social dialogue may support this group of employees. Generally, the consultation process received criticism from both trade unions and employer organisations. While Commission officials emphasized the far-reaching consultation both at EU and national level and framed that as a symbol of their seriousness with the EPSR, the ETUC criticized meetings with social partners in member states for lack of preparation and said they were ‘only a ‘box ticking’ exercise (ETUC 2016b:13). Similarly, BusinessEurope criticized the perceived lack and insufficiency of social partner involvement (BE 2016:7). The ETUI’s report for the EPSR consultation expanded on this point. Not only was the questionnaire seen as confusing and methodologically unsound to produce quality feedback, but even more so, the consultation process in the member states frustrated meaningful engagement, as the authors note:

“Furthermore, the European Commission is expending lots of energy and resources in the organisation of direct public consultations of different groups of civil society at the national level, as well as strategic dialogue meetings with civil society organisations and special hearings with the European social partners based on a particular predefined scenario, which leaves the participants with little room for manoeuvre to express critical views and develop more proactive replies.” (Lörcher and Schömann 2016:19)

Within the period of the consultation, a clear shift in ETUC positioning can be observed. While early statements were mostly sceptical, later statements highlighted the achievement of the EPSR and saw it as an important tool to achieve Social Europe. At the same time, criticism of the Commission has been softened. This shift stands out as neither the EPSR nor ETUC positions on the issues changed during that time. Four documents prove this shift:

1. The ETUC State of the union commentary from 9 September 2015 (ETUC 2015a)
2. The press release in response to the initial EPSR proposal from 8 March 2016 (ETUC 2016a)
3. The official ETUC position from 9 September 2016 (ETUC 2016b)
4. General Secretary Luca Visentini's speech during the Social Summit in Gothenburg from 16 November 2017 and the respective press release from 17 November 2017 (ETUC 2017b)

The EPSR assessment changed from an “interesting proposal” (ETUC 2015a) to an “ambitious initiative” (ETUC 2016a) and finally to the “most important initiative in years to reinforce the European social model” of this Commission (ETUC 2017a). Meanwhile, the critical aspects of the respective statements changed, too. Initially, the ETUC was critical of policy issues such as flexicurity, the dominance of public finances and an austerity framework and the lack of endorsements of collective bargaining and social dialogue. Additionally, the ETUC was critical of placing the EPSR in the Commission's Better Regulation Agenda which they made responsible for labour market deregulation, and finally, the ETUC criticized the lack of implementation and enforcement efforts (ETUC 2016a). While the September 2016 position held firm in the criticism of the deregulation, the contested policy issues were dropped. Flexicurity was not mentioned again and the Pillar was not linked to austerity, but described as a possible means to overcome it (ETUC 2016b). The ETUC endorsed the EPSR as “the catalyst to achieve” social rights in the EU. Finally in November 2017, the ETUC expressed their hope that the EPSR would move Europe “from austerity to social rights and solidarity” and shifted their main focus on the need to implement the agenda (ETUC 2017b).

On the issues, the ETUC took expected positions for more legislative action on social issue. In the consultation process they demanded an approach that went well beyond the Commission proposal, calling those “familiar” ETUC positions during the crisis. They called for enforceable social rights, which should take precedence over the economic freedoms of the single market. Additionally, minimum standards for wages and working conditions, based on European benchmarks, should be implemented by legislation and other instruments

in the European Semester (ETUC 2016b). These positions were not challenged on a European level. The sectoral trade unions aligned closely with the ETUC, and the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) took a similar, yet more scientific, position. ETUI's legal analysis was highly critical of the scope and legal nature of the EPSR and wondered, if the hidden agenda, i.e. a further step of European social integration, could be achieved by a non-binding proclamation (Lörcher and Schömann 2016:29-30).

Looking at the national stage, differences become more visible.¹⁰² Importantly, Nordic trade unions disagreed with the ETUC position. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO-S) welcomed the EPSR as a symbolic European commitment, yet argued against further European legislation and especially against European influence on wage-setting and welfare benefits (LO-S 2016). In a similar tone, the Danish trade unions argued that the Social Pillar should focus on workers' right to organize but must not interfere with national labour markets and thus opposed any attempts towards co-ordination of minimum wages. Instead, the European effort should focus on benchmarking (LO-D, FTF and AC 2016). While Nordic trade unions feared that the Social Pillar would interfere with their national collective bargaining, Southern unions demanded action beyond symbolism as they were critical of benchmarking (CISL 2016) and called for a European minimum wage (CGT 2016). Disagreements between national and European trade unions were confirmed by an interviewee from ETUC who, however, did not regard this meaningful long-term (Interview ETUC). This outcome reflects long-standing scepticism among Nordic unions regarding both state and European intervention into wage-setting and independent collective bargaining (Furåker and Lovén Seldén 2013, Furåker 2020, Höpner and Seeliger 2019, Lovén Seldén 2020, Seeliger 2017). Overall, the ETUC was aware that they could not achieve changes to the EPSR itself and did not target the twenty principles in their respective statements. Instead, they focussed on the EPSR as a whole and found it more important to help reach a suitable compromise. Having any form of Social Pillar was superior to having the best one:

¹⁰² Google Translate was used for the analysis, unless documents were provided in English, French or German.

“In the preamble, we were fully involved. And thanks to our General-Secretary, we can say, we had also a role in seeking the compromise and to bring people/member states to compromise their positions. Concerning the 20 principles, no, in the sense that when they had been issued, we all agreed, they were so delicate balanced in wording that there was no way to re-open the discussions. Even if we had some requests for improvements. We participated in the drafting in terms of consultation. But as usual only part of our requests were accepted, but in general, we were happy with the results, so we accepted the idea from the publication to the proclamation. [Our concept was:] Let's lock the 20 principles and let's work on the preamble.” (Interview ETUC)

European employer organisations were even less united in their approach towards the EPSR. BE decided to ignore both the ten questions and the twenty principles in their consultation response. Instead, they focused on competitiveness and the need of further structural reforms towards flexicurity via benchmarking (BE 2016). This strategic choice was confirmed by an interview with a spokesperson who emphasized that the position built on prior publications on the future of social Europe and that BusinessEurope wanted something different:

“When it was published, I think, we never really came up with detailed recommendations on the principles, because we felt that that wasn't the right approach. We took a broader approach when commenting on it and saying what we think the social dimension of the EU should be rather than commenting on each line of the draft principles.” (Interview BE)

UEAPME took the same position and argued that the demise of social policies in some member states did not stem from a lack of social legislation or social rights, but was instead the result of an business-unfriendly environment, inflexible labour markets, and the high tax burden on labour and wages, which were not in line with productivity (UEAPME 2016). Alongside national employer organisations, they also pointed out that the EU already had a framework of guaranteed social rights with the EUCFR and that the EPSR as drafted might only repeat that (UEAPME 2016:6). The third recognized European employer organization CEEP, however, took a different approach, at least in tone. Their contribution expressed agreement and confidence in the EPSR draft, yet also warned against overreaching new legislation and demanded implementation via benchmarking in the European Semester. Meanwhile, CEEP did not demand flexicurity and activation, but social investment (CEEP 2016). CEEP was notably absent from a late-intervention, authored by BE and UEAPME alongside eleven sectoral European employer organisations, which directly criticized the Commission's use of social rights to fulfil its social agenda. (BE et al. 2017).

