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THE EU'S POTENTIAL FOR PROMOTING AN ECO-SOCIAL AGENDA

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Authors
Sebastiano Sabato (European Social Observatory)
Matteo Mandelli (University of Milan)

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Sebastiano Sabato sabato@ose.be
Matteo Mandelli matteomandelli005@gmail.com

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1. Introduction

Climate change, which is a large component of environmental degradation, is a key public policy challenge confronting contemporary societies. Largely caused by greenhouse gas emissions, it has (and will increasingly have) a devastating impact on the environment and on human livelihoods. Policies to address climate change (e.g. promoting the decarbonisation of production and consumption) will be costly, in economic, political and social terms. In terms of social consequences, the risk is an increase in inequalities (Koch, 2018). Indeed, while different social groups have different responsibilities and are impacted in different ways, responsibilities and impacts are indirectly proportional, thus provoking a 'double injustice' (Walker, 2012): groups less responsible for climate change will pay a higher price in terms of impact. The same mechanism applies to countries, with the poorest countries – less responsible for greenhouse gas emissions – paying a higher price in terms of environmental and social impacts (Koch, 2018: 34). Policies against climate change and social policies are significantly linked, and the relationship between these two policy areas can be seen from two angles. On the one hand, climate change and policies to address this phenomenon have consequences for societal well-being; on the other hand, Western lifestyle has an impact on the environment. This may call into question the very foundation of Western societies' developmental model, which has largely prioritised the pursuit of economic growth and competitiveness, often at the expense of other objectives, such as environmental sustainability and global social justice.

Policies addressing climate change – as well as social policies - are primarily a responsibility of the Member States (MS) of the European Union (EU). This said, the EU dimension of these policy areas cannot be underestimated, since the EU has varying degrees of competence in economic, social and environmental policies. Furthermore, the EU has implemented strategies aiming at linking and creating synergies – at least on paper – between these three policy domains.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this paper is twofold. First, we aim to understand the approach followed by the EU in order to link and create synergies between environmental and social policies (and economic policies). In examining environmental policies, we focus on policies aimed at combating climate change. Second, we analyze how EU institutions coordinate internally (intra-institutional coordination, with one another (inter-institutional coordination) and with other stakeholders (societal coordination) in this context.

We will thus try to answer two research questions:

1) What approach does the EU follow in relation to the linking of social and environmental policies?

2) What channels and mechanisms does the EU use to integrate its activities in the two policy domains?

This paper uses qualitative research methods. First, we conducted a review of the relevant scientific literature. Second, we carried out an analytical reading of key policy documents. Third, we conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with key informants, including officials from the European Commission (EC), trade union and employer representatives, researchers, and members of European social and environmental NGOs (see Annex 1). Finally, we conducted a systematic textual analysis of the Annual Growth Surveys (AGS) over the period 2011 - 2018. The AGS are key documents in the governance procedure through which the EU coordinates economic and social policies and some aspects of climate change and energy policies (the European Semester - see Section 5). The textual analysis was conducted manually. Through our reading of the documents, we identified the parts of the AGS in which environmental policies are mentioned. Then, we analysed those paragraphs, to understand if and to what extent environmental aspects are related to social aspects.

This paper is structured as follows. In Section 2, we elaborate the analytical framework of the research. In Section 3, we present five possible approaches to 'reconciling' and creating synergies between policies for attaining environmental (notably climate change-related) and social goals and policies for economic growth. After discussing, in Section 4, EU competences with respect to social and environmental policies, we undertake two empirical case studies of strategies through which the EU has aimed to link these policy domains: the Europe 2020 strategy (Section 5) and the Sustainable Development Agenda (Section 6). Section 7 discusses the governance mechanisms through which the actors pursuing social and environmental policies at the EU level interact. Section 8 concludes.

2. The analytical framework: the challenge of reconciling environmental, social and economic policies

The problems related to economic, social and environmental challenges faced by the EU and its MS are a classical example of 'wicked problems' (cf. Brown at al., 2010). These problems are complex and multi-faceted. They are characterised by interdependencies, trade-offs and unforeseen consequences. The issues involve a wide range of stakeholders, and any solutions require changes in personal and societal behaviour. As Nicholls and Murdock (2012) explain, 'intractable problems are seen as highlighting the failure of conventional solutions and established paradigms entrenched in intractable institutional settings across all three conventional sectors of society'. Indeed, as Caulier-Grice and colleagues (The Young Foundation, 2012:5) maintain, '[T]ackling these challenges is hampered in the public sector by silos, in the private sector by market failures and in the civil sector by a lack of scale and fragmentation'. Furthermore, the relationship between climate change

policies and social policies has a temporal dimension, raising the issue of intergenerational justice (Gough, 2017).

To illustrate the complexity of and the interrelationships between economic, environmental and social challenges we refer to the so-called eco-social-growth trilemma. This is an analytical construct deriving from the so-called triple bottom line literature (cf. O'Connor, 2007; Ravi Nayak and Venkatraman, 2015). This literature proposes a normative approach to the theory of sustainability. It postulates the existence of an economic, a social and an environmental dimension. These are conceptualized as separate systems that inevitably and dynamically clash in a way that makes it meaningless to treat any sphere, or even any relation between spheres, in isolation from the others (O'Connor, 2007).

Each sphere is a separate, yet highly interconnected, organizational form, characterized by elements of self-preservation and self-organization. Every sphere also relies on its own principles of performance and quality, which give rise to certain political demands. An issue is 'political' if there are actors who put forward claims regarding the issue itself, with the aim of influencing public policies (O'Connor 2007). Political claims regarding the economic, ecological and social spheres reflect the performance goals inherent in each sphere.

O'Connor (2007) adds a fourth sphere to the three identified by the triple bottom line approach: the realm of systemic regulation through political organization, i.e. the political sphere. The political sphere functions through institutional arrangements, principles and normative instruments. It is designed to fulfil a dual function. First, political actors representing different interests or segments of the population formulate and put forward specific claims or policy demands. Secondly, political decision-makers channel policy demands through institutions, procedures and conventions. Then decision-makers have to arbitrate between different demands with a view to ultimately supplying policy outputs.

In short, a vector representing the relationship between the political sphere and the economic, social and ecological domains would look like a bi-directional arrow. The political sphere is the realm in which inputs and outputs deriving from the other three spheres are managed. Policy demands may be conflictual, which is perfectly in line with the nature of politics and power. However, this raises the question of how to ensure the simultaneous respect of potentially divergent performance goals when designing policy outputs.

The eco-social-growth trilemma refers to the condition of actors in the political sphere. These actors, which may be either institutional or non-institutional, are confronted with the triple bottom line, i.e.

a decision about which of the performance goals arising from the economic, social and environmental spheres should be respected (O'Connor, 2007).

