



EVENT REPORT

Sustainable Development Goals vs European Pillar of Social Rights? Making two frameworks work together

Breakfast event at the European Parliament on 15th May 2018

On 15 May 2018, Eurodiaconia organised a breakfast debate with the title 'Sustainable Development Goals vs European Pillar of Social Rights? Making two frameworks work together' at the European Parliament, hosted by MEP Jean Lambert. The event aimed at bringing together actors from different institutions and backgrounds, in order to discuss potential opportunities and difficulties in merging those two initiatives in a single policy framework guiding the EU's actions of the next years. On the occasion Eurodiaconia launched its research paper, which takes a closer look at the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and opportunities of bringing them together in a strong overarching framework, accompanied by specific policy recommendations.

Welcome and Introduction

MEP Jean Lambert, the host of the event, opened the meeting by stressing that the European Pillar of Social Rights was a good way forward to make the European Semester more social. With regard to the SDGs, she regretted that it was still rather considered a development agenda for developing countries. She welcomed Eurodiaconia's initiative, as she recognises the many links of the work of the European Parliament on the SDGs and the issues of poverty and social inclusion.

Heather Roy, Secretary General of Eurodiaconia, presented Eurodiaconia and explained the organisation's involvement in the ongoing discussions around the Social Pillar and the SDGs. She welcomed that the SDGs seek to address poverty, inequality and to ensure that communities are built in a sustainable and social way. Eurodiaconia wanted to start a debate on a potential alignment of the SDGs and the EPSR and their implementation through the European Semester, because of a growing concern that both frameworks would proceed separate from each other.

Presentation of the Eurodiaconia Research Paper

Anne-Sophie Wislocki, Policy Officer at Eurodiaconia, presented the research paper *Towards a Social, Sustainable, and Equitable Europe: Integrating and Implementing the European Pillar of*





Social Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals and the accompanying Eurodiaconia policy recommendations.

She highlighted the Chapter 2 of the research paper, which provides an analysis of the thematic similarities between the SDGs and the EPSR, including a table comparing both instruments. It finds that there are significant overlaps between both frameworks, who are often addressing the same social issues. Chapter 3 of the paper then has a closer look to the implementation of both frameworks and in particular the European Semester as a tool to monitor and support implementation.

The Eurodiaconia policy recommendations *Joining forces for social justice and sustainability - How to make the Sustainable Development Goals and the European Pillar of Social Rights work together*, build on the results of the research paper and propose a five-step approach to bring both frameworks together. First, the EPSR and SDGs should feed into an overarching single framework or strategy guiding the EU's work for the period after 2020. Second, existing monitoring systems should be merged and based on a single set of indicators. Then, the EPSR and SDGs should be put at the heart of the European Semester process, to ensure that the social dimension of the EU and in particular social rights are at the core of the European integration process. The implementation should also be supported through European Funds within the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and a 'Silver Rule' for public social investment should be introduced to support Member States to commit to investments, which will help them reach the goals of the SDGs and guarantee the rights of the EPSR.

Panel Discussion: How can the SDGs and EPSR be brought together to form a coherent and comprehensive post 2020 Strategy?

Irene Wintermayr, Policy Officer at ILO Brussels Office responded to Eurodiaconia's presentation from a UN perspective, focusing on two key messages. First, she stressed that most of the implementation work of both frameworks needed to be done at national level. Therefore, it was crucial to ensure the coherence and complementarity of the implementation of both frameworks, which should not be dealt with separately. Second, in both frameworks/processes civil society and social partners should be closely involved and should have the opportunity and capacity to participate. While this was the case in some EU member states, there was still a lot of room for improvement.

Ms Wintermayr explained that the monitoring of the SDGs is currently done through 169 targets and about 240 indicators. In comparison the EPSR is much narrower, but can still help to build a fair and inclusive world of work. As regards the implementation and monitoring, she clarified that States are encouraged to develop national strategies and provide national reviews on their implementation. In 2016-2018 112 countries, out of which 23 EU Member States, have conducted Voluntary National Reviews and reported on their achievement of the sustainable goals. However, as the guidelines on reporting are voluntary, the States do not always report on all goals. There is a global indicator framework, but States are also free to use other indicators.

