

Expectations of the German Association for Public and private Welfare regarding the European Union on the occasion of the European Elections 2019: Perspective for a social Europe

The opinion (DV 18/18) was adopted by the executive committee of the German Association on 5 December 2018, following discussion in the specialist committee on "International Cooperation and European Integration".

Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.
(German Association for Public and Private Welfare) – the forum for the social sector since 1880.

The German Association for Public and Private Welfare (Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V.) is the joint forum of municipalities and non-statutory social welfare organisations and their social services in Germany, the Länder (federal states) and academia in all fields of social work and social policy. Through its experience and expertise, it monitors and shapes policy and legislation in relation to children, young people and families, the social insurance system, social assistance, assistance for the elderly, care and rehabilitation, social volunteering, the planning and management of social work and social services as well as international and European social policy and social legislation.

Transparency Reg. No. 14766442240-14

Inhalt

Introduction	3
1. Upward social convergence at a high level	4
2. Flanking structural support to boost social cohesion	5
3. Social goals in an overall strategy for policy coordination in the EU	6
4. Participation and democracy in the EU policy-forming process	7

Introduction

A unique community of peace, values and prosperity came about with the European Union (EU). European cohesion and the solidarity of its members have made it possible to integrate many states into a Single market and to stand up effectively for its social standards even today, in a globalised world.

A raft of EU regulations, namely the EU social security coordination, equality of men and women, anti-discrimination, work safety, working conditions and worker involvement, have resulted in “unparalleled levels of social protection and welfare”¹. The national social and employment policies of the Member States are today coordinated in a structured approach with a European focus, under the respective responsibilities. Just over ten years ago, the goal of a “highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress” was enshrined in Article 3 (3) of the Treaty on European Union (TFEU), as is the clause on a horizontal social policy in Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU).

Fighting social exclusion and discrimination, and promoting social justice, adequate social protection and social cohesion remain declared aims of the Union (Article 3 (3) TFEU). The work of the Member States in the Union, including in overcoming the consequences of ageing in societies across Europe, of service sector expansion, of the growing use of technology in the world of work and of the heightened migration of people from crisis areas and war zones outside the EU, is to be measured against this. According to an appraisal by the European Commission, however, the internal market, flanked by EU Structural and Cohesion Funds, has largely lost its driving force in EU-wide equalization of living standards². The German Association shares this assessment. From this, it draws the conclusion that efforts by the EU and its Member States in the social policy arena will continue to be needed in order to achieve the aims of the Treaty.

Even if successful in expanding employment, the goal of the current strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth (the “Europe 2020” strategy), of lowering the number of those affected by poverty in the EU by 20 million by 2020, can no longer be achieved. The number of such persons has in fact risen since the strategy was adopted, by 1.7 million. Accordingly, it remains a key concern of the German Association to position itself for a social Europe. Concrete specified targets at EU level for gradual achievement of this goal are urgently required.

From the perspective of the German Association, a social Europe is characterised by activities of the European Commission, of the European Parliament and of the Council of the European Union which collectively set powerful impulses for upward social convergence of the Member States at a high level, flanked by adequate structural support to strengthen social cohesion and with clear social goals in an overall strategy for policy coordination in the EU, with national, re-

Your contact at
Deutscher Verein:
Cornelia Markowski.

¹ Rome Declaration of 25 March 2017

² Reflection paper on the social dimension of Europe, 26 April 2017, European Commission, p. 8

gional and local interests together with the interests of civil society being broadly involved in the European policy-forming process.

The German Association is directing its expectations to the newly elected European Parliament and the new European Commission, as well as to the German federal government for its actions at Council level.

1. Upward social convergence at a high level

Just as a prospering economy in the EU enables people to participate in society and in the labour market, permanent economic success is based on effective and efficient social policy. The German Association is calling for the potential and the instruments set out in the Treaties³ to be exploited in order to deepen the EU's social dimension.