A key aspect of the trilemma is the relationship between social and environmental goals and economic growth. On the one hand, social policy has been designed as a distributional adjustment to free markets and economic growth; as such, it does not question neo-liberal patterns, it rather acts as a complement to them (Meadowcroft, 2005; Midgley and Tang, 2001). On the other hand, environmental agreements, taxes, subsidies, regulations and prohibitions aim to manage the negative ecological externalities of economic activities (Meadowcroft, 2005), hence challenging the traditional conception of unlimited growth (Behrens III et al., 1972; Arrow et al., 2004). In order for an ongoing growth path to be environmentally sustainable, production and consumption must be kept within the limits that the planetary system can sustain (Gough, 2017; Brock and Taylor, 2005; Meadowcroft, 2005). Economic growth, however, is necessary for distributional justice, since it delivers the resources that are necessary for ensuring the financial sustainability of welfare systems (Midgley and Tang, 2001). Seemingly, governments should design policies to achieve, simultaneously, objectives related to economic growth, environmental sustainability and social justice and well-being. However, simultaneously maximizing such a variety of goals may prove hard, especially as there are 'limits to growth'. For this reason, political actors facing the above-mentioned trilemma may end up prioritizing one objective at the expense of the others.

3. Five approaches to resolving the eco-social-growth trilemma

Despite the evident links between environmental and social policies, the impact of climate change initiatives on the welfare state is an issue relatively neglected by social policy scholars (Schoyen and Hvinden, 2017). We thus identify five main approaches to resolving the eco-social-growth trilemma. These approaches differ in two ways: first, in the role attributed to growth and, second, in the relationship between the social and environmental spheres.

3.1 Growth – centred approaches

Irrational optimism

The first approach is irrational optimism (Koch,2018: 35), providing a neo-liberal view of the trilemma. This perspective, which is associated with mainstream US Republican positions, is built on an assumption that fast growth, a free market and technological development will by themselves lead to the solution of the trilemma. They will do so by 'equip[ping] the future populations to cope with climate change, mainly through adaptation [...]' (Gough, 2011:16). In other words, according to this approach, the key priority is growth.

Green growth

The green growth approach also attributes a fundamental importance to growth; however, this growth must be 'green', i.e. environmentally-friendly. This is an approach promoted by international organisations such as the OECD, the World Bank and the United Nations (UN) (cf. OECD, 2011a; OECD, 2011b). Fundamental to this approach is the notion of 'decoupling' GDP from carbon emissions and resource use. In this perspective, unlike a pure neo-liberal view, an active role of the State is required, '...setting goals and targets, managing risks, promoting industrial policy, realigning prices and countering negative business interests' (Koch, 2018: 35). In this way, synergies can be created between economic, ecological and social goals. According to this approach, the growth of green sectors in the economy will bring environmental benefits and create employment opportunities ('green jobs').

Just transition

'Just transition' is an approach proposed by the trade union movement (cf. Galgóczi, 2018) and by the International Labour Organisation, which in 2015 published a set of 'Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all' (ILO, 2015). This approach could be subsumed in the set of perspectives endorsing sustainable development. Indeed, the ILO Guidelines extensively refer to the sustainable development approach, emphasising the 'greening' of the economy and green growth. As in the case of 'pure' green growth strategies, the just transition approach relies on the idea that the greening of the economy will be an engine to boost growth and jobs (green jobs). However, the concept of 'just transition' pays more attention to the possible adverse consequences of the green economy, for instance in terms of industrial restructuring. Thus, the focus of the just transition approach is on cushioning these negative effects, making sure that the transition to a green economy is 'just', i.e. that it leads to decent (green) jobs and fulfils the criteria of equity and redistribution. In a way, this approach can be seen as complementary to green growth and, as such, as the other side of the same coin.

3.2 'Balanced' approaches

Sustainable development

At the international level, the questioning of the traditional notion of growth (i.e. growth in GDP) started at the end of the 1960s and mainly stemmed from environmental concerns. The debate on the concept of sustainable development has reflected an attempt to 'put economic growth in a wider picture'. This debate originated in the '60s and '70s, when a number of observers raised concerns about the long-term impact of the Western growth model (exclusively oriented towards continuous

increases in production and consumption) (see, in particular, the study 'The Limits to Growth' (Meadows et al. 1972)). A starting point was the definition provided in the report by the World Commission on Environment and Development entitled 'Our Common Future'. In this report, sustainable development is defined as a development path that '[…] meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (United Nations, 1987: par. 27). Since then, the concept has been gradually widened and refined by a series of UN Conferences. The most recent of these initiatives was the drafting, in 2015, of the UN '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' and the definition of a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (see Section 6.1).

What emerges from UN debate is that sustainable development implies the convergence of three goals (which should constitute the three pillars of development): economic development, social equity and environmental protection. In UN discourses, these three goals are considered as interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Therefore, in this view, the objectives are economic stability and sustained economic growth (United Nations, 2012: par.11). However, economic growth should not be an objective *per se* but should also contribute to the achievement of the other goals. Consequently, some observers call for a new notion of growth beyond the neo-liberal paradigm: a 'new economics of sustainable development' (Sommestad, 2012) is, they say, needed.

Summing up, from this perspective synergies are possible between economic, social and environmental priorities and policies. Growth should be seen as part of a broader picture and should facilitate the achievement of environmental protection and social equity, for both present and future generations.

3.3 De-growth approaches

As described above, in sustainable development approaches, 'qualitative' growth replaces, to some extent, the traditional dynamic of 'quantitative' growth and technological progress, ensuring the compatibility of growth patterns with environmental sustainability. However, this approach has often been criticised as ineffective or unrealistic. Indeed, by relying on faith in technological development, no clear limits to quantitative growth are set. However, as pointed out by Hubert (2011: 53), '[…] there must be another way of thinking about and measuring economic development that does not confront resource limits. Such an alternative perspective is based on the premise that development can mean growth in quality, and that quality is not necessarily linked to quantity'. Important contributions to this view have been provided by environmental economists, among which the figure of Herman Daly stands out. According to Daly, the possibility of 'development' implies a 'steady state economy', that is '[…] an economy with constant stocks of people and artefacts, maintained at some desired, sufficient levels by low rates of maintenance "throughput", that is, by the lowest feasible

flows of matter and energy from the first stage of production […] to the last stage of consumption […]' (Daly, 1992:17).

These are the bases of a diverse set of approaches relying on the notion of de-growth (see Büchs and Koch (2017) for an overview). Summing up, the common starting point of such approaches is that the ecological crisis and the increase in social inequalities derive from a consumption-intensive capitalist model (Koch, 2018.: 36). Consequently, '[t]he common goal [of these approaches] is to re-embed production and consumption patterns into planetary limits through a decrease in material and energy throughputs, particularly in rich countries […]' (ibid.).
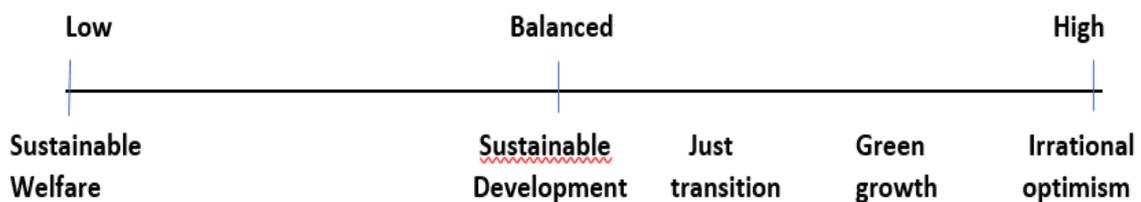
Sustainable welfare

