

Jobs, Green Deal and Sustainability

By Simone Caponetti*

This paper aims to analyse the European Green Deal with reference to the effects it will have on the labour market. After describing this strategic plan for the period 2019-2024, the Author states that in order to have a just, green and equitable change, a multilevel approach must be pursued that takes into account equal opportunities and digital skills, professional mobility, the creation of new jobs and support for social enterprises, the promotion of gender equality, inclusion and equality, support for fair and decent work, as well as social protection. Important aid will result not only from the involvement of people in the green transaction process, but also from the support of the trade unions which, more than anyone else, can help to obtain the maximum profit from the merger between the environment and jobs.

Keywords: *European Green Deal; Labour; Sustainability; Green transition; Green Jobs; Union role; Labour law market*

The EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 according to von der Leyen: A New Paradigm?

On 20 June 2019, the European Council adopted the new strategic agenda for 2019-2024, singling out four main priorities on which to focus its actions. These dealt with protecting citizens and their freedoms; developing a strong and responsive economic base; building a green, fair, and social Europe with zero climate impact; and, last but not least, promoting European values and interests on the world stage¹.

This strategy does not clash with the content of the 2030 Agenda, since in both cases the content is diffuse and transversal to the various priorities already established. Indeed, the various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) included

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¹While Europe is focusing on its promotion activities, Japan is already talking about Society 5.0 with regard to the Internet of Things and the social impact of these new technologies, Realising Society 5.0, JAPANGOV, Society 5.0, which the Japanese government is aiming at realising, is a society where, through the Internet of Things (IoT), all human beings and things are connected, and a huge amount of information is accumulated in the virtual space (on the net) by means of sensors stretched in real space. Artificial intelligence analyses this big data, and the analysis results are fed back to human beings in various forms in real space». See, Ouchi (2018). The interdisciplinary literature on the subject is now extensive; there is no need to recall titles and authors. See also Tagliapietra (2019).

in the 2030 Agenda are explicitly taken as a fundamental reference and could be considered as suitable support for the latter strategy².

The framework of European strategies was further defined on 16 July 2019, when the new President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, presented the political guidelines for the 2019-2024 mandate, as detailed in the publication: "A more ambitious Union - my programme for Europe"³. This programme can be summarised in six points⁴:

- Delivering a European Green Deal;
- Encouraging an economy that works for the people;
- Preparing Europe for the Digital Age;
- Protecting the European way of life;
- Imposing (in a positive sense) European strength;
- Giving a new impetus to European democracy.

Particular emphasis is placed on the first point in the programme, the European Green Deal⁵. The President herself described it as the most pressing challenge among all the priorities. Dealing with the health of the planet, it brings with it the highest responsibility, yet also provides one of the greatest opportunities of our time. Its ambition is to transform Europe into the first climate neutral continent by 2050.

Regarding the issue at hand, the document also states that, although Europe takes pride in its economy and endeavours to make it stronger, it must be borne in mind that it is not the people who should serve the economy, but the economy that should increasingly serve the people. What has been lacking in recent years is precisely the social dimension of the economy and its reconciliation with the market. Efforts should therefore be made to steer the European Semester towards these goals to ensure that the economies of individual European countries move towards the sustainable development objectives⁶.

In material terms, each European Commissioner will implement the new strategy, adopting a proposal launched by ASVIS⁷, each ensuring the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in their respective policy area. The

²Indeed, the EESC notes in its opinion of 26 September 2019 that 'the EU's strategic agenda for 2019-2024 should have been based on the SDGs'. The opinion can be consulted at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019IE1561&from=EN>

³The completed document was published on 9 October 2019 at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/43a17056-ebf1-11e9-9c4e-01aa75ed71a1>.

⁴These can be further explored at https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_it

⁵For further details and implications see Asaro & Fiscaro (2020).