VI.1.5 The parliamentary proceedings

The initial Commission proposal on the EPSR did not specify its legal nature, yet it called for the explicit involvement of the European Parliament to broaden support and enhance legitimacy for the initiative (European Commission 2016b:9).¹⁰³ Thus, the EMPL committee appointed rapporteur Maria João Rodrigues and the respective shadow rapporteurs on 3 May 2016 (for a complete overview of the procedural events in the European Parliament see main page in its Legislative Observatory: European Parliament Legislative Observatory n.d.). The committee drafted a first opinion on 13 September and the final opinion passed the committee 12 December with 34 votes to 14 (4 abstentions). While the committee for women's rights and gender equality (FEMM) supported the resolution, the ECON committee decided not to give an opinion and had thus not appointed shadow rapporteurs. The motion was tabled subsequently on the 20 December and adopted by the EP on 19 January 2017. The EP voted in favour of the EPSR with 396 for and 180 votes against the resolution (68 abstentions) (European Parliament 2017). The breakdown of votes by party groups shows that (centre-)left MEPs voted overwhelmingly in favour, while conservative and far-right MEPs voted almost unanimously against the EPSR. The votes of the centre right EPP and the liberal ALDE meanwhile were split: in both groups only a slim majority of MEPs were in favour. Opposition within EPP and ALDE came from Baltic, Nordic (here including the Netherlands and Germany), and Visegrád delegations which Vesan and Corti (2019:984-85) explain as a clash between integrationist and anti-European sentiments and between creditor and debtor states. Additionally, an analysis of the amendments which were tabled in the EMPL committee shows that ALDE and EPP MEPs from creditor countries aimed to strengthen and support the initial resolution, while their colleagues from debtor countries wanted weaken the text (Vesan and Corti 2019:987). While this answers the question how national crisis experiences can explain different voting behaviour, it cannot explain why Rodrigues and the centre-left were successful in moving so fast with resolution and effectively splitting a possible blocking minority. After all, the EPP group could have stalled the resolution in committee.

The parliamentary process was dominated by Maria João Rodrigues who was in control of policy decisions, timing, and coalition-building. Rodrigues' experience and skills in

¹⁰³ By law, the Council can decide on non-binding recommendations on the Commission's initiative without parliamentary approval (Art. 292 TFEU).

policymaking as well as her contacts and networks made it possible to move the resolution forward in a way other social-democratic MEPs could not have. Her respective counterparts acknowledged this. On the one side, an aide to the EPP shadow rapporteur Tom Vandenkendelaere pointed to her multipositionality and clarifies how the process was anchored around Rodrigues and her very personal characteristics:

“Although she is from S&D, she is smart, she is very clever, is experienced, was a minister of labour in Portugal. So, she knew, how the Council worked. She worked for Barroso as well, she worked with [Prime Minister of Portugal] Guterrez as she was a minister. I know, she or one of her advisers also worked in the Commission. She had very good contacts, so, in that case, she played her role like she had to play.” (Interview EP-EPP)

Additionally, Rodrigues knew the positions of the EPP group and thus did not need to negotiate for long to produce a compromise draft. Instead after the discussion and critique of her initial draft, she was more interested in moving forward than in pushing for a result closer to her initial draft. Similar to the procedure in the EESC, when Bischoff and Rodrigues joined forces to rally institutional support, Rodrigues prioritised procedural quickness, coalition-building, and emphasis on a common project over discontent on specific issues and wordings.

“We had this rough report of Mrs Rodrigues, we were very critical. There were a lot of critical points, and I made a lot of sharp comments and at the end of the day she knew more or less we would end. And we also knew where we would end and what were red lines for EPP and what were red lines for S&D were already clear, because in many reports, the same points were discussed. So, we immediately felt that a good compromise would be one with the grand coalition, no matter what. Because you, you know the S&D is the biggest party, EPP is the biggest party, and at one point, we understood each other really well. We respect each other really well and then you have that click and then you work on, you work together and then you work quite fast, because there are 20 principles in this and a lot of principles you can discuss on many points, but if you go fast and she put really a fast pace in the negotiation round, which was good and we could work together very quickly and that was really good, because when the pace stops, the process is gone and you need to restart again.” (Interview EP-EPP)

On the other side, the GUE/NGL group, represented in the process by German MEP Gabriele Zimmerer, was also looking to Rodrigues in positioning themselves. The far-left group which included parties whose core message was opposition to austerity and EU economic governance such as SYRIZA (Greece) or Podemos (Spain) opted to work constructively with Rodrigues to support her and her agenda.

“For us on the left, it is not so easy. We have a very diverse faction with very different positions on European integration. [...] The majority of the faction had decided to work constructively with the social-democratic rapporteur, building an alliance with the Greens and, one has to say, with some Christian Democrats to produce a resolution and put maximum pressure on the coalition. Thus, from early on, we had strategically elaborated, especially with the rapporteur, how we could support her regarding issues that were important to us.” (Interview EP-GUE/NGL)

Rodrigues role was to bring a quick parliamentary resolution for the EPSR underway against opposition from parts of ALDE and the EPP. She was able to do this as she was a trusted ally of, Thyssen, Juncker, and Larsson, had stakeholder support from trade unions and the EESC, and because she understood, what it took to divide the centre-right forces. Rodrigues main objective was to collaborate with the other central actors in support of the EPSR as quickly as possible and to bring the positions of the Commission and the Parliament together.

“There were 1119 amendments, so together with a colleague we went through them and we drafted the compromise text which we negotiated with the shadow rapporteurs of other political groups. This was between August 2016 and January 2017; I was really busy with the parliamentary report. In this capacity, I also had contacts with the cabinets of Marianne Thyssen, with DG EMPL and with various stakeholders. [...] When I saw [the proposal], I thought: Okay, this is good enough and it couldn't get much better, so let's make sure we take it through the interinstitutional process safely and as quickly as possible. [...] Indeed, the negotiation of the parliamentary report was very interesting. We got the interesting majority for it with the S&D group, the Greens, most of the GUE/NGL and half of the liberals and half of the EPP. It was an internal strategy to divide the EPP and the liberals on this and we got more than 400 members supporting the resolution. The Commission was very happy, the Christian Democratic Commissioner [Thyssen] and even the Christian Democratic President of the Commission [Juncker] were happy that the parliament so strongly supported their proposal, and this really helped to convince the Council to buy into this whole project.” (Interview EP-S&D2)

This citation reveals another feature of the parliamentary process: Unlike for legislative initiatives which lead to Directives or Regulations, details were less important. Since it was clear that the EPSR was a non-binding resolution, it was not necessary that it was “good” but only “good enough”, meaning that its core message and its symbolic value was more important than the principles as such. For Rodrigues, the EPSR was more than the sum of its parts.

Thus, the focus of the parliamentary proceedings cannot be found in the specific definitions in the twenty principles of the EPSR but in two things: First, it symbolizes a new general compromise between centre-right and centre-left political parties and the ambition to build a Social Europe, and second, the parliamentary resolution points beyond the non-binding declaration of goodwill to concrete legislative initiatives which would have an impact on European social policymaking, most prominently the European Labour Authority, the Written Statement Directive, the Work-Life Balance Directive, and the Minimum Wage Directive.

VI.1.6 Euro area or EU: The role of member states

The EPSR was adopted via an inter-institutional proclamation – a term which defies both the legal definitions in the TEU and the TFEU and political theories of EU policymaking.¹⁰⁴ As shown before, the Commission was the main agent behind the EPSR and the adoption and proclamation of the EPSR widely followed the Community Method which means that the Commission set the agenda and involved the European Parliament. Nonetheless, Commission President Juncker was clear that all three decision making bodies should adopt the proclamation to increase its legitimacy. Thus, after the parliamentary vote, the resolution entered into the trilogue – the negotiations between the Commission, the Parliament, and the European Council where it had to overcome one final obstacle: Opposition from member states.¹⁰⁵ At this stage, two groups of countries were critical the EPSR. Nordic countries feared for the integrity of their social models, while some Central and Eastern European countries wanted to protect their growth models building partly on labour market deregulation and social dumping (Bernaciak 2015). Prior resentments by Southern countries most affected by austerity had given way to support, as these countries – Portugal in particular – had started to take ownership of the Pillar.

Responding to the widespread criticism, the Commission quickly decided that the EPSR would indeed target the EU proper and not only the euro area. However, this new approach opened it up to a new group of possible opponents – namely governments from non-EMU countries. As seen throughout this dissertation, Nordic countries had been reluctant to endorse further social integration as they feared this would harm the Nordic social model. Here, however, the Nordic countries took different positions. While the Danish centre-right government of Lars Løkke Rasmussen (Venstre – ALDE) only reluctantly supported the EPSR and emphasized its voluntary character, Sweden’s centre-left Prime Minister Stefan Löfven fully promoted the EPSR as a step to Europeanize the Nordic social model (de la Porte 2019:8).