Concerning the EU/UN cooperation on the SDGs, she stressed that the EU has been very supportive in the development of the SDGs. In addition to that, there are regular briefings of EU officials by UN



officials concerning the current state of play. In those discussions the link with the EPSR has also been made. According to her, there is an awareness of the relevance of the SDG for the EU internal policies.

Finally, on a personal basis, she agreed that the two frameworks should be aligned under a post 2020 strategy and that sufficient funding is needed. She was positive towards the idea of monitoring the implementation process through the European Semester, but pointed out that it will always remain an economic tool.

Ruth Paserman, Deputy Head of Cabinet of the Cabinet of Commissioner Marianne Thyssen (European Commission) gave some insights on the SDGs and EPSR from a European Commission perspective. She explained that the Commissioners in charge for both frameworks are First Vice-President Timmermans and Vice-President Katainen, working closely together with all relevant Commissioners.

She referred to the Commission Communication *Next steps for a sustainable European future – European action for sustainability*, published in November 2016, which sets out how the European Commission is planning to implement the SDGs and contains several references to the EPSR. Furthermore, the European Commission set up a Stakeholder-Platform to discuss the SDGs and their implementation with stakeholders, including NGOs as well as business representatives. Finally, a reflection paper on the implementation of the SDGs will be published later this year and might also include some proposals on possible interlinkages with the EPSR.

Ruth Paserman stressed that for Commissioner Thyssen both frameworks are complementary and the EPSR is considered to be an implementation tool for the SDGs. While in her view the existence of different frameworks was not a problem, she was sceptical about the proliferation of indicators and supported therefore the Commissions approach in Europe 2020, as well as the Social Scoreboard to reduce the number of targets and indicators. Nevertheless, she recognized that one could question the choice of targets and indicators that was made.

In Ms Pasermans view, the EU funds were used as an important tool to mainstream social issues in other areas. She stressed that the Commission was committed to make sufficient funding available for the implementation of both frameworks, keeping in mind that Member States have the main responsibility for the implementation. Finally, Ms Paserman acknowledged the need to recognize certain expenditures as public investments, but also reminded the audience that also with such a “Silver rule” overall expenditures would need to respect the 3% deficit rule.

Masha Smirnova, Policy and Advocacy Adviser at Social Platform gave some insights into the work of the Stakeholder Platform, which includes stakeholders from NGOs, businesses and trade unions to advise the European Commission on the implementation of the SDGs. Among others they are providing input for the Commissions reflection paper on the SDGs. Ms Smirnova highlighted that the group of NGOs was advocating for a clear pathway for the implementation of the SDGs, regretting the lack of agenda for the period post 2020, while there were already discussions on the next EU budget. She advocated for a holistic implementation of the initiatives, alignment of the indicators, better involvement of civil society and real transformation.



In general, Masha Smirnova stressed that the principle of “leave no one behind” should be taken seriously and the EU should lead as an example. She considered the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) as a reform delivery tool and advocated in favour of a strengthened link of the MFF and the European Semester and national reform plans. Regarding the European Semester, she also pointed out that there needs to be more attention to the way recommendations in one area influence other policy areas. Furthermore, there needs to be more cooperation between different partners and sectors in order to make reforms in alignment with the SDGs/EPSR.

Questions & Answers

Several questions and comments were made following the interventions of the speakers. Participants were concerned about the use of indicators and targets and wondered about the use of indicators for the new ESF+, as well as opportunities to improve data on particular issues, such as homelessness and extreme poverty. In response to this, Ms Paserman reflected whether it was the right approach for the EU to reach targets or whether there should be more attention to quality. Ms Wintermayr reminded participants that from a UN perspective the EU was very advanced on developing indicators and while a small number could focus the discussion a wide range could provide a more complete picture.

Participants also highlighted the fact that investing in the implementation of both frameworks would allow Member States to save money in the long term and should therefore be more actively promoted. In addition to this they saw a need of improving communication on those frameworks to reach out to people working at the local level.

Conclusions

MEP Jean Lambert closed the event by reminding everyone of the tight timetable before the coming EU elections, but stressed the importance of addressing both frameworks across the European Parliament (EP) and across the committees. She hopes that the EP will be able to put down some markers before the elections and make the reference to the SDGs and the EPSR an automatic way of thinking.