⁶Ursula von der Leyen - 16 July 2019, opening address at the plenary session of the European Parliament, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/62e534f4-62c1-11ea-b735-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-search>

⁷This can be read in https://asvis.it/public/asvis2/files/CSCCommissioneeuropeaASviS190911__1_.pdf

College as a whole, on the other hand, will be responsible for the overall implementation of the goals⁸.

The European Green Deal: A Focus for Reflection

On 11 December 2019, the new Commission presented the European Green Deal as the first key act opening the political mandate, suggesting the extent to which this issue lies at the heart of the current political bodies⁹.

Neither English nor any other language dictionaries provide a complete definition of “green deal”: Whilst we know that the adjective “green” is currently considered ecological, sustainable, and zero-emission (green economy, green growth, green jobs, green bonds, go-green industries, etc.), the noun “deal” – meaning agreement, contract, political pact/programme - is almost as familiar, at least since the 1930’s, when American President F. D. Roosevelt launched his "New Deal" ("new course, new direction"). That is, his economic policy programme aimed at halting the Great Depression in the United States and at the same time laying the foundations for a new economic order that would allow for a fairer distribution of wealth and greater stability. Precisely in order to fully preserve the meaning of “momentum towards a better future,” with reference to the quality of life inherent in the famous Rooseveltian expression, the linguists at European institutions have decided, in some cases, to leave the English phrase “Green Deal” in various versions (as in the case of Italy), instead of translating it, as in the case of Spanish (Un Pacto Verde Europeo) or French (Un Pacte Vert pour l'Europe) or, to a lesser extent, German (Ein Europäischer Grüner Deal) translations.

Von der Leyen's green plan is based on three pillars. The first, called the Just Transition Mechanism, benefits from a dedicated fund and aims to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the green transition for the regions most dependent on fossil fuels (thus pulling Poland into the Green Deal “bandwagon”). The second is InvestEU, the successor programme to the Juncker plan, which will

⁸Which can be read at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/comm-cwt2019/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-paologentiloni_en.pdf

⁹The expression "Green Deal" was coined by the Pulitzer Prize-winning American journalist Thomas Friedman (A warning from the garden, The New York Times), but there is also a United Nations report that, back in 2009, called for a "Global Green Deal". It was the American Democrats, led by the young congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who first presented Congress (February 2019) with a "plan" of economic reforms, based on the report of the United Nations advisory body Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which analyses the possible consequences of a 1.5 degree increase in global temperatures. Although the Green Deal was defeated in the Senate by the Republicans, once it was presented in the United States, it went around the world. In March 2019, in the United Kingdom, the Green Party, together with Labour, presented a draft bill for a Green Deal of its own and, under the impetus of the Paris Agreement and the wave of Greta Thurnberg's Fridays for Future, many countries started to think seriously about it. As has the new European Commission, which on 11 December 2019 presented the 'European Green Pact', a veritable 'Marshall plan for the climate' which, together with the long-term strategy to 2050, to be approved in the coming months, should put the European Union on course for complete decarbonisation. This is a coordinated action on several fronts, involving commitments at both European and national level, which will be supported by a vast investment plan, but which will have to be negotiated in its many aspects.

support investments in the EU from 2021 to 2027, at least a third of which will be for combating climate change. The third pillar is the intervention of the European Investment Bank (EIB) which, from 2021, will no longer support the use of fossil fuels and aims to double its investment in green projects from the current 25 % to 50 %, consequently becoming the European climate bank¹⁰.

Although not forming a true part of an actual pillar, the work within the Green Deal will be a driving force. Unquestionably, the main objective of the Green Deal is to protect, conserve and improve the EU's natural capital and thereby protect the health and well-being of its citizens from environmental threats and their effects. Additionally, it aims to strengthen the social economy, augment the employment rate in individual countries, and promote fair and decent working conditions, building upon the so-called green transition.