However, as there was little to no public awareness of the EPSR in the member states and as the initiative would not impede on national sovereignty, salience outside Brussels was

¹⁰⁴ Rasnača (2017:13) notices that some precedents for such an approach exist. The three EU institutions adopted a joint declaration on fundamental rights in 1977 and the EUCFR was “solemnly proclaimed”, before it was enshrined into primary law.

¹⁰⁵ Some MEPs and party groups who had felt left out during the parliamentary proceedings tried to get involved in the trilogue which was skilfully managed and denied by rapporteur Rodrigues.

relatively low and member state participation played out in the de-politicized and technical sub-committees for the most part. EMCO and the SPC had produced joint opinions on the first Commission draft in September 2016 after the final Commission communication in May 2016. The opinions welcomed the Commission initiative and linked it to the EES, the social OMC, and the Europe 2020 strategy as policies which have contributed to upward convergence while respecting member states' competences and the principle of subsidiarity. The first opinion urged to transform the EPSR into a flexible tool to react to new social challenges in the future (EMCO and SPC 2016; 2017).

However, even here, Hungary refused to sign-up to the opinion for political reasons, an unusual event in the committees (Interview EMCO). Nonetheless, in June 2017, EPSCO without support from Hungary endorsed the joint opinion by SPC and EMCO and thus the EPSR. In its decision, it cited the latter opinion to highlight the significance of the Social Pillar:

“According to this opinion, the Social Pillar initiative is an important milestone in putting employment and social protection at the forefront of EU and national policymaking, in line with the Rome Declaration of March 2017, in particular points 2 and 3.¹⁰⁶ It seeks to strike a balance between ambition and realism, while at the same time addressing the employment and social policy challenges which Europe faces in the 21st century.” (EPSCO 2017:7)

Even when the Council endorsed the EPSR, ministers were sending out mixed messages regarding its legal status. Some declared their intention to build on the EPSR with European-wide initiatives, while others argued that implementation should be fully in the hands of the member states (Vandenbroucke 2019:7).

¹⁰⁶ On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Rome Treaties, European heads of government, the Commission and the European Parliament met in Rome and proclaimed the Rome Declaration – a pledge to work towards a safe, sustainable, social, and strong EU. Unlike similar documents, however, the Rome Declaration has not become a focal point for the discussion of the future of Europe and has largely been forgotten.

VI.2 ADAPTING THE EPSR TO NEW PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Beyond the narrow discussions of the detailed policy content in the EPSR, two issues have dominated the debate as they questioned and thereby defined the very nature of the Social Pillar: the changing nature of public awareness of elements of the polycrisis, and the issue of social rights. As discussed above, for many actors the meaning and the normative function of the EPSR went beyond its pure text and these two issues have been key to generate its meaning and to define its purpose. First, the policymakers' perception of the polycrisis changed, while they debated the EPSR. The vote for Brexit in June 2016 shocked the European establishment and made them re-establish their priorities. While Juncker in 2015 envisioned a social policy response to the euro crisis, many actors, as time went on, started to connect the EPSR to Brexit, the threats of populism, the rise of the far right, and European disintegration. Second, the nature of the pre-scribed 'social rights' was put into question. Could citizens invoke these social rights in front of courts? Did they give them a right and *vice versa* government entities an enforceable obligation to provide adequate housing, social protection, parental leave etc.? While the Pillar's rights-based language appeared strong in this regard, at the same time the Commission had invoked a wording which used the term "principle".

Both, the uncertainty whether the EPSR guaranteed social rights or was a mere declaration of social principles, and the changed perception of the polycrisis and the policy challenges to which the EPSR was an institutional answer in the process of the negotiations provided contributed to its symbolic as opposed to its policy value. The more the 'true nature' of the EPSR remained ambiguous, the more it was important that the central actors could successfully enforce their interpretation.

VI.2.1 New challenges: Populism, far right, refugee crisis and Brexit

After the ECB introduced its new bond purchasing program "Outright Monetary Transactions" (OTB), the euro crisis calmed significantly and some countries, starting with Ireland in December 2013, exited the bailout programmes in 2013 and 2014. With the exception of Greece, all countries and the euro area as a whole experienced an uptick in growth from 2013-2015 (Copelovitch, Frieden and Walter 2016:816-17). The euro crisis had by no means resolved or even ended but other elements of the European polycrisis had moved to centre stage. Immigration, the "refugee crisis" and the rise of far-right parties,

digitization and precarious forms of work, and finally the British referendum on the exit from the EU in June 2016 had infiltrated the discourse in the field of Social Europe, as all of these demanded some kind of social policy response.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the specific link between the euro area and the need for more social integration, which Andor and others had tried to establish with the social-dimension debate and which was still at Juncker's mind with the proposal of a 'social triple A' in 2015 (Juncker 2015), became less important. Instead, actors would now link the EPSR to the new crises the EU faced, in particular Brexit and the rise of parties whose ideology ranged from Euroscepticism via (right-wing) populism to the extreme right (Altafin and Lamer 2018).

"The political context of that time was coloured by the rising wave of populism in Europe and the accelerating Brexit debate in Britain, both of which had evident interfaces with the euro crisis." (Rehn 2020:xi)

However, especially the supporters of the EPSR started to link it to Brexit, the rise of far right, and populist parties. They argued that these threats to European democracy and integration stemmed from the public perception that the EU was only an economic project without social balance.

"Whether you agree or not, I think it is clear that in the Brexit vote a lot of the discontent in the UK, where they formulated the answer to take back control, is to take back control of our labour market, because we are suffering because of this liberalised market, which the EU is. So, it's Juncker, it's focussing on the future of the labour market, it's also trying to learn some lessons from the populist vote, which leads to a quiet big support for the report and which led to the proclamation of Gothenburg." (Interview EP-S&D1)

In a report on behalf of the Workers' Group in the EESC, researchers from the OSE argued that the Brexit vote was indicative of the relation between social inequality and European integration and warned that inaction on Social Europe would cause harm to the EU's legitimacy.

"Against this background of an enduring asymmetry between economic and social policy issues, awareness has slowly developed of the unsustainability of the status quo. The deterioration of the social situation in the EU has impacted not only on the living standards of its citizens but it has also led to questioning of the legitimacy of the EU as a political project, eventually leading to the risk of disintegration of both the Eurozone and the EU, as shown by 'Brexit'." (Sabato et al. 2019:3)

¹⁰⁷ The advent of the precariat can be linked to demands for more social protection, while immigration of refugees restarted new debates about social investment in the need of integration through labour market participation. Both the rise of far right and populist parties and the British vote to exit the EU meanwhile were linked to insufficient welfare state protection and were sometimes interpreted as protest from working-class voters. Chapter I.1.2 briefly discusses this relationship, yet a full discussion of the academic literature whether and how social deprivation fostered Brexit and the populist vote cannot be presented here.

Lazlo Andor, too, pointed to Brexit as “the ultimate argument for Social Europe” and made a link between socio-economic alienation and deprivation and the Brexit vote. According to his analysis, a majority of British voters did not perceive the EU as too social but rather as too distant and they felt politically and economically disenfranchised:

“The real lessons of Brexit actually support the progressive arguments about the need for tackling imbalances and inequality collectively in the EU and for stronger common instruments in favour of economic, social and territorial cohesion.” (Andor 2019b:31)

This view was widely shared by social scientists who participated in a workshop on the nexus between social rights and Brexit in 2019, and later contributed to a book, edited by Mikko Kuisma and Matthew Donoghue on behalf of Social Europe and the FES (Donoghue and Kuisma 2020). Linda Hantrais summed up the relevance and the possible impacts of Brexit on Social Europe.