The German Association shares the view of the European Economic and Social Committee that social policy can equally make a contribution to growth and employment, whilst it should also be a pillar of EU policy in its own right⁴. The new "European Pillar of Social Rights" (European Pillar), as a guideline for better implementation of social principles and rights in concrete legislation, must therefore be understood as a supporting element of the future European economic and social model. The German Association supports the goal of the European Parliament, of the Council and of the European Commission in driving upward social convergence in the interests of improved economic and social cohesion in the EU5 and in supporting the Member States in this regard over reform plans. The German Association calls for consistent further pursuit of implementing the European Pillar, including in a newly elected European Parliament and a new European Commission in collaboration with the Council of the European Union. In doing this, the German Association draws attention to the fact that the necessary consideration of the different traditions and systems of social policy in the individual Member States is to be secured through upholding Member State competences and respecting the principle of subsidiarity and proportionality in the individual EU initiatives to implement the European Pillar⁶. This is reflected currently in the discussion concerning the framing of entitlements to release from work and remuneration in the draft Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers⁷ and concerning the development of an EU framework for national minimum income systems.

The German Association welcomes the draft Regulation for the European Social Fund from 2021 (ESF+), aimed at implementing the rights and principles set out in the European Pillar. The EU should further be used as a political union to give

³ Art. 3 (3) TFEU, Art. 8-10 TFEU, Art. 26-34 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Art. 4 (2) together with Art. 151 et seq. TFEU, Art. 5 (3) together with Art. 156 TFEU, Art. 5 (2) together with Art. 145 et seq. TFEU, Art. 157 TFEU, Art. 162 et seq. TFEU

⁴ Opinion of the German Association for strengthening the social dimension of EU policy – establishing effective and reliable welfare provision systems, NDV 2016, 65

⁵ Opinion of the German Association on the European Pillar of Social Rights, NDV 2018, 64

⁶ *Idem*, p. 66

⁷ Cf. also regarding this, Opinion of the German Association for Public and Private Welfare regarding the proposal for a Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers, NDV 2017, 492 et seq.

momentum to the Member States in fulfilling their public responsibility⁸ in the framing of their welfare systems and social services and in aspiring to a policy that promotes social investment. In its Social Investment Package (2013), the European Commission had already underlined that precisely the countries with the most efficient social systems were amongst the most successful and most competitive economies in the world, and called on the Member States to place increased emphasis on social investments. The German Association expressly welcomed at that time the European Commission's view in regarding expenditures for social purposes as sustainable investments in people and in social cohesion, and not simply as a cost factor.⁹

2. Flanking structural support to boost social cohesion

The European Commission takes the view that the ESF+ will be the most important financing instrument in the EU for investments in people, and a key factor in boosting social cohesion, in improving social justice and raising competitiveness throughout Europe. The German Association fully endorses this appraisal. It emphasises that precisely this instrument delivers considerable a European added value, complementing the social and employment policy successes of the Member States.

In the draft of the new structural funds from 2021, around EUR 760 million is allocated to the funding goals of employment and social innovation (EaSI Fund) as directly managed funding. Of the further EUR 100 billion for employment, education and social integration as part of the funding managed jointly with the Member States, at least 25% is to be used to promote social inclusion, and at least 2% to support particularly deprived people (combatting material deprivation). For Member States with above-averagely high youth unemployment, at least a further 10% is to be committed to supporting young people not in education or training (NEETs). Although these quotas are minimum specifications, the view of the German Association is that they should not be allowed to result in any restriction on flexibility in the use of funding to promote social inclusion. Moreover, taken over the lifetime of the Fund to 2027 and with assisted regions in 27 Member States, this sum will not be sufficient if the European Commission is serious about upward social convergence at a high level. In view of the fact that the stated goal for combatting poverty has not been achieved in recent years, that population ageing in societies in Europe is ongoing and relentless, and that the consequences of the European economic and financial crisis still continue to be clearly felt for the citizens in certain Member States, it is reasonable to ask how the funding to support people needing assistance and job opportunities can as a minimum be maintained, and ideally expanded. This is all the more pressing in that the EU is faced with entirely new challenges, such as overcoming the social and employment integration of refugees, adapting the fight against poverty to a changed world of work, and in the medium term the end of the period of low interest rates.

⁸ Opinion on effective and reliable welfare provision systems, p. 65

⁹ Deutscher Verein's Opinion on the European Commission's Communication "Towards Social Investment for Growth and Cohesion", NDV 2013, 298 f.

To apply the funding in the most practically oriented manner, the German Association is committed to involving civil society, in line with the partnership principle¹⁰. The partnership of the Funds is demonstrably a success factor in implementation of the current ESF and of the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) in Germany. It should be expressly anchored in the new ESF+ Regulation, in the same way as it is defined in the new umbrella Regulation merging the several funds and programmes from 2021.