Much criticism has been levelled at the announcement of a 1 trillion Euro investment. It should be made clear, however, that this is not money that the EU will allot directly out of pocket (this currently amounts to €7.5 billion), but an overall calculation that aims to stimulate public and private investment for this amount¹¹. This is in addition to existing funding and the so-called leverage effect. Private investment will be crucial to the success of the European Green Deal.

EESC study on the economy "we need" for fair, decent and sustainable work

On 23 January 2020, with its opinion piece entitled "The sustainable economy we need"¹², the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) supplemented the framework of systemic measures that Europe should adopt with innovative considerations and proposals, by focusing on the criticism of the rules of finance and of GDP as the preferred indicator¹³. The commentary aimed at outlining the foundations of a European economy of well-being that would be sustainable and

¹⁰See EIB Investment Survey 2022. European Union Overview. In this survey, EIB analyses the share of EU firms seeing the transition to stricter climate standards and regulations as a risk or an opportunity remained fairly balanced (each around 30%), with nearly 40% of EU firms continuing to expect no impact from the transition. About 90% of EU firms have already taken action in this respect, with the aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. About 57% of firms are making investments in energy efficiency, 64% in waste minimisation and recycling and 32% in new, less polluting business areas and technologies. In 2021 alone, around 40% of firms invested in energy efficiency. Around 57% of EU firms see themselves as affected by physical climate change risks, with only a third having taken action to build resilience against these risks. While 20% of firms invested in or developed solutions to reduce or avoid exposure, 14% invested in or developed an adaptation strategy. About 53% of EU firms have already invested in climate change more broadly, and more than half plan to invest over the next three years. Compared to the United States, the European Union continues to forge ahead, both in terms of the share of firms that have invested and the share of firms planning, over the next three years, to invest in tackling climate change. EIBIS 2022 overview presents the results of the survey run in 2022. Questions in the survey might point to "last financial year" (2021) or expectations for the current year (2022).

¹¹Could, in this contest, re-update the problem exposed by Joerges (2010).

¹²The document in question can be read at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019IE2316&from=IT>

¹³This was already studied by Manfrin (2010).

inclusive, through which the adoption of a European ecological and social pact will give substance to the EU's commitment to the 2030 Agenda.

Based on an in-depth economic and social analysis of labour issues, the EESC has noted that marginal productivity gains have benefited the shareholders of large companies rather than workers. This has called into question the social contract, increased the inequalities, and undermined public confidence in public administrations. It may also be argued that a continuous demand for increased labour productivity has led to important criticalities. An exclusive focus on increasing labour productivity, without due attention to its environmental and social implications, could drive smaller firms out of business, increasing unemployment and exacerbating inequalities.

The "commercialisation" of life, which has undermined the social fabric of citizens, has also been decisive here. The characterisation of citizens primarily as individual consumers has burdened them with the responsibility for their choices without offering them affordable and accessible alternatives. The commercialisation of social life and the reinforcement of unbridled individualism have undermined the social fabric and contributed to political instability in Europe.

According to this study, strengthening social solidarity will also have beneficial effects on democracy. The fears of citizens regarding the climate crisis, social injustice, and financial malfeasance are now manifesting themselves in new and more pressing forms, as shown by the school climate strikes and other societal movements on this issue.

The study then moves on to indications of principle, recognising that the welfare economy should be capable of achieving the SDGs while ensuring prosperity. This should be achieved even under conditions of low or no growth associated with the economic recession or secular stagnation that many states are facing or are set to face, especially since the current global pandemic. One of the objectives that should be pursued to achieve fair, sustainable and decent work is precisely that of reforming the nature and quality of work. It is therefore necessary to transform investments and consider how to achieve lasting prosperity. It will not be possible to reorganise businesses and work without transforming investment, which is the basis of any lasting prosperity.

The bottom line is that there is currently no comprehensive and concrete review of the EU's monetary and budgetary rules¹⁴ to ensure that they are consistent with the objective of enabling the transition to a sustainable economy, including a review of current EU structures. The aim is to develop ideas and strategies to end the "growth dependency" of the EU economy¹⁵.