“The UK referendum in 2016 served as a wake-up call and a trigger for EU institutions to review and modernise European social policy. The vote to leave provided an opportunity for the commission to promote social integration in the knowledge that UK-led opposition would no longer be able to block proposals for enhancing social rights. The then commission president, Jean-Claude Juncker, exploited the occasion to prepare his own legacy by launching the European Pillar of Social Rights to counter growing populism and disillusionment with the European project.” (Hantrais 2020:26)

Finally, Schulten and Müller (2021) have argued that the legitimacy loss which resulted from the euro crisis and manifested itself in the electoral success of far right and populist parties created the opportunity and the political commitment which led to the successful adoption of the EPSR. The discursive connections, actors made between the EPSR and the new elements of Europe’s polycrisis, too, increased its symbolic value. While former policy initiatives under the banner of the social dimension or the EUBS were policy solutions in response to particular challenges, the EPSR was now inflated as the EU response to the polycrisis as such.

VI.2.2 Social Rights and social principles

One question has been frequently asked as the social-rights-based approach towards Social Europe took form: Are ‘social rights’ rights or are they mere principles? From a legal point of view at least, social rights had not been rights. Catherine Barnard (2020) pointed out that the distinction between rights which must be respected, e.g., by courts or secondary legislation, and principles which must only be observed was already inherent in the EUCFR. To make matters worse (from the viewpoint of understandability), the ECJ, she argued, had slowly started to interpret some rights which were designed as principles, as rights *sui*

generis. Add the EPSR and its rights-based adoption of twenty principles and the confusion is almost perfect, as she, too, noted:

“So, are social right rights? The answer now is: some can be. [...] But there will still be a number of social ‘rights’ in the Charter – and not just those mentioned by way of examples in the Explanations – that are in fact principles. For the general public – who are not privy to the Court’s case law, this will all feel rather abstract and unreal.” (Barnard 2020:363)

Social scientists, meanwhile, have approached EU social rights and social citizenship through the lens of T.H. Marshall who distinguished between civil, political, and social rights and argued that social rights were necessary for citizens to enjoy and execute their civil and political rights (Marshall 1950). Hansen and Hager (2010:122-23) claimed that social rights in the EU were sub-ordinated to the economic freedoms in a model of “neoliberal communitarian citizenship” and citizens were thus not able to exercise either their civil or political rights fully. This perspective has recently been confirmed by Stefanie Börner (2020:432) who criticized the European emphasis on providing social rights to transnational and mobile citizens, since Marshallian social rights would instead enable all citizens to become mobile.

Regarding the EPSR, the first issue was a dominant feature in the debates and many commentators struggled to make sense of the EPSR, when it was adopted as Hendrickx pointed out in an early legal assessment:

The legal nature of the Social Pillar will certainly be subject of debate. While the Pillar gives the impression of creating new rights, nothing is pointing in the direction of a legally enforceable instrument. On the contrary, the Pillar is expressly referred to as being ‘designed as a compass’ and ‘to serve as a guide’ (Preamble 12), as also expressed in the Interinstitutional Pillar Proposal of 26 April 2017. In the accompanying Commission Working Staff document it is mentioned that ‘given the legal nature of the Pillar, these principles and rights are not directly enforceable and will require a translation into dedicated action and/or separate pieces of legislation, at the appropriate level’ (SWD(2017) 201 final, p3). About its own content, the Pillar’s Preamble 14 states that ‘for them to be legally enforceable, the principles and rights first require dedicated measures or legislation to be adopted at the appropriate level.’ (Hendrickx 2018:5)

The legal ambiguity also drew criticism from both sceptics and supporters of the EPSR. On the one side, some member states were afraid that the Commission would overreach its legal competence. Yet, when the Commission emphasized that the rights were mere non-enforceable principles, this drew criticism from the other side. Proponents of Social Europe criticized that the rights-based language would generate false hopes, as it would not be backed by legislation and could not be used to argue in courts. This interview excerpt sums up this antagonism between legal overreach and overpromise:

“What is all this about? We already have the European Employment Strategy, we have the Semester, [the Commission] proposing something, that is very abstract without an implementation mechanism. What is going on here? Are we creating new legal rights? Some countries are very worried about that. Then we say 'We are not', but then the flip side of that questions is: If we not creating any legal rights, what is all this for?” (Interview EMCO)

The confusion about the nature of the Pillar was manifest in the consultation contributions from legal analysts from the trade union side. Not only did they criticise the confusion between rights and principles and said that the high expectations had not been met but they also wondered how the EPSR would relate to the EUCFR which – after all – is a part of EU primary law (Lörcher and Schömann 2016:30-31). Zane Rasnača speculated whether the EPSR might replace the EUCFR in the future and would equally become a part of primary law, since she deemed the coexistence of these two social-rights documents “obscure”. On the one hand, the EPSR could function as an interpretative update for the Charter, yet on the other hand, the adoption of the Pillar could also point beyond the failure of the EUCFR to improve social rights in the EU (Rasnača 2017:21). Finally, Daniel Seikel criticized in a WSI Policy Paper that a higher degree of legal bind would not increase enforceability since the “provisions are so vague that they could easily be interpreted to mean that they have already been implemented” (Seikel 2017:6). Despite the criticism of its obscure legal nature, all analysts found the EPSR helpful from a trade unionist perspective (and *pars pro toto* from the perspective of all supporters). For them, the added value of the Pillar was political rather than legal. They hoped that the EPSR “will result in an actual change of policy discourse in the EU” and “could serve as the first step and the first trigger towards changing the current paradigm in Social Europe” (Rasnača 2017:38), that it “can be useful in political discourse” (Seikel 2017:6) and that it may “embrace a much broader context” and endorse the “historical legacy” of the European Social Model (Lörcher and Schömann 2016:25). Accordingly, the true nature of the EPSR and its impact for Social Europe did not lie in the confusing and at time contradicting legal architecture but in its political and symbolic value. Thus, the question whether the social rights were a mere label or a deception which featured during consultation and after the proclamation is less important. For the actors who actively worked on bringing the EPSR to life, it had been clear that they were not creating a legal text or a technical document but a strong commitment and a symbol that Social Europe was back after the Great Recession:

“I think that symbols are important, as they are in religions as for the European project. This is an important symbol that we should not underestimate. Indeed, for the first time in 20 years, it's trying to define that everyone living in the European continent is entitled to a decent living, decent working conditions, decent housing. [...] So, it is not THE game changer, but it is A game changer and it helps us, telling the story that Europe is not only about markets and currencies, but it is also about people.” (Interview EP-S&D1)

“No, of course, it's not spectacular. You just repeat, what already has been said. But, just to confirm it. That's really the added value. And it's not only confirmed by the Parliament, not only by the Trilogue, we also need to know that in Gothenburg all the heads of the governments or the heads of states were there as a symbol. You cannot just sign and then go home and say okay, just leave it. That's really, what the added value is.” (Interview EP-EPP)

VI.3 INTERMEDIATE CONCLUSION: ACTORS, NETWORKS, AND THE SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

As was the case with the social dimension of the EMU and the EUBS, actors inside the European Commission aimed to achieve an agenda-setting position regarding the EPSR. However, this time, the Commission infighting between DG EMPL and DG ECFIN and the respective Commissioners gave way to an initial top-down approach as the agenda for the advancement of Social Europe came from Commission President himself. Since the Lisbon Treaty and especially during the Great Recession, the other EU institutions – most visibly the European Council – had challenged the Commission’s agenda-setting monopoly (Bocquillon and Dobbels 2014, Deters and Falkner 2021). Likewise, the dominance of intergovernmental actors in crisis management and new economic governance had diminished the Commission’s agenda-setting capability, so that Juncker’s ‘political’ Commission (Peterson 2017, Rhinard and Nugent 2019) had to seek out support from others within and outside the institutional framework early on to accomplish legislative success. This was undertaken with a multi-layered and multi-level consultation regime which involved both formal and informal venues and both national and transnational actors. While the Commission claimed that the aim of all consultations was to eliminate bias from the decision-making process, recent research suggests that the Commission may strategically choose the type and format of consultation exercises to improve its reputation and legitimacy (Binderkrantz, Blom-Hansen and Senninger 2021). Stakeholders may contribute to the Commission’s legitimacy through raising public awareness in open consultation formats in exchange for political influence – typically in closed fora (Binderkrantz et al. 2022). Thus, the consultation process can be analysed from a field perspective, where the Juncker Commission was willing to invest political capital to provide some actors with access to decision making (centrality) and expected public appraisal and reputational gains, i.e., symbolic social and European capital.