The sustainable welfare approach (Koch, 2018.; Koch and Mont, 2016) derives from the de-growth perspective illustrated above. It focuses '[...] on the long-term implications of contemporary production and consumption patterns [raising] normative questions such as whose welfare should be represented in current welfare societies' (Koch, 2018.: 40). It is based on the distributive principle, calling for an equal distribution of welfare between rich and poor countries, between poor and richer population subsets within countries, and between current and future generations. In other words, sustainable welfare '[...] is oriented towards satisfying human needs within ecological limits, from an intergenerational and global perspective' (Koch et al., 2016.: 704). In this view, the environmental dimension is fundamental and the ecological limits are not only incompatible with economic growth, but also constrain social welfare. Western life-style patterns of consumption are incompatible with environmental protection. They should be made sustainable: once basic needs are satisfied, one should make welfare and wellbeing secondary in comparison to environmental sustainability (Gough, 2017; Koch and Mont, 2016). At the cornerstone of this approach is the premise that, once decent material standards of living are satisfied, human welfare mainly depends on non-material aspects (Koch et al, 2016: 707). As is evident, this approach calls into question not only the feasibility of growth, but also the fiscal and social sustainability of contemporary welfare systems. Innovative eco-social policies should be designed, based on the satisfaction of basic needs (cf. Büchs and Koch, 2017) .

3.4 Summing up

In the previous sections, we have discussed five possible approaches to resolving the eco-social- growth trilemma. We draw three key conclusions. First, as is evident, these approaches can be classified according to the role and importance they attach to the objective of economic growth. They can thus be placed on a continuum (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Importance attached to economic growth in the five approaches

Low		Balanced				High
Sustainable Welfare		Sustainable Development	Just transition	Green growth		Irrational optimism

Second, most of these approaches postulate that synergies can be created between economic, social and environmental objectives, and that win-win solutions are possible. Sustainable development, green growth and just transition approaches are associated with the idea that it is possible to achieve economic, social and environmental progress simultaneously. In order to do so, growth needs to play a fundamental role: it should be green, fair and compatible with high social and environmental standards. According to some observers, these approaches also require a specific social policy orientation: social investment (see Section 5.1.) This is particularly suited to preparing people for the changes in the production system required by climate policies, by providing them with the labour market skills needed (Sommestad, 2012). The sustainable welfare approach is the only one that distances itself from these win-win solutions, based on the ideas that the respect of environmental limits should be the priority, that economic growth is not compatible with these limits, and that social welfare should be limited to the fulfilment of basic needs.

Third, these approaches are not always incompatible. For instance, not only, as we said, can green growth and just transition complement each other; they could also be considered as constitutive elements of a sustainable development strategy. Furthermore, even the green growth approach and the sustainable welfare perspective can be combined, if the former is seen as an intermediary step to achieving the latter (Gough, 2017).

4. EU competences and governance in the environmental and social domains

In EU Member States, governance of the economic, environmental and social spheres and of the relationships between them is a responsibility shared among several political levels. Each domain has a different distribution of responsibilities. There is clear asymmetry of competences between the environmental and social domains, with the EU holding more power over environmental issues, whereas in most social areas EU power is limited to so-called 'soft law'. Article 4 of the 'Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union' (TFEU) contains a non-exclusive list of the principal policy domains in which competence is shared between the EU and its Member States. Environmental and social policies are included in the list. A number of institutional actors are involved in these policy domains. As for the European Commission, key responsibilities for social affairs lie with the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). Competences on environmental policies are attributed to the Directorates General for Climate Action (DG Clima) and for the Environment (DG ENV).

4.1 EU competences in social policies

The social dimension of the European Union was originally conceived as a counterpart to the Union's economic agenda, i.e. it was set up to regulate the social effects generated by the process of constructing an internal market, and, thus, it ultimately drew its legitimacy from the EU's duty to pursue economic efficiency (Daly, 2006). The so-called European social model (ESM), despite being a controversial concept to this day (Daly, 2006), could be thought of as a peculiar set of values, institutions, instruments and policy outcomes (Jepsen and Serrano Pascual, 2005). This model is peculiar to the European experience, because it is intended to promote the simultaneous goals of economic growth and social cohesion (Jepsen and Serrano Pascual, 2005). The EU social model comprises those principles and norms within and derived from the Treaties that create a common base of social guarantees for EU citizens. It also, however, includes programmes of direct financial intervention, such as the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund (Ferrera and Sacchi, 2008).

Social policies were originally among the MS' main competences. This division of competences has led to a separation of jurisdiction between the European and the national levels, based on a principle of mutual non-interference between the two goals of making (supra-nationally) and correcting (nationally) the market (Ferrera, 2008a). This binary track, i.e. delegating the construction of a common market to the supra-national level, while keeping social protection as a responsibility of the sovereign State, was possible and perhaps desirable through the 1950s, 1960s and until the mid-1970s. However, since the mid-1970s, scholars have talked about a crisis of the European welfare model (Ferrera 2008). In the context of this crisis, European integration has been one the main causal elements determining the alleged fall 'from greatness' of traditional European welfare states

(Ferrera 2008a). On the one hand, EU-derived budget-restraining financial requirements (especially for the countries of the eurozone) have hindered the capacity of the MS to freely manage resources to allocate to welfare provision; on the other hand, the process of European integration itself has challenged the principle of territorial closure upon which national welfare schemes are built (Ferrera 2008a).

When it comes to 'hard law' social instruments, the Union mostly adopts regulative measures, designed to serve as counterparts to economic integration. Examples of such norms are those concerning free movement of workers; equal treatment in national social security systems; health and safety at work; working conditions; gender equality and non-discrimination (Ferrera 2008a). The core of social security policies, however, as stated before, largely remains a competence of the MS. The EU has intervened in the social dimension over the years, especially via instruments of soft law – such as, for instance, the Open Method of Coordination (cf. Barcevicius et al., 2014)- and mainly through coordinated strategies, such as the 'Lisbon Strategy' and, then, 'Europe 2020' (see Section 5). Finally, EU social policy is unique for its commitment to social and civil dialogue, involving, respectively, the social partners and civil society organisations.

4.2 EU competences in environmental policies

The ecological dimension of the European Union can be interpreted as the set of institutional arrangements, policies, strategies and ideological frameworks that regulate environmental issues in the EU. Through the adoption of several Environmental Action Programmes (EAPs) and through various Treaty reforms (cf. Lenschow, 2015), EU institutions progressively assumed a more prominent role in environmental protection, increasingly decoupling it from the realm of communitarian economic policies (Fu, 2008). Since its early stages, EU environmental policy has been highly influenced by the emergence of the idea of sustainable development; this was deemed to be one the Union's main objectives in the sixth EAP and in the Treaty of Amsterdam, signed in 1997. Through its articles, the Lisbon Treaty provides a solid legal basis for EU environmental policy. Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU) asserts that the EU shall work for the sustainable development of Europe, making itself directly responsible for this goal. Moreover, the Treaty of Lisbon has added climate change to the main environmental objectives of the Union.