The EESC thus makes a strong plea to the EU and the Member States to raise awareness in their policy choices to reverse these imbalances.

¹⁴Reference should be made to Caponetti (2018). See also Joerges & Glinski (2014); Scharpf (2010).

¹⁵See the studies of Dyson (2014) and Rodrik (2011).

...and in Italy? The economy amid pandemic, work and Green Deal

Faced with the pandemic crisis now gripping the whole of Europe and beyond, the European Commission has developed an initial assessment for the European Semester with a detailed analysis document relating to each country, including Italy¹⁶. As regards the labour sector, the recommendations made to Italy for the European Semester (2020 stability programme)¹⁷ are to provide adequate replacement incomes and access to the social protection system, especially for atypical workers; to mitigate the impact of the crisis on employment, including through flexible working arrangements and active employment support; and to strengthen distance learning and the upgrading of skills, including digital ones¹⁸.

Given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, Europe has signalled to Italy that social safety nets should be strengthened to ensure adequate replacement incomes, irrespective of the employment status of workers, particularly those facing gaps in access to social protection¹⁹. Strengthening income support and replacement income is particularly relevant for atypical workers and people in vulnerable situations. The provision of services for social inclusion in the labour market would also be crucial, as would, in line with the promotion of a sustainable and inclusive approach, the integration of women and young people into the labour market.

Additional important steps Europe is asking of Italy include: providing liquidity to the real economy and investment in green and digital transition; ensuring the effective implementation of measures aimed at providing liquidity to the real economy, in particular to small and medium-sized enterprises, innovative companies and the self-employed, avoiding payment delays; frontloading mature public investment projects and fostering private investment to support economic recovery; focusing investments on green and digital transition, in particular on clean and efficient energy production and use, research and innovation, sustainable public transport, waste and water management and an enhanced digital infrastructure to ensure the provision of essential services. Green transition investments will be particularly relevant in supporting recovery and increasing future resilience. Italy is highly vulnerable to extreme weather phenomena and hydro-geological disasters, including droughts and forest fires. For this reason, Italy's transformation into a climate-neutral economy will require substantial public and private investment over an extended period.

¹⁶This is the Communication of 26 February 2020 which can be read in <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=COM:2019:150:FIN&qid=1551777809333&from=IT>

¹⁷Reference is to European Commission 20 May 2020 - COM(2020) 512 final and European Council 20 July 2020.

¹⁸See, Garofalo, Tiraboschi, Fili & Seghezzi (2020).

¹⁹In this respect, COM(2020) 241 final of 16 June 2020, reporting on the impact of demographic change, highlighted the impacts also on the world of work and skills, indicating in the Recovery and Resilience Facility in response to the very serious pandemic due to COVID-19, large-scale financial support with the aim of making the economies of Member States more resilient and better prepared for the future, in particular with regard to demographic change. The Communication can be read at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0241&qid=1594562540840&from=EN>.

Green Deal investments are also key to reducing the human health impact of air pollution in Italian cities, particularly in the Po River Basin. Infrastructure deficits in water and waste management, particularly in southern regions, generate environmental and health impacts that result in considerable costs and lost revenue for the Italian economy. Resilience to climate change is important for all infrastructures, including health infrastructures, and requires adaptation strategies towards this end. Addressing the challenges associated with the environment, hydrological risks, climate action, the circular economy and industrial transformation offer an opportunity to improve productivity while avoiding unsustainable practices. Therefore, investing in these types of projects could help create new jobs and support post-crisis recovery.

Relaunching the European Pillar of Social Rights through the Green Deal

In order to implement the fair and inclusive transition, indicated in the Green Deal as a fundamental principle, the European Commission²⁰ relaunched the twenty points of the European Pillar of Social Rights already proclaimed jointly by the European Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission on 17 November 2017²¹. This positions an action plan to implement the pillar, starting 2021. The actions address several of the SDGs detailed in the 2030 Agenda not already directly considered in the Green Deal. In the communication, the Commission emphasises the interrelationship between the Green Deal and the implementation of the social rights pillar, making it the main reference of the new European strategy for sustainable development²².

