

Conference on Common Social Values &
Principles and Social Governance, 4.11.15

Common social values in the EU

Fran Bennett

(& on behalf of Sandy Ruxton)

(Conference organised by European Economic & Social
Committee & ESC of Luxembourg)

Introduction: context

- Aim → support LU PRES priority: to **deepen ‘social Europe’**
- **To complement other moves:**
 - IT/LV/LU-Trio programme: **social should be priority**
 - Commission President & 5 Presidents’ report: call for **social ‘triple A’**
 - Commission President’s State of Union speech: **European pillar of social rights**
 - Thyssen’s speeches:
 - **social issues should be at heart of economic policy**
 - **policy coordination & upward social convergence need reinforcing** (standards/performance, not ‘1 size fits all’)

- **Countervailing pressures :**
 - emphasis on economic/fiscal more than social (though moves to counter this are evident)
 - rising inequality within & between Member States ...
 - ... and shifts in public attitudes towards EU action
 - threat to improved social provision posed by topical debates on current asylum/migration crisis
- **Conclusion of *Common Social Values*:**
 - addresses some of these tensions, especially the first
 - builds on recent calls to deepen 'social Europe'

Overview of *Common Social Values*

- **Aim** → to outline:

- widely shared values
- principles
- recommendations
- ways forward on social objectives



within EU

- **Sets out:**

- Treaty provisions
- overarching social objectives
- recent challenges & developments

- **Main focus:** areas of EU co-operation in social field (especially via **social OMC**) & supported by **Europe 2020 Strategy**:
 - **Social inclusion** (combating poverty & social exclusion; child poverty & wellbeing; homelessness & housing exclusion)
 - **Social protection** (pensions, health & long-term care)
 - **Each includes:** shared objectives, agreed indicators, monitoring, mutual learning, peer review

Overarching social objectives & tools

- **Broad social objectives:**
 - Article 3 TEU
 - Article 9 TFEU (**horizontal social clause**): EU & Member States
- **Lisbon Treaty:** Charter of Fundamental Rights binding effect
- Shared views (**Council, Commission etc.**) on common EU objectives for social protection/inclusion **reaffirmed (2011)**
- **Tools include:**
 - monitoring
 - multilateral surveillance
 - thematic policy discussion
 - discussion of policy proposals before their introduction (informed by assessment of their social impact)

Bringing social & economic objectives together

- SPC 2012 → should **address social consequences of crisis**:
 - adequate social protection relevant to all should be maintained
 - employment/social protection enhance growth
 - mitigating inequalities is key in itself & for confidence
- SPC 2013:
 - AGS should **pay more attention to long-term social priorities** in Europe 2020 Strategy
 - **social impact assessment** is essential to choose right reforms; should precede Economic Adjustment Programmes
- Council 2014:
 - European Semester needs to work in **more balanced** way, to steer progress on all targets

- European Commission '**Social Investment Package**' (2013):
 - prevention/support measures addressing risks across lifecycle are **growth enhancing**
- Council (2014):
 - **coherence of economic & social objectives** necessary
- SPC/Commission services report (2015):
 - **need social protection** for high performance, highly inclusive, high employment social market economies
 - sustainability, efficiency and **adequacy** are important

Improving social situation: a widely shared priority

- Council (2015):
 - welcomed **strengthening** of employment & social aspects of economic governance
 - strengthen link between AGS & Europe 2020 Strategy
- **Gender (and other forms of) equality, rights, involvement of relevant stakeholders:**
 - all also central to key EU values (insufficiently prioritised?)
- **EU institutions' role:** complement & support national action; give framework to monitor & coordinate policy development

Social inclusion

Combating poverty & social exclusion:

- first target in Europe 2020 Strategy
- adequate income support, inclusive labour markets and access to quality services all important
- current focus on minimum income schemes + developing reference budgets for adequacy
- support into secure work key for long-term outcomes
- services should be accessible & of good quality

Child poverty and wellbeing:

- **focus of EU attention**, with development of coherent principles and planning/monitoring/evaluation arrangements (but no specific target)
- promoting wellbeing helps to prevent poverty
- *EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child (2011)*
- Commission recommendation 2013: 'Investing in Children' (including children's participation)
- crucial for future of EU; child poverty & wellbeing should be monitored & mainstreamed into all policy areas

Homelessness & housing exclusion:

- **integrated strategies required**
- housing affordability is key challenge
- housing costs overburden should be tackled
- preventing homelessness is crucial (3-pronged)
- European Parliament resolution on street homelessness (2011)

Social protection

Pensions:

- **adequacy needed for political (& therefore also financial) sustainability**
- matching increased life expectancy is not the only way to raise pension age; & longer working lives will depend on how adequately workers' needs are met
- gender should be mainstreamed
- closer examination of private pensions is needed, including tax exemptions

Healthcare:

- **need to ensure universal access & equity** and to secure adequate & sustainable financing
- prevention, & coordination of services, are crucial
- reduction of health inequalities is also a core aim

Long-term care:

- **increasingly proactive policy** necessary
- gender also key
- prevention & support for informal carers are important
- social protection is central for equity & efficiency: little/no protection means impact depends on resources/family
- European Quality Framework for social services (SPC 2010)

Conclusion

- ***Common Social Values*** outlines:
 - shared social **objectives**
 - how these were **furthered/challenged** in recent years
 - how they are realised in **more specific areas**
- **Achievements** include:
 - strengthened political **commitment** to ‘social Europe’
 - **agreement** on overarching framework & priorities
 - **influencing policy positively**, through EU co-operation in social field (especially via social OMC), Europe 2020 Strategy & European Semester, in range of Member States
 - **enhancements in** data, statistical capacity & indicators
 - in-depth exploration of policy issues: **mutual learning**

- Social objectives increasingly **linked with economic & employment objectives**, seen as integral to their achievement
- More **emphasis on social monitoring, peer review ...**
- **But significant challenges remain**, including poverty, disparities within & between countries
- Rebalancing to social in AGS, but **not sustained?**

- Essential to **maintain & strengthen social objectives**
- So need for **renewed commitment** at all levels & **strengthened governance mechanisms**
- **Mainstream EU social objectives** into all policy making areas (including outside the ‘social’)
- Systematic **social impact assessments** of all relevant policies needed, both at EU and Member State levels
- Develop **guidelines for involvement of stakeholders**

What next?

- **Areas for further work** to draw out common social values?
- How could values, principles, commitments in paper be used as a basis on which to develop **benchmarks**? ...
'Setting out a pillar of social rights, building on the EU acquis, in order to identify common principles and reference benchmarks, which can create a greater convergence of employment and social performance over time.'
(Commission President, 9 Sept 2015)
- ... and to contribute to **strengthening social governance**?
- In view of evidence and belief that **social agenda is critical** for future of Europe - & for its citizens' confidence in that future