Carella and Graziano (2022) have proposed an alternative approach for explaining the successful proclamation of the EPSR as they analyzed the causal relationship between the Juncker Commission, policy agency, and the accomplishment of the EPSR through the lens of historical institutionalism. They argue that the Juncker Commission utilized critical juncture which was not caused by external conditions but was endogenous in nature and which existed for a short period 2015-2017. This “endogenous critical juncture” allowed them to make substantial changes regarding Social Europe. Conditions as the rise in

Euroscepticism, an increase in public support for Social Europe¹⁰⁸ and a more favourable composition of the European Commission created a window of opportunity for legislation on social policies (Carella and Graziano 2022:377). Paul Copeland (2022) expanded on endogenous critical junctures and combined it with the concept of bricolage. Politicizing bricoleurs are actors who strategically work towards long-term institutional change.¹⁰⁹ Copeland's analysis has an underlying, yet un-theorised, field-perspective on Social Europe and makes references to actors' resources, strategies, and the uniqueness of their experiences. Among other things, he pointed out the importance Juncker's, Rodrigues' and Thyssen's prior experiences working on Social Europe. However, this theoretical novelty of an endogenous critical juncture which can be invoked by actors in the absence of an exogeneous shock to stable institutions leaves unanswered questions: To some extent, the historical institutionalist approaches have gone full circle from a rather static explanatory model of slow evolutionary change within path dependent boundaries to a causal model where actors can create their very own critical junctures and windows of opportunities – as such, they must correctly ask for the sets of conditions which allow these actions but even more so for the underlying reasons why certain actors can or cannot create these “out of thin air”.¹¹⁰ Endogenous critical junctures and the politicizing bricolage are just two ways to square the circle and re-evaluate the relation between structure and agency. To a great degree, this study has come to a similar conclusion as this very recent research albeit from a different theoretical angle, yet one major obstacle remains: the question of power and agency. Copeland summarized the Commission's track-record as follows:

¹⁰⁸ On firsthand, these conditions seem to contradict each other as Eurosceptics would naturally oppose any further European integration. Thus, it needs actors who define these phenomena as a protest vote against austerity.

¹⁰⁹ It is at least doubtful whether the theoretical concept of the bricolage/bricoleur can add substantially to our understanding of actors' strategic ability to mediate long-term political and institutional change and whether it offers explanatory value beyond the established concept of policy entrepreneurship. Copeland's (2022) definition of the bricoleur builds on work by Martin B. Carstensen and Paul Campbell, yet Carstensen himself uses the terms interchangeably: “What, then, determines whether the process of bricolage leads to evolutionary or revolutionary change? In short, actors – or what Campbell calls ‘entrepreneurs’ – with more diverse social, organisational and institutional connections ‘tend to have more expansive repertoires with which to work’ (Campbell 2004, 75). Moreover, it also matters to what degree entrepreneurs can demonstrate that their innovations fit the prevailing institutional set-up, which again limits the degree of change that can be effected through bricolage.” (Carstensen 2015:49)

¹¹⁰ This is another instance where governmental and institutional actors selectively apply theories of political decision making and European integration to policymaking which underlines the reflexive nature of many of these theories.

“Prior to the Juncker Commission taking office, legislative agreements in social Europe featured decision-making deadlock. Acutely aware of this situation, the newly formed Commission deployed a strategy of being a politicizing bricoleur with the aim of securing agreements and generating a political momentum that could potentially deepen integration. It was a bricoleur in the sense that to reinvigorate the policy field it revisited and revised existing tools with the aim of generating long-term change, and politicizing in the sense that the Commission exercised social acuity, built broad teams to mobilize for change, and deployed a specific discursive strategy.” (Copeland 2022:13)

The main tools of the Juncker Commission were awareness and strategy, yet not all aware and strategical actors can be bricoleurs. Likewise, Carella and Graziano avoided any active language when they define the endogenous critical juncture – instead, by 2014, the conditions for an endogenous critical juncture “had emerged” (Carella and Graziano 2022:378,86).

This chapter indeed proposes an active explanation: The central actors, especially the “old guard” Juncker, Larsson, and Rodrigues, had worked to create their very own window of opportunity or critical juncture and they had invested much of their social capital to be successful. The decisive difference between the EPSR-network and the social-dimension network is not that the first one employed a political strategy and the latter did not. The reference to strategy as an explanatory variable is meaningless because all actors in the political field are expected to act strategic. Instead, the main difference is that Juncker, Larsson, and Rodrigues had the necessary political and European capital which allowed them to dominate the social field. Their field-specific knowledge allowed them to employ a strategy that was successful but it is not the presence or absence of strategy which explains the proclamation of the EPSR vis a vis the social dimension but the capital, actors can invest into a strategy. Crucially, Rodrigues and Larsson are prime examples of the power of betweenness centrality and multipositionality in the European politics. The informal consultation stage was instrumental as they eliminated possible sources of opposition, such as the ETUC, early on. While still sceptical, trade unions, social NGOs, and centre-left parties quickly took ownership for the EPSR. As can be seen in the EESC consultations, the more critical inputs from national organisations were ignored by the European actors and Gabriele Bischoff skilfully positioned the EESC as a supportive actor. Juncker, Thyssen, and to lesser extent Thyssen’s replacement as MEP Vandenkendelaere brought the EPP along.

During 2016 and 2017, Rodrigues and Larsson participated in numerous conferences, panels, debates etc. with political groups, NGOs, or member state organisations to promote the EPSR. Their political understanding of European policymaking meant that they knew how to forge compromises with necessary actors (e.g., part of the EPP group in the EP). They

purposefully built the EPSR coalition – a network of influential individual actors who worked beyond institutional or political boundaries and who wielded the support of important probable adversary coalitions.

“This is also fundamentally the meaning of the EPSR. This is an updated understanding between the European centre-right and the centre-left, a renewed compromise on the European model. This is what is about. One question is: Weren’t we just wasting time with this project? Yes, it took two years, this whole exercise and we found that quite frustrating and we wanted the Juncker Commission to act much more resolutely and quickly with a number of proposals. We were a bit frustrated by this whole exercise of rebuilding the narrative of Social Europe but in the end, this was probably necessary because without an updated understanding, the political importance of keeping the single market and the euro area together is something important to both the centre-right and the centre-left. Without an overall political understanding, you can hardly proceed to discussing any specific legislative proposals, regulatory or financial. I think Juncker was quite wise with this method but of course it took an awful lot of time.” (Interview EP-S&D2)

Finally, Juncker’s full support and its symbolic value was crucial and is hard to overstate¹¹¹ – a fact that has been acknowledged by recent research:

“In a context characterised by the rise of anti-European movements and multiple EU crises that question the legitimacy of the EU, the entrepreneurship of Juncker contributed to open a window of opportunity to increase the visibility of social issues within the Semester. To this end, Juncker promoted the launch of the EPSR, which provided a reference framework for all the EC initiatives in the domain of social policy. In this respect, clear evidence of these entrepreneurial activities can be found in the recourse to the strategic use of Presidency’s Cabinet and the Secretary General, the re-organization of tasks within DG EMPL and DG ECFIN and, crucially, the adoption of a new monitoring tool, i.e. the EPSR Social Scoreboard. Our research shows that the window of opportunity opened by Juncker did not produce an abrupt change in the internal composition of the social dimension of the Semester but, rather, a *reinforcement and consolidation* of an ongoing trend.” (Vesan, Corti and Sabato 2021:290)

Already before the proclamation in Gothenburg, all supporters of the EPSR turned their activities towards delivering on the EPSR. Since 2018, with the very notable exception of the unforeseen Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on welfare states, EU social policy has been focussed on the implementation of the EPSR. Actors such as the trade unions, NGOs, and left parties and politicians have repeatedly pointed to the EPSR, when they were discussing social challenges and drawbacks. During the Porto Social Summit in May 2021, the EU agreed on an Action Plan to reach a number of statistical targets on employment participation and poverty reduction as well as legislative achievements on platform work and minimum income by 2025.