Closely related to environmental policy, yet gaining an increasingly autonomous political role, is energy. EU energy policy has followed a similar path to environment policy. Energy was (and largely still is) a core prerogative of the MS. However, the EU integration process has been regarded as successful in this policy field by many (Poiană, 2017), mainly thanks to MS' willingness to secure their energy resources. The EU's current energy policy should be seen more as an ongoing effort to put in place coordinated actions in the energy field, rather than as a coherent and robust policy framework. The main aims of EU energy policy are to achieve energy security at affordable prices,

to develop an internal energy market and a low-carbon economic system. Importantly, in recent years, the EU has adopted many non-binding environmental and energy strategies, defining coordinated governance processes, actionable recommendations and general common objectives. Examples include 'Energy 2020. A strategy for competitive, sustainable and secure energy' (European Commission, 2010a) and the 'Energy Roadmap 2050' (European Commission, 2011a), that set targets for carbon emission reductions, to be achieved by 2020 and 2050 respectively.

Finally, EU climate change policies have gained an autonomous status since 2010, with the transfer of competences in this policy domain from DG ENV to the newly established DG CLIMA (Lenscow, 2015:325). The EU has traditionally been particularly active in this domain, often assuming a leading role in international negotiations. EU actions against climate change have been mainly undertaken through the enactment of regulation and the definition of targets, with an important role played by the establishment of the so-called 'EU emission trading system' (ETS), created in 2003 and further amended over the years (Buchan, 2015). The latter aims at reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a cost-effective manner. It is based on the 'cap and trade system', i.e. the establishment of caps on the total amount of greenhouse gas emissions allowed from installations, complemented by emission allowances that companies receive or buy and that they can trade with one another as needed[1].

5. The Europe 2020 strategy and the European Semester

The European Commission launched the 'Europe 2020' strategy in 2010. This strategy aims to turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy – the three European 'overarching priorities' – characterized by high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion. In line with the three priorities, the European Council adopted five 'headline targets' tackling certain thematic areas linked to the strategy[2] and ten 'Integrated guidelines' (IGs). In addition, seven 'flagship initiatives' were launched to support actions at various levels of government, with the aim of achieving the headline targets.

As for the headline targets of the strategy, the European Union undertook:

1) to raise the employment rate of the population over twenty and under sixty-four years of age to at least 75%;

2) to invest at least 3% of GDP in research and development; to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20%, compared to the levels registered in 1990; to increase the share

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/ets_en
[2] Employment, Research and Development, Climate change and energy, Education, Poverty and Social Exclusion.

of renewable energy in final energy consumption by 20%; and to achieve a 20% increase in energy efficiency;

3) to reduce the rates of early school dropout to 10% and to increase the share of the population aged between thirty and thirty-four having completed tertiary education to a minimum of 40% of the total population;

4) to reduce the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion by at least 20 million.

Every target is associated with one or more indicators that measure the key variable attached to the target itself (Frazer et al., 2010). In line with these interrelated targets, each MS is responsible for identifying which objectives they intend to pursue and how, and for setting their own national targets, taking into account their peculiar circumstances and decision-making procedures (Frazer et al., 2010).

Two main reflections concerning the topic of the present study arise from an analysis of the Commission Communication on Europe 2020 (European Commission, 2010b). First, one should keep in mind that this is a *growth strategy*. Economic growth is at the centre, though it should be (ibid:5):

- Smart, i.e. based on knowledge and innovation;

- Sustainable, i.e. promoting a more resource-efficient, greener and more competitive economy;

- Inclusive, i.e. characterised by high employment rates and delivering social and territorial cohesion.

Second, when it comes to 'sustainable growth', the objective is '[...] to help the EU to prosper in a low- carbon, resource-constrained world while preventing environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and unsustainable use of resources' (European Commission, 2010b: 14). In practice, what is emphasised is that sustainable growth should enhance Europe's competitiveness *vis- à-vis* other global players; in particular, the adoption of 'green solutions' is seen as a competitive advantage for European industries. Policies aiming to mitigate climate change should, *inter-alia*, boost economic growth in all sectors of the economy, while policies for a transition to clean energy should foster job creation.

Europe 2020 is implemented through the 'European Semester for economic policy coordination'. Launched in 2011, the Semester is an annual policy coordination cycle aimed at synchronizing and coordinating the diverse instruments and procedures linked to the reformed Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and activities associated with the Europe 2020 Strategy. In a nutshell, the Semester is based on three pillars: (1) the reformed SGP (fiscal policy), (2) the Macroeconomic Imbalances

Procedure (MIP) (macroeconomic policy), and (3) the Europe 2020 Strategy, supported by the Integrated Guidelines for growth and jobs.

The Semester is an iterative process: every year, the European Commission publishes its 'Annual Growth Survey', identifying key policy challenges and setting out EU priorities. The MS then submit 'National Reform Programmes' (NRPs), detailing structural reforms implemented or foreseen in the domains covered by Europe 2020. These are subsequently used by the Commission and the Council of the EU to issue (non-binding) Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs), providing MS with policy advice.

5.1 Eco-social policies in the European Semester

European Semester priorities identified in the AGS have evolved over time (Sabato et al., 2018). In the first-ever cycle of the Semester (2011), the European Commission (2010c) identified three key priorities:

1) The need for rigorous fiscal consolidation for enhancing macroeconomic stability.

2) Labour market reforms for higher employment.

3) Growth-enhancing measures.

The 2012 AGS (European Commission, 2011b) had five priorities, including two new ones: tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis, and modernising public administration. These objectives were the following:

1) Pursuing differentiated growth-friendly fiscal consolidation.

2) Restoring normal lending to the economy.

3) Promoting growth and competitiveness for today and tomorrow.

4) Tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis.

5) Modernising public administration.

The above priorities remained unchanged until 2015 – the first AGS published by the Juncker Commission – when, as part of an overall reorganisation of the Semester, the Commission focused on three overarching priorities (European Commission, 2014a):

1) A coordinated boost to investment.

2) A renewed commitment to structural reforms.

3) Pursuing fiscal responsibility3.

Structural reforms identified in the AGS 2015 concerned: a) labour market and unemployment policies; b) pensions; c) social protection systems; d) the product and services market; e) framework conditions for business investment; f) research and innovation; and g) public administration.

5.1.1 Social policies

Going into more detail on the development of social policies in the Semester cycles, some observers have noted that, in a framework in which priority is given to fiscal consolidation, this policy area was neglected in the 2011 AGS (Sabato et al., 2018). Then, as said, tackling the social consequences of the crisis became a priority in 2012, while social and employment interventions are among the key structural reforms identified in the 2015 AGS.

In general, after a difficult start, attention to social policies has increased over the years, so much so that authors such as Zeitlin and Vanhercke (2017) have identified a progressive 'socialisation' of the Semester. This process concerns, firstly, procedural aspects and the distribution of responsibilities between institutional actors and, secondly, the outputs of the Semester. With regard to the latter aspect, some observers have pointed to a gradual increase of 'social' CSRs (Bekker, 2015; Zeitlin and Vanhercke, 2017), though this finding is highly debated in the literature[4]. In addition to this, new (social) policy initiatives have been introduced, notably the Social Investment Package (SIP) (in 2013) and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) (European Commission, 2017a).