Indeed, taking the European pillar of social rights into account could be key to effective implementation of these new strategies. This is precisely what is needed to ensure that the transition to climate neutrality, digitalisation, and new employment is socially fair and just²³.

²⁰Through COM(2020) 14 final, 14 January 2020, Un'Europa sociale forte per le giuste transizioni. Consult at https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:e8c76c67-37a0-11ea-ba6e-01aa75ed71a1.0012.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

²¹This can be found at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/priorities/deeper-and-fairer-economic-and-monetary-union/european-pillar-social-rights/european-pillar-social-rights-20-principles_it. For a more detailed discussion: Sartori & Corti (2019); Giubboni (2018).

²²For more information on sustainable development in relation to the issue at hand, see Battisti (2018). See also COM(2020) 14 final, which relaunched the social rights pillar and also outlined guidelines for labour policies in a coherent framework that integrates the Green Deal investment plan and the Fair Transition Fund.

²³A just transition means that addressing both the employment and distributional effects of a shift to a net-zero economy should be seen as an integral part of the climate policy framework (e.g. the Fit for 55 package) and not only as supplementary corrective measures. These issues span many dimensions such as the distributional effects of decarbonisation policies, jobs losses and employment transitions, the protection of basic social rights and the inclusion of citizens and organised civil society in decision-making. See European Economic and Social Committee Opinion on Social dialogue within the green transition (Exploratory opinion requested by the Czech Presidency), NAT/864, 21 September 2022.

The European pillar of social rights could be a valuable tool in making the daily lives of citizens fairer, whether students, employees, jobseekers or pensioners, whether urban or rural, irrespective of gender, race, or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. The pillar aims to improve equal opportunities and employment for all and to ensure fair labour conditions, social protection, and inclusion.

Clearly, at the heart of these principles lies a commitment to placing people at the centre²⁴, regardless of the changes, leaving no one behind²⁵. To this end, the contribution of every nation state will be required. Operationally, an action plan from 2021 will be presented, that will make the rights and principles protected in the pillar a reality²⁶. The European Semester for economic policy coordination will undoubtedly act as a reminder and will continue to record progress towards achieving the pillar's objectives. Obviously, the Semester will need to integrate the UN Sustainable Development Goals, so that sustainability and the well-being of citizens are at the heart of European economic policy and governance, honing macroeconomic stability, productivity, equity and environmental sustainability. The structure of taxation should also support employment and growth, while complying with climate, environmental and social objectives. Inequitable taxation, including at the global level, would undermine the ability of countries to meet the needs of their economies and populations.

The Green Deal should be seen by national governments as a strategy for growth. This is a time of great change. Climate change and environmental degradation will force us to adapt the economy, industry, the way we travel and

²⁴For further details see Gabrielli (2016) and Gabrielli (2015).

²⁵Recently, the European Council, in its Conclusions of 24 October 2019 on "The Welfare Economy", highlighted that at the heart of the Welfare Economy are the interconnections between the European Pillar of Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda, emphasising their mutual relations for the benefit of citizens and economic development, while calling for their implementation in national and EU policies.