In order to effectively align the structural support to the goal of upward convergence, it is necessary that the European Commission adopt effective measures to increase the quota for the drawing down of funds. This includes retaining the EU co-financing rates from the current funding period, in order to ensure that as many interested projects as possible are able to use funds from the ESF+ programmes from 2021. Experience has shown that projects are often unable to contribute higher own shares to funding. Added to this is the fact that the proposed funding rates, measured against the organisational and financial expenditure involved in applying and accounting for ESF funds, set too low an incentive.

3. Social goals in an overall strategy for policy coordination in the EU

In an overall strategy for policy coordination in the EU for greater growth and employment, clear social aspects need to be incorporated, in the opinion of the German Association, in order to achieve a social market economy that aims at full employment and social progress, or upward social convergence at a high level. The European added value results clearly from the fact that individual Member States in the Union cannot achieve the cross-border exchange with all Member States as well as a concerted, effective coordination of economic, employment and social policies in response to Europe-wide phenomena on their own.

The German Association argues in favour of continuing successful elements of the “Europe 2020” strategy in a new strategy, such as the defining of explicit social goals and monitoring strategic goals in the European Semester, including monitoring implementation of the European Pillar (“Social Scoreboard”). The German Association also expressly welcomes the planned closer linking of structural funding in the areas under shared funding management with the challenges identified in the framework of the European Semester. In September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations. A new overall strategy of the EU should reflect its goals (Sustainable development goals, SDG), in particular the goals on combating poverty, reducing inequalities and achieving gender equality, in order to drive forward implementation of the Agenda.

Against this background, the German Association is calling for the rights and principles of the European Pillar and the policy goals of the EU structural fund-

¹⁰ The partnership approach enables intensive participation by partners in civil society at the level of developing and implementing funding programmes at Member State level.

ing as currently proposed, along with the SDG of the 2030 Agenda, to be expressly made into goals of a new EU strategy to shape the European economic and social model post-2020.

4. Participation and democracy in the EU policy-forming process

European institutions continually need to fight Europe-wide for acceptance from its citizens. The instruments for incorporating the various interests, the voices of EU citizens and the democratically legitimised national parliaments during the entire policy cycle at EU level need to be further developed – particularly following the emergence from crisis management mode. In order to be able to recognise the representation of interests even more effectively, the German Association is calling on the European Commission to improve the possibilities for early input of interests and advisory work in the preliminary stages of new legislative measures.

In the opinion of the German Association, greater effort needs to be committed to achieving equal status for people with disabilities in the EU policy-forming process. Ensuring the participation of people with disabilities in policy matters is enshrined in Article 29a of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and thus binding for the Member States. With regard to the further development of the democratic processes in the EU, the German Association is calling on the European Commission to commit itself to the right to vote for persons who are currently still excluded from that right or who are subject to restrictions on their right to vote (in Germany, removal of the exclusion *inter alia* for people for whom a carer – with oversight in all matters – has been appointed is agreed in the coalition agreement and is currently in preparation).

Vital to the promotion or maintenance of the European Union as a unique community of peace, values and prosperity, including into the future, will be nurturing the willingness to participate in and to identify with the European project, particularly amongst young people. Linking in with the federal government's coalition agreement, the German Association emphasises the need for the EU to offer opportunities to find good jobs, to be able to move freely and easily within Europe, to forge friendships with others through dialogue, and to be able to experience European co-existence at a practical level. International exchanges facilitate knowledge of languages, promote intercultural competence and enable young people to find their way in a globalised world¹¹. The Erasmus+ programme is a decisive success factor in promoting mobility and opportunities to meet for young people in Europe. It creates European added value. The German Association welcomes the current proposal to boost the programme further and to strengthen it again in future. The Association is committed to its continuation, and to taking disadvantaged groups duly into account. At the same time, the European Commission is urged to foster greater aware-

¹¹ A new start for Europe. A new dynamic for Germany. A new cohesiveness for our country – coalition agreement between CDU, CSU and SPD, 2018, Chap. II.2, line 921 et seq.

ness of the opportunities that already exist for promoting mobility in school, in vocational training, in initial and continuing professional training and on university courses, where appropriate by supporting the national institutions for political education in the Member States.

Imprint

Publisher:

Deutscher Verein für öffentliche und private Fürsorge e.V./
German Association for Public and Private Welfare

Michael Löher, Managing Director

Michaelkirchstr. 17/18

10179 Berlin

Germany

www.deutscher-verein.de

info@deutscher-verein.de