The SIP aims to provide '[…] a policy framework for redirecting Member States' policies […] towards social investment throughout life […]' (European Commission 2013a: 3), thus contributing to the achievement of the objectives of Europe 2020. Social investment can be understood as a paradigm for reforming welfare systems, based on a specific vision for social policy: instead of a burden to growth (as in a neoliberal view), social policy, if approached as social investment, can be a productive factor contributing to economic growth, job creation and competitiveness (Morel et al. 2012: 2). For this to be the case, priority should be given to policies *preparing* people to cope with challenges arising at various stages of their lives (rather than simply *repairing* the consequences of adverse circumstances). Examples include policies facilitating human capital development (e.g. early

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[3] As can be seen, fiscal discipline remains a constant priority over the years, though the wording changes from 'fiscal consolidation' (2011) to 'growth-friendly fiscal consolidation' (2012), to 'fiscal responsibility' (2015).

[4] Indeed, the fact that a CSR concerns the social domain does not automatically mean that it is 'pro-social'. At least in the first cycles of the Semester, most social CSRs treated social policies as an 'adjustment factor' to restore growth and competitiveness.

childhood education and care), the efficient use of human capital (e.g. reconciliation of working-family life, active labour market policies), and integration of excluded groups into the labour market (Morel et al. 2012: 2). This said, the SIP is a social policy framework: there are no references made to integration of social and environmental policies.

The EPSR (Sabato and Vanhercke, 2017; Sabato and Corti, 2018) is meant to be '[…] a reference framework to screen the employment and social performance of participating Member States, to drive reforms at national level and, more specifically, to serve as a compass for renewed convergence within the euro area' (European Commission 2016c:7). In a nutshell, the Pillar is made up of 20 rights and principles organised around three Chapters – 'Equal opportunities and access to the labour market'; 'Fair working conditions'; and 'Social protection and inclusion'. It is intended to set the direction of EU and MS' social policies. As for the connection between social and environmental policies, principle 20 of the EPSR is particularly interesting, stating that 'Everyone has the right to access essential services of good quality, including water, sanitation, energy, transport, financial services and digital communications. Support for access to such services shall be available for those in need' (European Commission, 2017).

5.1.2 Environmental (climate change-related) policies

As seen at the beginning of this Section, policies against environmental degradation (in particular, against climate change) have never explicitly been among the key priorities of the Semester's AGSs. This said, a (limited) number of references are made to this policy area, although far fewer than are made to macro-economic, fiscal and social policies.

A textual analysis of the climate/environment-related messages in the AGSs from 2011 to 2018 (Table 1) reveals a downwards trend.

Table 1.   Climate/environment – related paragraphs AGS 2011-2018

AGS (year)	No. of paragraphs
2011	4
2012	3
2013	2
2014	5
2015	2
2016	1
2017	2
2018	1

Source: authors' elaboration from European Commission 2010c, 2011b, 2012, 2013b, 2014a, 2015b, 2016d, 2017b.

More specifically, the key themes/messages emerging from the various AGSs are:

- Eliminate *environmentally harmful subsidies*, when eliminating unjustified subsidies, to increase competition (AGS 2011; AGS 2012; AGS 2013; AGS 2014; AGS 2015).
- *Shifting taxation* away from labour (so as to create new employment opportunities) towards a taxation model that is less detrimental to growth (including environmental taxation) (AGS 2011; AGS 2012; AGS 2013; AGS 2014).
- Devoting new sources of national revenue (e.g. auctioning of CO_2 emission allowances) to supporting growth-friendly expenditure patterns, including *green growth* measures (AGS 2012).
- Developing initiatives that facilitate the development of sectors with the highest employment potential, including *low-carbon, resource-efficient* jobs *('green jobs')* (AGS 2012).
- Enacting more ambitious *energy efficiency renovation programmes* that could bring about considerable savings and job creation (in addition to environmental benefits) (AGS 2013; AGS 2016)
- Increase longer-term *investment in energy and climate actions*, also considering the needs of the most vulnerable (AGS 2014).
- Pay attention to policies with a high growth potential in the framework of the *green economy*, such as waste and water management (AGS 2014; AGS 2017).
- Enacting structural reforms in the *energy market (*AGS 2015).
- Promoting the *circular economy* (see Annex 3), which will create new jobs in some service sectors. Particular attention should be paid to green public procurement, investment in waste and water infrastructure, sustainable construction, energy and climate-related investment (AGS 2016; AGS 2017).

These messages reveal an understanding of climate change policies that is mostly oriented towards the green growth approach. The Commission points to the capacity of these policies to preserve the environment. However, emphasis is placed on their contribution to growth, productivity, competitiveness and job creation. Significantly, when referring to the ratification of the Paris climate change agreement, the Commission immediately makes it clear that '[it] will create further new opportunities for EU business' (European Commission, 2017b: 9).

6. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals

Apart from the EU, the most prominent international organization promoting sustainable strategies among its members is the United Nations (UN). In 2015, the UN launched the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable development', which was adopted by the UN General Assembly. The document contains seventeen *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) which, building on and renewing the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), form a coordination framework applicable to the following fifteen years.

The Agenda is a plan to transform the world through a sustainable pathway of development, i.e. by simultaneously promoting human well-being, economic prosperity and environmental protection (Pradhan et al., 2017). The aim of the Agenda is to stimulate collaborative actions by UN countries and other stakeholders, with a view to ending poverty and promoting sustainable development (United Nations, 2015), while at the same time helping to build just, peaceful, inclusive societies, as well as to grant environmental protection.

The action plan is organized around three interconnected goals: people, planet and prosperity. The first dimension refers to the commitment to end poverty and hunger, recognized as today's greatest global challenge, as well as to ensure access to equal, dignified and healthy opportunities to all (United Nations, 2015). The second goal refers to the fight against environmental degradation and, specifically, against climate change, as well as to the promotion of sustainable consumption, production and natural resources management (ibid.). Finally, promoting prosperity means endorsing a model of growth that 'ensure[s] that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature' (United Nations, 2015: 5). The UN also promotes world peace and the strengthening of global solidarity and partnerships, which are seen as necessary preconditions to supplement its sustainable agenda (United Nations, 2015).

As stated, the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' includes seventeen *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) (Annex 2). The SDGs are meant to cover and strike a balance between all three dimensions of sustainability. They build on the previous MDGs, with a view to progressing towards the goals that the MDGs did not manage to achieve in their entirety (United Nations, 2015). The SDGs are to be reached by 2030 at the global level, working towards 'human dignity, stability, a healthy planet, fair and resilient societies and prosperous economies' (European Commission, 2016b: 3). The goals are associated with 169 targets, specified in qualitative and quantitative terms, and these targets are in turn accompanied by 232 indicators, each one designed to monitor one or

more targets (Eurostat, 2017). Goals and targets are defined as integrated and indivisible, as well as global in nature, i.e. universally applicable (United Nations, 2015).

The SDGs are not legally binding: all national governments, of developing as well as industrialized countries, are expected to take ownership of the goals themselves, reflecting shared responsibility. They are to ensure their effective implementation, by putting in place adequate national frameworks to translate and monitor them, i.e. by ensuring progress and accountability (United Nations, 2015). Meeting such global goals requires similarly globally developed partnerships between national governments and relevant stakeholders, to mobilise the financial and non-financial resources necessary for the implementation of the SDGs. The monitoring of the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' can be carried out at the national, regional, supranational or thematic level and is coordinated by the High-level Political Forum created in 2012. Reviews and follow-ups have to be voluntary, state-led and participative, i.e. involving relevant stakeholders. States are free to adopt national indicators in addition to those in the Agenda.