¹¹¹ Almost all interviewees, independent of their political leanings or professional positions, have confirmed two things: First, they thought that Juncker was the main driving force behind the EPSR and second, they believed him to be sincere in his social policy agenda.

VII. CONCLUSION: REMAKING SOCIAL EUROPE

“Looking at this issue from a historical perspective, we can see that around every 15 years an ambitious proposal of rebalancing and development gets adopted.” (Philippe Pochet)

Philippe Pochet offered an interesting framework for the historical analysis of Social Europe. After every 15 years, the EU collectively looks back on achievements, failures, and challenges still unaddressed, and renews and updates its social policy framework. From the beginnings in the 1970s via first the Delors Commission and the Community Charter and then the ‘golden age’ of Social Europe at the turn of the millennium to finally the ratification of the EPSR, actors have, “in true Sisyphean style” (Pochet 2017) developed and rebalanced the social dimension of European integration. The repetitive cycle of policy debates and outcomes can be observed for all three cases. First, regarding the social dimension of the EMU, many arguments, actors, and their positions but also confusions and ambiguity resembled a similar constellation as during the late 1990s. Second, the question whether and how the EU should implement an EUBS as a tool for fiscal stabilization, meanwhile, has been a constant companion of the EMU introduction and subsequent reform attempts since the 1970s. Third, the EPSR built on existing social-rights-codifications as the EUCFR and the Community Charter and shares many of their ambiguities with respect to the legal nature and enforceability. The iterative process of collective awareness and recognition of the past, the definition of a contested issue, actor-self-positioning in relation to both the issue and other actors to work on the fundamentals of what “Social Europe” means, and, eventually, a new common consensus of Social Europe is, what Pierre Bourdieu describes as the reproduction of a social field. However, as discussed in the theoretical outline of social fields: Where is reproduction, there is also change. The re-emergence of the social field after the Great Recession was not a copy of its pre-crisis version but was shaped by the ideational and material crisis experiences of the actors and the EU as a whole.

These concluding pages will scrutinize the renewal of Social Europe from two angles. First, it will compare the outcome to the Social Europe of the past along the established categories of policy, polity, and politics. Second, it will reproduce Social Europe as a social and analyse the conflicts, actors, their capital relations, and network effects.

VII.1 POLICIES AND POLITICS OF SOCIAL EUROPE: THE NEW COMPROMISE

The SI paradigm did not feature prominently in either one of the debates. With the euro crisis in mind, most actors wanted to reconcile economic and social policy objectives and to restore the symbolic and moral rights-based policy element. The SIP of 2013, exemplary, did not feature in the making of the EPSR – unlike the Community Charter. Actors around Juncker aspired to reproduce the successful history of the Community Charter as the origin of the progressive development of Social Europe in the 1990s and early 2000s. László Andor criticized the “withdrawal from the social investment paradigm” (Andor 2019b:32) in the EPSR and Anton Hemerijck remarked that the EPSR discontinued a trajectory that seemed possible with the adoption of the SIP in 2013:

“In comparison with the SIP, the EPSR offers a considerably more positive understanding of European welfare provision, ranging from traditional social safety nets to capacitating social services. By invoking a moral language of ‘rights’, the Social Pillar departs in a noteworthy fashion from the more utilitarian ‘social policy as productive factor’ approach”. (Hemerijck 2022:7)

Instead, the policies implemented via the Social Scoreboard and the EPSR focussed on reconciliation and on social rights as depicted in Table 9. Proposals to include enforceability did not find sufficient support and both scoreboards were sufficiently based in the framework of soft governance which remained the rule of the game for European social policymaking. Attempts to adopt more structural elements, especially for the euro area, have failed: For one, they faced well-known opposition from DG ECFIN and ECOFIN and Nordic member states and secondly, non-EMU member states and transnational organizations as the ETUC or the EESC feared that these countries might be left alone. Overall, European actors viewed positively on the experiences of the EES and the OMC and advocated continuation rather than innovation. However, the new social governance structure puts greater value on policy and process ownership. Sacha Garben noted both the reconciliation element and the centrist and consensus-driven appeal in an early assessment of the Social Pillar’s qualities:

“Steeped in centrist language about improving the situation of both citizens and businesses across Europe, reconciling labour market security and flexibility, and combining high social standards with economic adaptability and competitiveness, this policy initiative is canvassing broad, cross-spectrum appeal and support.” (Garben 2018:210)

Policy element	Policy objective	Policy content	Policy implementation
Reconciliation element	Balance between economic (market-making) and social (market-correcting) objectives	Mainstreaming of social policy in all policy fields Social indicators and benchmarking on equal footing with economic and fiscal ones Inclusion of social actors in EU policymaking	Social Scoreboards (2013; 2017) Socialization of European Semester No enforcement mechanism
Fiscal solidarity element	Automatic stabilization of euro area in economic recession Prevention of high unemployment rates Direct link between EU and citizens	European tax base European social bonds European Unemployment Benefit Scheme (EUBS) Euro area budget to finance SI and ALMP	SURE (2020) Commission proposal for Unemployment Reinsurance
Social rights element	Guarantee, assurance, and monitoring of social rights for all EU citizens	20 principles in the European Pillar of Social Rights SI and ALMP component	European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles EPSR implementation agenda Symbolic representation of Social Europe

Table 9: Policy elements of Social Europe, own representation

However, SI was not completely absent from policy debates, and it can be found in the new policy mix of Social Europe. Sebastiano Sabato and Francesco Corti have argued that the EPSR combines elements of social policy as a productive factor with a de-commodifying perspective of social rights and thus takes a “hybrid approach as a rights-based social investment approach” (Sabato and Corti 2018:61). A European Unemployment Benefit Scheme or other fiscal solidarity instruments were not part of the renewal of Social Europe until 2019. However, the EU engaged in fiscal policy to deal with the pandemic-imposed recession and implemented SURE and the RRF, and the Commission, in theory, stays committed to the implementation of an automatic re-insurance scheme – both of which were impacted by the debate on EUBS and fiscal solidarity after the Great Recession.

The legal status of Social Europe was relevant in all three case studies in two ways: First, it was discussed, whether the social policy regime should be on equal legal footing with macroeconomic governance and how this would relate to national sovereignty and the EU Treaties. The proposals for structural policy, especially the EUBS, were perceived as threats to welfare states. The social-rights-language led to confusion about the enforceability of the EPSR. Second, there was a conflict whether new social policy should target the euro area or all European member states. Both, the social-dimension debate and the EUBS were designed as a response to design failures of the EMU and were seen as exclusive policy responses. In the beginning, the EPSR, too, was designed as mandatory for the EMU and voluntary to the EU. However, in all three cases, non-EMU actors such as member states outside the EMU and transnational collective actors, had opposed policies targeted at the euro area. They argued that social policies should address social challenges which were by no means unique to the euro area and feared that the integration divide would deepen. Policy implementation tools such as the OMC or the EES were positive anchor points in the debates. Thus, the soft governance paradigm was reinforced, however updated with the introduction of new social scoreboards and stronger focus on policy ownership.

