

Preface

Last year's *Social developments in the European Union* shed light on the main tensions affecting the integration project, while providing some insights on to how to move beyond such problems. The main issue we described was the increasing divergence between the North and the South of the EU. To address it, we proposed a more flexible EU political economy to tackle asymmetrical shocks, allowing the rich countries (North and Continental Member States) to spend more, thus boosting internal demand. This was expected to help the poor countries (Southern Member States) to start on a path of renewed growth.

In this book we continue this search for a possible strategy to lead the EU out of crisis. While the Brussels community of EU policymakers anxiously await the next European Parliament – with the risk of an increased weight of euroscepticism – many are debating how to bring the EU out of its multidimensional (political, economic and social) crisis. The most recent debate has focused on how to reinvigorate the social dimension of the EU and the Monetary Union. In the following pages we thus provide a detailed summary of the proposals put forward by experts and stakeholders for a new EU social toolkit. The contributors give a detailed description of both the challenges involved in revising the EU economic and social paradigm, and some options for a reinforced protection of social rights.

This year we see a complex, and to some extent ambivalent, picture. While EU leaders are struggling to restart the integration project and effectively address economic, social and political challenges, two agendas have been developed in parallel: some see them as conflicting while others are hoping for synergies between the two. The first agenda is very much focused on conditionality and the so-called contractual arrangements. The focus is here on the need to find new and more effective instruments to compel Member States to follow the EU budgetary and macroeconomic guidelines. Access to structural funds, for instance, is increasingly linked to the strict respect of EU macroeconomic

policy. The second agenda is keener to set EU-level stabilisers to make the EMU stronger and sustainable in the medium and long-term. These stabilisers are deemed useful for both economic and social reasons.

While the political landscape seems still largely hostile, the debate among experts and stakeholders has centred on a few key issues: the options we present here include the setting up of a European unemployment insurance scheme, the launch of a European minimum income programme, and a more effective social dimension for the EMU (with reinforced social policy coordination). They represent a breath of fresh air in the EU edifice and give us some hope for a more social type of integration.

This year's *Social developments in the European Union 2013* concentrates, therefore, on the potential for a more effective Social Europe. All the chapters attempt to identify an alternative path to help the EU to survive and pursue a more socially-oriented growth pattern. As was the case in previous years, the present edition consists of two parts. One of these examines the main issues at stake in the integration process, with an in-depth reflection on the EU's economic and social paradigm, and the other is more focused on the specific development of single policy areas (at the EU and national levels). This year this part concentrates on employment policy and the gender perspective in the EU social agenda.

The European Trade Union Institute has worked together with the European Social Observatory to draw up this new edition of *Social developments in the European Union*. Through this publication, we aim to contribute to the debate between policymakers, stakeholders and public opinion in general.

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