6.1 The EU and the 2030 Agenda

Even before it was adopted, the EU showed great commitment to the mission of the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', contributing various position papers to the global debate (Eurostat, 2017). The Agenda was only the most recent step in the history of EU engagement with sustainable development strategies. This started in 1997, with the inclusion of sustainable development as an objective in EU Treaties, and culminated in 2001, with the adoption of the *EU Sustainable Development Strategy*, which was released in 2001 and renewed in 2006 and 2009 (European Commission, 2016 b).

A Commission Communication issued in 2016 (European Commission, 2016a) explains how the EU is implementing the 2030 Agenda. The Communication makes it clear that the main governance tool for implementing the Agenda is the Europe 2020 strategy and, consistently, it immediately (ibid:2) refers to the notion of 'inclusive and sustainable growth' as well as the need to implement 'responsible fiscal policies'. Challenges such as the transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient economy are presented as 'opportunities for new business and new jobs' (ibid.). The Communication thus presents already existing initiatives as the way to implement the 17 SDGs, including overarching strategy, sectoral policies and EU funds (European Commission, 2016a; 2016b). In the Communication, particular attention is devoted to the circular economy (see Annex 3), which, according to the Commission, is linked to the implementation of 8 SDGs (no. 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). According to the Commission, the 2030 Agenda has already been included in the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission, 2016a: 15).

With respect to the cross-sectoral integration of the environmental and social SDGs in EU policy, the European Commission recognizes that

> 'sustainable development requires a holistic and cross-sector policy approach to ensure that economic, social and environmental challenges are addressed together. Hence, ultimately sustainable development is an issue of governance and requires the right instruments to ensure policy coherence, across thematic areas as well as between the EU's external action and its other policies' (European Commission 2016b: 14, italics added).

Importantly, the Commission specifies that, in order to ensure policy coherence in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it aims to work through project teams, bringing together institutional actors from different policy sectors, so as to ensure the mutual reinforcement of initiatives taken in different fields (European Commission 2016b). Furthermore, to ensure the cross-sectoral mainstreaming of the SDGs, the European Commission undertakes to adopt better regulating tools, ensuring that every impact assessment is conducted in a participative way and taking into account all the three dimensions of sustainability (European Commission 2016b).

Progress in achieving the SDGs at the EU level is regularly monitored by Eurostat, which has a dedicated dataset on EU SDG indicators. According to the latest available data (Eurostat, 2018), in the last five years, the EU has made progress towards almost all goals, particularly towards SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy). However, available data are insufficient to measure progress on four SDGs, notably: SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 13 (climate action), SDG 14 (climate below water), and SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions).

As for the next steps in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, the Commission has committed itself to launching a reflection process on the long-term implementation of the SDGs, i.e. their inclusion in the next overarching EU strategy post-2020 and in the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework, so as to elaborate a 'Sustainable Europe 2030 Strategy'. A High-level multi-stakeholder platform was set up for this purpose, with 30 members, including representatives from academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, civil society, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions (European Commission 2018; see also Section 7). The first meeting of the Platform was held in January 2018, in the presence of the Commission's Vice-Presidents Frans Timmermans, (responsible for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights) and Jyrki Katainen (responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness). Interestingly, in an extract from his speech, the latter does not refer to the notion of sustainable development but to

'sustainable growth strategy post-2020'. A Commission Reflection paper, 'Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030', is expected for the end of 2018/early 2019.

7. EU level coordination of environmental and social policies

While in the previous Sections, we have shown how the EU tries to link environmental and social policies in terms of policy contents, in this Section we deal in more depth with the governance of this process, i.e. how actors involved in these policies interact and coordinate. We distinguish between three forms of coordination:

1) *Intra-institutional coordination*, i.e. between various structures in the same institution (notably the Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC));

2) *Inter-institutional coordination*, i.e. between EU institutions; and

3) *Societal coordination*, i.e. how EU institutions coordinate with social stakeholders, and how the various stakeholders coordinate with one another and within their own underlying network.

7.1 Intra- and inter-institutional coordination

We interviewed several stakeholders. One of the images they often used to illustrate the coordination between different Commission DGs dealing with social, economic and environmental affairs is that of 'silos'. Silos indicate that, sometimes, the external perception is that each of the various DGs responsible for social (DG EMPL) and environmental (DG Clima and DG ENV) policies follow their own work programme and initiatives and try to achieve their own targets and objectives, with a low level of interaction with other DGs. Obviously, this would impede effective coordination between these policies and would decrease policy coherence. According to the same interviewees, however, the situation has improved since the appointment of the Juncker Commission: coordination is now stronger than in the past. However, to a significant extent, the logic of silos persists.

Obviously, the perception 'from the inside' is different. Interviewees within the Commission, the Parliament and the EESC have pointed to the existence of mechanisms for internal coordination within their institutions, although they recognise that these can obviously be improved.

As for the Commission, coordination between DGs responsible for social, environmental, and economic affairs appears to be rather *ad-hoc*. Coordination, instead of relating to overarching strategies, concerns specific initiatives or pieces of legislation falling within the domains of more

than one DG. In these cases, each DG may give its contribution. One example referred to by many interviewees is the work on the circular economy (see Annex 3). Another way to integrate environmental, social and economic concerns is the impact assessment procedure that the Commission performs on all its legislative acts. According to our interviewees, this procedure has improved over the years. In the past, each DG produced, for each legislative proposal, its own impact assessment on the aspects under its responsibility. Since 2000, the procedure has been reformed and, for each initiative, there is a single DG responsible for assessing the impact on various domains, in collaboration with the other DGs concerned. In other words, while in the past there were a variety of documents assessing the impact of an initiative on various policy domains, now there is a single, integrated, document. These procedures will be strengthened by the new Better Regulation Agenda adopted by the Commission (see Annex 4).

The coordination mechanisms within the European Parliament concern regular interaction between the various Parliament committees. Here again, this coordination concerns specific pieces of legislation.

One of the institutions that has set up specific internal coordination mechanisms is the EESC. The Committee has created a Sustainable Development Observatory, which coordinates the activities of the various groups responsible for environmental, social and economic policies. This Observatory also coordinates with the two other observatories set up by the EESC: the Labour Market Observatory and the Single Market Observatory. Furthermore, in order to form its opinions on more general and transversal issues, as was the case for its evaluation of Europe 2020, the EESC can set up sub-committees, made up of members of a variety of committees (e.g. environment, economic affairs and social and employment). It can thus be sure that relevant and cross-sectoral expertise is brought to bear on these issues.

As for collaboration between institutions, the information available points to the same pattern of ad-hoc coordination on specific initiatives/legislative proposals. Obviously, in order to assess the effectiveness of these coordination arrangements, i.e. their capacity to effectively take into account and integrate environmental and social concerns, in-depth studies on specific legislative proposals would be needed. This is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

7.2 Societal coordination

Interactions between stakeholders (NGOs, trade unions and business) and EU institutions reflect ordinary lobbying strategies and are justified by stakeholders' attempts to influence specific legislation. In this respect, the main targets of stakeholders are the European Commission (in the pre-legislative stage) and the European Parliament. On some specific issues, stakeholders act in

coalition (an example often referred to is the Energy for All coalition, see reference to WP2 to be added).