Unlike before the crisis, the policy regime of social rights and the polity of soft governance and ownership was not backed by an intellectual political agenda. Social Europe after the Great Recession had no Anthony Giddens. At the turn of the century, the Third Way had offered social democrats a viable strategy to occupy the political centre and win power in most West European member states. However, the relative electoral decline of both social and Christian democracy in the EU since the mid-2000s and challenges by populist and far-right parties meant that winning at the centre was no longer a viable strategy to gain a majority. The traditional left and right parties did not engage in a fight against each other over the political centre but found themselves pressed to the centre in a grand coalition with anti-European and Eurosceptics at the fringes. Thus, the politics of Social Europe after the Great Recession are a politics of coalition-building, not only within political institutions but also with civil society and social partners. While the EES and the OMC were the result of a strong European social democracy, the political coalition behind the EPSR may be described as a coalition of weakened collective actors. Figure 4 captures the policy, politics, and governance elements of Social Europe after the adoption of the EPSR.

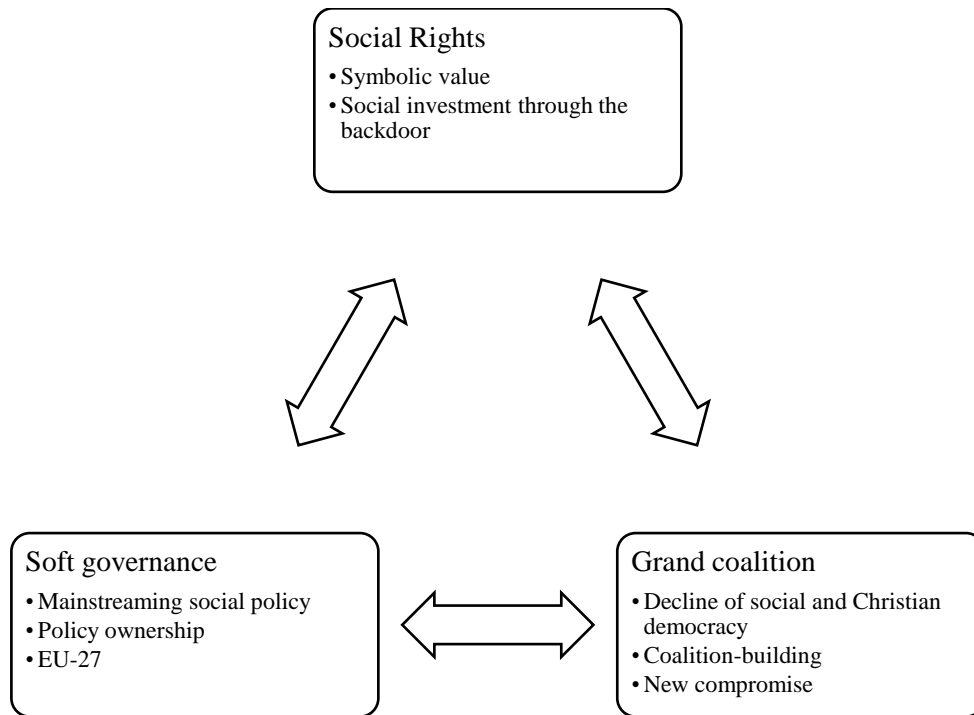


Figure 4: Three elements of Social Europe after the EPSR, own representation

VII.2 STRUCTURE AND AGENCY, REPRODUCTION AND CHANGE: THE SOCIAL FIELD

All attempts of re-making Social Europe after the Great Recession were centred on one contested issue: How – if at all necessary – should European social policy relate to the European macroeconomic and fiscal governance regime? This conflict structures all three case studies and is the main question for actors to position themselves. The conflict between the social and the economic side of European integration has been the most relevant defining aspect of Social Europe as a social field:

1. The social dimension of EMU challenged the dominance of fiscal consolidation and technical crisis management in the euro crisis. László Andor, the main advocate, argued that the social dimension should be equal to other euro area reform projects, such as banking or capital markets union. Its main antagonists from DG ECFIN, the ECB, and the Eurogroup opposed this proposal on the grounds that neither the EU nor the EMU needed a social dimension because fiscal consolidation and structural reforms by itself would lead to social outcomes in the form of job creation, competitiveness, and growth. A second opposition group which included trade unions, the EESC, and centre-left research institutes disagreed with the focus on the EMU and demanded a social dimension for the EU-proper.
2. Keynesian economists proposed an EUBS for the EMU because it could combine macro-economic with social (and political) benefits. On the one hand, it would protect EMU labour markets against exogenous shocks and would stabilize the economy. On the other hand, it would provide social protection and a direct link between the EU and European citizens. Conflicts arose when other economists from an ordoliberal tradition emphasized negative macroeconomic effects, such as permanent transfers between member states and moral hazard, while many member states and the ETUC feared the replacement of national unemployment schemes.
3. When first drafted in 2015, the EPSR, too, aimed to subvert the dominance of macroeconomics and fiscal consolidation in EU governance by invoking social rights. The opposition forces were like the first two cases (employer organisations,

parts of the political centre-right, and Nordic member states), yet it was a top-down initiative, coming from Commission President Juncker and a dedicated group of supporters with powerful positions in various institutions. Additionally, during 2016, new conflicts overlapped with the antagonism between economic and social policies. The rise of populism and the threat of disintegration became important issues for supporters of the EPSR. Thus, the changing shape of Europe's polycrisis and the symbolic and moral characteristic of a declaration of social rights slightly changed the central conflict in the field and thereby weakened opposition from the economic side.

This dissertation has analysed this conflict and its case-specific expressions from the perspective of relational sociology by studying the actors who operate in the field. Going back to the distinction made in Chapter II, one can differentiate between collective and individual actors. Collective actors play a role in the field, many of them have existed for several decades and the structure of their policy antagonisms contribute to the field reproduction. ETUC and BE commonly take opposite positions on the necessity of social integration. The relations between the employment and social affairs side (DG EMPL, EMPL, EPSCO) and their economic counterparts (DG ECFIN, ECON, ECOFIN) are similarly predictive. The EESC and think-tanks and research institutes such as CEPS or the Bertelsmann Foundation, too, are constant players in the social field of Social Europe. Similar to the EESC, the trade-union-affiliated ETUI and the OSE are decidedly pro Social Europe, while European employers lack such a research capacity. All these actors provide background knowledge, cost-benefit analyses, and model simulations; additionally, they organize workshops and conferences. The EUBS case study has shown that the selection of research partners by European institutions corresponds with the institutional policy preferences. It has also shown that Brussels-based think-tanks follow an interdisciplinary approach and have a moderating effect on debates. As such, collective actors provide the long-term structure, the basic framework, of the social field of Social Europe.

Nonetheless, the dissertation has highlighted the importance of individual actors whose activities go well beyond the organizational and institutional boundaries set by collective actors. They stand out for their specific European capital which stems from three sources. First, it includes professional positions which they had: in national politics in parliament and in government; in the European Commission, the Parliament, the EESC, or the European Council; in international organisations as the OECD, the IMF, or the World Bank; in central

banks, both nationally and European; in academia and in civil society. Their experience is widely recognised by other actors in the field, even by their political opponents who attribute them as knowledgeable, fair, or committed. They understand the inner workings of European politics better than most and their different experiences allow them to activate support networks wherever they are needed. Second, their social capital stems from the long-lasting political friendships that they have built. In advancing certain debates, they know how other actors may react, they understand the art of building coalitions, and they have an exceptionally good grasp of where to look and how to convince allies. Third, they share a common vision, a lifelong dream, and a task in their own life of a European social market economy, a European Union that is more than a common market, but a social union, a union of welfare states. This is the criterion of homophily – these actors understand being in the fight together. These key actors build bridges and moderate between different camps, their degree of betweenness centrality allows them to form coalitions others – could not have formed.

In the social-dimension-debate and on the EUBS, Andor¹¹² and DG EMPL, were on the edges of the European field of power which was dominated by the Troika in general and DG ECFIN Vice-President Rehn within the European Commission. Andor himself described this in his review of Rehn's book. Additionally, they lacked the European capital to build coalitions with likely allies beforehand. Trade unions and the EESC were irritated by the push for an EUBS and feared the threat of European competence overreach. The social-dimension-debate was an unsuccessful search for any form of alternative to the status-quo of austerity politics. However, it started the process of re-making, and field reproduction, as it got many actors involved in the collective search for a new social model.