In the past, attempts were made to build coalitions dealing with broader themes (i.e. with environmental and social integration going beyond specific initiatives). This was the case of the 'EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester' (EU Semester Alliance), launched in 2014. Led by the European Anti-Poverty Network, this coalition brought together 15 major European civil society organisations and trade unions. The majority of the civil society organizations were social NGOs, but two environmental NGOs were also represented5. The aim of the Alliance was to exert advocacy for effective inclusion of social and environmental policies in the Semester, while pushing for greater involvement of civil society. In order to do so, Annual Joint reports were produced, assessing the outcome of the Semester and providing proposals on the Country-specific recommendations. However, according to many observers, the experience of the Alliance was not successful, due to a lack of sufficient staffing capacity and financial resources, and to the poor commitment of some members.

Another example of societal coordination on cross-cutting issues concerns the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. As already reported in Section 6.2, a High-level multi-stakeholder platform was set up in January 2018, with a view to discussing and providing recommendations on how to integrate the SDGs and sustainable development into the post-2020 EU strategy. This multi-stakeholder group is made up of 30 members, including representatives from academia, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), businesses, civil society, the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Committee of the Regions. According to EC representatives, it is a truly 'stakeholder- led' group. The group is organised in sub-groups, each of them dealing with clusters of SDGs. The various Commission DGs participate in the meetings of these groups, but the overall coordination is in the hands of the Commission Secretariat General, thus ensuring cross-sectoral coherence, in an attempt to overcome the silo-driven logic. All in all, the Commission's level of commitment seems high, and the stakeholders interviewed seem rather satisfied with the platform, although they are somewhat puzzled that MS and European Parliament representatives are not involved in the group.

One last aspect to address concerning stakeholders is their difficulties in building common positions, not only between different organisations, but also within organisations themselves. Indeed, the various social actors (NGOs, trade unions and business organisations) should not be seen as monoliths, always having a common position. The transition to a more sustainable economy is a process that will have winners and losers. Some countries will be advantaged and others will be

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5   The European Environmental Bureau and Green Budget Europe.

penalised. Similarly, some sectors of the economy will develop, others will be radically restructured with considerable job losses. Consequently, both business and trade union organisations have to reconcile the different positions of their members when it comes to policies against climate change. As we have already explained, trade unions are trying to achieve this objective through the notion of 'just transition', which should help to cushion the negative social consequences of climate change policies. Divisions are more apparent in the world of business: large companies (in particular multi-nationals) are more open to the transition towards a greener economy, because they see new business opportunities in this change. Other business actors, and in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, are more concerned about the negative effects (read: costs) of this transition. Furthermore, the biggest EU-level employers' organisation – BusinessEurope – is totally against more ambitious climate targets, fearing a possible loss of competitiveness vis-à- vis other global players. Therefore, when it comes to linking environmental and social objectives and actions, the possible coalitions will probably be variegated, each of them including actors from different groups. The social partners, for instance, might possibly find common ground by bridging the gap between green growth and just transition strategies, but, as we have seen, this would in any case lead to intra-organisational tensions.

8. Conclusions: EU eco-social policies - ambitions and reality

This paper aimed to answer two research questions:

1) What is the approach followed by the EU in relation to the linking of social and environmental policies?
2) How does the EU integrate actions in the two policy domains?

The starting point of our analysis is that the EU actually endorses the objective of linking social and environmental policies and that, to a certain extent, an EU eco-social agenda already exists. The aim of this agenda is to establish a pattern of sustainable development in the EU. This objective is in the Treaty and emerges from the major contribution made by the EU to defining the UN 2030 Agenda.

The reality is, however, different and, to a large extent, this EU eco-social agenda lacks internal coherence. In the current EU overarching strategy – Europe 2020 – an attempt is made to include environmental (climate change), social and economic objectives and policies. However, the impression given is that progress made towards these goals is disjointed. It is true, on the one hand, that social and economic policies have been integrated into the European Semester, the governance arm of Europe 2020. However, the same cannot be said for environmental policies, with the exception of a few messages concerning energy policies. All in all, Europe 2020 is a growth strategy,

and macro-economic and fiscal policies have the most prominent role. Of course, growth, as understood in Europe 2020, should be, in principle, sustainable and inclusive, i.e. it should ensure environmental sustainability. Looking at how this notion of sustainable growth has been reflected in key Semester documents, one can conclude that the strategy followed by the EU is close to a green growth approach, i.e. underlining the positive effects that a greener economy could have in terms of growth, employment, productivity and competitiveness.

While Europe 2020 could be considered as an attempt to link economic, social and environmental objectives and policies, its actual implementation is seen by many stakeholders as a missed opportunity (Interview 7 – CSR EU).

When it comes to coordination dynamics, intra- and inter-institutional governance arrangements seem rather ad-hoc, i.e. they mostly concern specific initiatives and pieces of legislation. Structured arrangements for interacting on broader objectives and strategies are missing. The same applies, to a large extent, to coordination with stakeholders, although some interesting attempts are being made, as exemplified by the 'Right to Energy for All Europeans' coalition (see reference to WP2 to be added). Furthermore, it is difficult for business organisations and trade unions to manage the internal tensions deriving from the ongoing transformation of the economic model into a more environmentally-friendly one. One way of finding common ground could be to construct a better link between green growth and just transition strategies.

A more structured pattern of interaction between social actors and institutional actors (in particular the Commission) can be seen in the discussions on how to integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into the future EU post-2020 strategy. This process is raising high hopes and has the potential to increase the role of sustainable development in EU policies, leading to a more balanced consideration of the linkages between economic, social and environmental policies and objectives in the (future) European Semester. However, there are both technical and political issues. With regard to the former, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are global processes that need to be adapted to the peculiarities of the EU context (also in terms of targets and indicators). Furthermore, it will be impossible to include all the SDGs in the Semester: priorities should be defined. Finally, and probably most importantly, the political situation is uncertain, due to the upcoming European elections. It is yet to be seen how willing the new Parliament and Commission will be to continue on this path of integrating a sustainable development perspective into the next EU grand strategy.

Summing-up, while the EU does aim to pursue a sustainable development strategy, its approach, in reality, is closer to a green growth pattern, taking some account of the social implications. Growth is, and will likely remain, a key priority, thus making the implementation of de-growth strategies

impossible. There is no coalition pushing in that direction – an approach which would be electorally problematic - and it is unlikely that such a consensus will emerge in the near future.