The conflict between Keynesian and new ordoliberal economists was partly mediated by a third group of Europeanists. Economists in this group such as Miroslav Beblavý from the CEPS did not approach the issue from a precast ideological position in the “battle of ideas” (Brunnermeier, James and Landau 2016) whether the EMU needed an unemployment insurance, but they developed and modelled different variants which could inform the institutional debates. Thus, they provided the framework for the re-insurance solution, which

¹¹² Andor is an interesting study for the accumulation of European capital in himself. Since leaving the Commission in 2014, he has built a career in Brussels-based think-tanks, institutes and advocacy groups, so that by today he is much better connected than during his time in office.

was supported by brokers such as Frank Vandenbroucke, Jakob von Weizsäcker, and the 7+7 group, respectively. On a political level, the new Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Moscovici, strategically tasked the Franco-German duo Fabien Dell and Reinhard Felke to advance a possible compromise solution.

The actors who dominated the negotiation and adoption of the EPSR are so truly multipositional that it would not bring justice to describe them with their job title alone. Maria Joao Rodrigues was not merely a parliamentary rapporteur but the ‘mother of the OMC’. Allan Larsson was Special Adviser, yet what made him “special” was not this denomination but his status as ‘father of the EES’. Together, they formed a decade-long political friendship with Commission President Juncker, a long-standing and widely trusted advocate for Social Europe. This is their symbolic political capital – a very personal embodiment of characteristics, features, and experiences other actors could never have. Gabriele Bischoff and Marianne Thyssen were also important in rallying support from groups, such as Nordic trade unions or parts of the EPP in the EP, while eliminating possible sources for opposition early on. These actors had unified behind a strategy of moving fast rather than including peripheral concerns.

Concluding, this dissertation has analysed the re-making of Social Europe after the Great Recession from the perspective of actors and social fields. While the social field is defined by capital relations between actors, actors also can make decisions. This interplay between strategic considerations and individual, intentional actions and the formations of capital and its “objective relations” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97) is the “double constitution of agency and structure” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:1004): Actors’ Europeanness, their experience with soft governance in the form the OMC or the EES (and their perception that these were successful policy tools), their commitment to and belief in the necessity of Social Europe both built their specific capital and informed their agency. Thus, the eventual outcome – the social field of Social Europe after the Great Recession and its most important policy output: the EPSR – features both reproduction and change. The policy change has been discussed in Chapter V.II.1, yet apart from this, the EPSR introduced a new symbolic point of reference to the field. Since its adoption in November 2017, all actors in the field – optimists and pessimists, supporters, and opponents, alike – refer to the EPSR to criticise its weak legal status, demand political delivery on its social principles, or praise it as proof that the EU has in fact a strong social dimension. Insofar the EPSR has replaced Europe 2020, the EES and the OMC as the main point of references for assessing the state of Social Europe.

The question, whether the EPSR is an important step on our road to Social Europe or mere window-dressing of a neoliberal European project will be the manifest contested issue, the central conflict, of the social field during the 2020s.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AC	Danish Confederation of Professional Associations
ACLI	Associazioni Cristiane dei Lavoratori Italiani - Christian Association of Italian Workers
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
ALMP	Active labour market policies
AROP	At risk of poverty rate
BE	BusinessEurope
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union - Christian Democratic Union
CEEP	European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public Services and Services of General Interest
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail - General Confederation of Labour
CISL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori - Italian Confederation of Trade Unions
CSU	Christlich Soziale Union - Christian Social Union
DG ECFIN	Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs, European Commission
DG EMPL	Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission
DG EPRS	Directorate General for Parliamentary Research Service, European Parliament
DG GROW	Directorate General for Internal Markets, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission
DG JUST	Directorate General for Justice and Consumers, European Commission
DG REGIO	Directorate General for Regional Policies, European Commission
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund - German Trade Union Confederation
DIW	Deutsches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung - German Institute for Economic Research
EBRD	European Bank of Reconstruction and Development
ECB	European Central Bank
ECFR	European Council on Foreign Relations
ECJ	European Court of Justice
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs Council
ECON	Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, European Parliament
EES	European Employment Strategy
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EESC-SOC	EESC Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship
EIB	European Investment Bank
EMCO	Employment Committee
EMPL	Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, European Parliament
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
EPC	European Policy Center
EPP	European People's Party
EPSCO	Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ERDF	European Regional and Development Fund

ESM	European Stability Mechanism
ESF	European Social Fund
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation
ETUI	European Trade Union Institute
EU	European Union
EUBS	European Unemployment Benefit Scheme
EUCFR	EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei - Free Democratic Party
FEMM	Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, European Parliament
FEPS	Foundation of Progressive Studies
FES	Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung - Friedrich Ebert Foundation
FGTB	Fédération du Travail de Belgique - General Labour Federation of Belgium
FoE	Friends of Europe
FTF	Confederation of Professionals in Denmark
Greens/EFA	Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	Gauche unitaire européenne/Gauche verte nordique - European United Left/Nordic Green Left
HTW	Hochschule für Technik und Wirtschaft Berlin - University of Applied Sciences for Engineering and Economics Berlin
ifo Institute	Leibniz-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung an der Universität München - Leibniz Institute for Economic Research at the University of Munich
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMK	Institut für Makroökonomie und Konjunkturforschung - Macroeconomic Policy Institute
IPE	International Political Economy
IZA	Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit - Institute of Labor Economics
LO-D	Landsorganisationen i Danmark - Danish Confederation of Trade Unions
LO-S	Landsorganisationen i Sverige - Swedish Trade Union Confederation
MEF	Ministero dell'Economia e delle Finanze - Ministry of Economy and Finance
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MFF	Multi-Annual Financial Framework
MIP	Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure
MR	Mouvement Réformateur – Reformist Movement
MS	Member State
MZSP	Magyar Szocialista Párt – Hungarian Socialist Party
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OCA	Optimum Currency Area
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	Open Method of Coordination
OSE	Observatoire Social Européen - European Social Observatory
PD	Partido Democratico - Democratic Party
PES	Party of European Socialists
PSPP	Public Sector Purchase Programme
RRF	Recovery and Resilience Facility
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

SEC-GEN	Secretariat-General, European Commission
SIG Europe	Services of General Interest Europe
SGP	Stability and Growth Pact
SI	Social Investment
SIP	Social Investment Package
SNA	Social Network Analysis
SPC	Social Protection Committee
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands - Social Democratic Party of Germany
SURE	European instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency
SWP	Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit – German Institute for International and Security Affairs
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UEAPME	Union Européenne de l'Artisanat et des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises - European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
ULB	Université Libre de Bruxelles – Free University of Brussels
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
WSI	Wirtschafts und Sozialwissenschaftliches Institut - Institute of Economic and Social Research
ZBW	Leibniz-Informationszentrum Wirtschaft - Leibniz Information Center for Economics
ZEW	Leibniz-Zentrum für Europäische Wirtschaftsforschung - Leibniz Centre for European Economic Research

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Interview COM-EMPL4	10.03.2018	Brussels
Interview COM-LEGAL	26.06.2018	Brussels
Interview COM-SEC-GEN	28.03.2018	Brussels
Interview EESC	17.07.2018	Brussels
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Interview SOCIAL PLATFORM	03.05.2018	Brussels
Interview-EMPL1	13.04.2018	Brussels

ANNEX 2: Erklärung nach § 12 der Prüfungsordnung für den Promotionsstudiengang Sozialwissenschaften an der Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen

1. Die Gelegenheit zum vorliegenden Promotionsvorhaben ist mir nicht kommerziell vermittelt worden. Insbesondere habe ich keine Organisation eingeschaltet, die gegen Entgelt Betreuerinnen und Betreuer für die Anfertigung von Dissertationen sucht oder die mir obliegenden Pflichten hinsichtlich der Prüfungsleistungen für mich ganz oder teilweise erledigt.

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