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Annex 1 List of interviews

Code	Organisation	Date	Modality
Interview 1 – EPSU	European Public Service Federation (EPSU)	15/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 2 - ETUI	European Trade Union Institute (ETUI)	15/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 3 - EESC	European Economic and Social Committee	16/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 4 - FoEE	Friends of the Earth Europe	16/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 5 - ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)	17/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 6 – DG ENV	European Commission – DG Environment	17/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 7 – CSR EU	The European Business Network for Corporate Social Responsibility	17/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 8 - MEP	Member of the European Parliament	18/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 9 - EAPN	European Anti-Poverty Network	18/10/2018	Face to face
Interview 10 – MEP Assistant	Assistant to a Member of the European Parliament	24/10/2018	Via *Skype*
Interview 11 – DG EMPL	European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion	26/10/2018	Face to face

Annex 2 The Sustainable Development Goals

Goal no.	Content
1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Source: adapted from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300 (last accessed: 08/11/2018)

Annex 3. The circular economy

According to the circular economy model, improvements in environmental quality can only be achieved by increasing the environmental self-renewal rate, meaning the rate of natural decay of a stock of pollution, or the recycling ratio, i.e. the proportion of waste stock that can be recycled in a period of time (Chen, Chi-ang Lin and George, 2015). Institutions like the EU primarily endorse circular economy for its alleged positive spillovers on overall economic performance. In a circular economy, the value of goods is maintained for as long as possible, through minimized waste, resource efficiency and recycling. This, in the view of the Commission, can bring major economic benefits, contributing to innovation, growth and job creation. While it is reasonable to believe that the EU would not endorse such a vision if it was not designed to sustain economic growth, circular economy is still somehow challenging the current economic model, by impacting consumption and production patterns from a qualitative point of view. In the words of the European Commission: 'by helping to decouple economic growth from resource use and its impacts, [circular economy] offers the prospect of sustainable growth that will last' (European Commission, 2014b: 3). Indeed, circular economy is seen as one of the most prominent strategies able to concretely deliver on sustainable growth (ibid.): "[it] is an essential contribution to the EU's efforts to develop a sustainable, low carbon, resource efficient and competitive economy" (European Commission, 2015c: 2).

In December 2015, the European Commission put forward a package, amending its less ambitious initial proposal issued the previous year, to support the transition of the EU towards a fully circular economic model (EPRS, 2016). Within the package, 'the European Commission made four legislative proposals introducing new waste-management targets regarding reuse, recycling and landfilling, notably: i) the 'Waste Framework Directive'; ii) the 'Landfilling Directive'; iii) the 'Packaging Waste Directive'; and iv) the Directives on 'end-of-life vehicles', on 'batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators', and on 'waste electrical and electronic equipment'. The proposals also strengthen provisions on waste prevention and extended producer responsibility, and streamline definitions, reporting obligations and calculation methods for targets' (EPRS, 2016: 1).

Alongside the four legislative proposals, which were ultimately all adopted, and the main Communication, the Package contains an 'EU action plan for the Circular Economy' (European Commission, 2015c). The plan establishes a concrete programme of actions tackling all the phases of product lifecycles, with a view to boosting investments, removing obstacles, creating incentives to innovation and involving all the relevant stakeholders in these processes (European Commission, 2015c).

Furthermore, the Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee have also set up a 'European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform', to enable the engagement of and dialogue

between relevant stakeholders and to spread information about activities and good practices related to the circular economy. The two EU institutions have also jointly organized two 'Stakeholder Conferences' on the topic in 2017 and 2018 (DG ENV website).

More recently, in 2018, the European Commission has issued a brand new set of measures to underline the Union's commitment to circular economy. Within this initiative, the 'European Strategy for Plastics in the Circular Economy' is particularly significant. It aims at transforming the design, use and waste management of plastics products and at reducing the detrimental impact of leaked plastics on the environment (European Commission, 2018). This Strategy also proposes the complete eradication of plastics packaging by 2030.

Annex 4. The Better Regulation Package

The European Commission issued the Communication 'Better regulation for better results – An EU Agenda' in 2015, building on an initiative by President Junker, who wished to add to the ten political priorities he identified for the EU, with an initiative that would address how the Union delivers on these priorities and, more in general, on policymaking.

The Agenda 'set(s) out to ensure: decision-making is transparent; citizens and stakeholders can contribute throughout the policy and law-making process; EU actions are based on evidence and understanding of the impacts; regulatory burdens on businesses, citizens or public administrations are kept to the minimum'[6]. Therefore, the initiative is an attempt by the European Commission to take political responsibility for improving its regulative processes, tackling both new initiatives and existing pieces of legislation (European Commission, 2015d).

In order to pursue its ends, the Commission defined a set of principles and measures to improve regulation, built around three pillars: impact assessment, 'evaluate first' and stakeholder engagement (European Commission, 2017c). The first principle refers to a commitment to assess the expected and actual impact of any legislative initiative in all the various phases of the policy cycle, particularly when initiatives have significant economic, social and environmental implications (Alemanno, 2015). The 'Evaluate first' principle refers to a commitment to evaluate the benefits and burdens not only *ex-ante*, i.e. of new initiatives, but also *ex-post*, i.e. with respect to existing legislation (Alemanno, 2015). Finally, the Commission commits to stronger consultation practices and more openness, which would enable citizens and stakeholders to express their views about any piece of legislation over its entire policy cycle (Alemanno, 2015).

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[6] ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how_en

Besides the main Communication, containing the Commission's main objectives and strategy for this policy domain (Radaelli, 2018), the so-called 'Better Regulation' package also includes a complex set of instrumental or technical tools that constitute the policy dimension of the package itself. Specifically, the Commission has designed a set of guidelines, applicable to each phase of policymaking for new and existing legislative measures (European Commission, 2017c) and a toolbox, which is a single document of about 400 pages containing a template of methodological advices on how to implement the agenda in concrete terms (Radaelli, 2018). The toolbox was reviewed in 2017, taking into account the progress made in the first two years since the issuing of the package.

Politically-speaking, on the other hand, the strategy has introduced two main initiatives addressing the current EU institutional system, with a view to guaranteeing the full operation of both the principles and the policy instruments in the 'Better Regulation' package (Alemanno, 2015). These instruments are: the introduction of a Regulatory Scrutiny Board, which replaced the former Impact Assessment Board, and the creation of the so-called REFIT Platform (Alemanno, 2015). The former is 'an independent group of Commission officials and experts from outside the Commission. Its role is to check the quality of all impact assessments and major evaluations that inform EU decision-making'[7]. The REFIT Platform, on the other hand, is chaired by the Commission's First Vice-President and made up of a group of high-level national experts and a group of stakeholders (Alemanno, 2015), aiming to 'advise the Commission on how to make EU regulation more efficient and effective, while reducing burden and without undermining policy objectives'[8]. Since the initial release of the package in 2015, the three main European institutions (the Commission, the Parliament and the Council) have reached a political agreement, which entered into force in April 2016, in which they all signed up to the intention to improve the quality of EU policy-making (Official Journal of the European Union, 2016). Furthermore, as stated above, the Commission issued a new communication in 2017, reviewing the progress made in the 'Better Regulation' agenda and updating some of the measures in the initial package (European Commission, 2017c). Finally, the Commission has also focused on strengthening the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, by creating an ad-hoc task force[9].

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[7] ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation-why-and-how_en

[8] ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-making-process/evaluating-and-improving-existing-laws/refit-making-eu-law-simpler-and-less-costly/refit-platform_en

[9] The 'Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and "Doing Less More Efficiently"' has already submitted its final report, focused on how to better apply the two principles and, in October 2018, the Commission issued a communication based on the task force's recommendations (European Commission 2018b).