²⁶In the EU Legislative Priorities for 2023 and 2024 Joint Declaration of the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission, the three Institutions agree to give the utmost priority, in 2023, and until the end of the parliamentary term in 2024, to the following policy objectives on the economy that works for people. In the Declaration it reads that "we will increase efforts to boost competitiveness, secure growth and create employment opportunities for European citizens. We will focus in particular on young people and the development of relevant skills. We will remove the obstacles and burdens holding back our small companies. We will act to put forward an SMEs Relief package and to support and relieve businesses, including through easier access to capital and data, fast and innovative payment solutions, and streamlined rules on insolvency. We will continue prioritising the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Porto Summit declaration, and take further measures to ensure that the social dimension is taken into consideration in all our actions, including the right to disconnect and the elimination of the gender pay gap. We will work towards a swift agreement on the co-ordination of social security systems to support labour mobility, as well as on deposit insurance, sustainable corporate governance, anti-money laundering, and on a ban on products made with forced labour. We will give due attention to the review of EU economic governance to ensure it functions to support the EU and Member State economies and work to strengthen the capital markets and the role of the euro, including the digital euro, and complete the banking union. We will endeavour to achieve progress on the global tax reform. To support sustainable development globally, we will work towards swift agreement on the generalised scheme of tariff preferences, and a reformed customs code".

work, what we buy and what we eat towards an alternative course. The beneficial effects will not be long in coming, as this strategy is expected to create new businesses and jobs over the next decade, generating new and increased investment. However, it will also be important to focus on the centrality of people in the digital economy of both today and tomorrow, in accordance with the principles protected in the European pillar of social rights²⁷. The forecast is that in the next five years, artificial intelligence and robotics alone will generate almost 60 million new jobs worldwide, while many occupations will change or cease to exist²⁸. While it is true that the new technologies will eliminate jobs that are by now out of date, they have the merit of creating new job opportunities and making it possible to work with more flexibility. The problem, if anything, is to ensure that the new jobs are quality ones, and that people have the right skills to perform them²⁹. The digital economy cannot be based on the legal and social norms of the 20th century³⁰, and perhaps it is time to rethink social protection systems, in some cases guaranteeing them and, finally, adapting them to taxation rules so that everyone contributes fairly³¹.

Another factor to be considered when dealing with the European pillar of social rights is the demographic and urban change that is taking place in Europe. Due to ageing and urbanisation, many rural areas in Europe are experiencing a decline in population, and the gap between cities and rural areas is growing and can no longer be ignored³². Today we are living longer and healthier lives, thanks to advances in medicine and public health³³. As a result, new needs are emerging (care of the elderly, for example), but also new opportunities (the whole field of home and other care work, as another example). The 'silver' economy and the care economy undoubtedly offer many new jobs that must be taken into account, while at the same time enabling older people to remain active and receiving the care they need³⁴.

²⁷For an economy that takes account of social rights, see: <https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2020/IT/COM-2020-14-F1-IT-MAIN-PART-1.PDF>

²⁸For an analysis of the issue of employment and unemployment due to artificial intelligence and Industry 4.0, refer to Caponetti (2018a).

²⁹Guarisco & Sacchi (2017).

³⁰Fray & Osborne (2013); Ichino (2017); Hadfield (2016).

³¹See Pessi (2013); Tiraboschi (2020); Lucifora & Origo (2017).

³²Factors noted as incisive by Tiraboschi (2020) states that these factors are widely understandable concerns, at least in a country like ours [Italy], characterised not only by consistent geographical and territorial differences, but also by rather differentiated conditions of access to welfare services or benefits provided by companies to their employees depending on the culture and size of the company, the type of employment and work, or the characteristics of the production or product sector of reference. See also, Caruso (2016); Zilio Grandi (2017).

³³Such are also the claims by Battisti (2020).

³⁴See Battisti (2020).

Criticism of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The issue of Effectiveness

Even after the proclamation of the pillar, however, there is still a strong need for regulatory legislation. The lack of the necessary balance continues to be felt in the relationship between collective social rights (right to strike, contractual autonomy) on the one hand, and the four fundamental European freedoms (goods, services, capital and persons) on the other hand, as well as the rules and procedures of the monetary union.

It is also essential to bear in mind that the seriousness of the current problems is due to the Euro crisis. The manner in which the Euro was bailed out is decisively irresponsible³⁵. Indeed, the policy put in place for this bailout constitutes the greatest threat to the European social model that has ever occurred in the 60-year history of European integration. Those Member States that have been particularly hard hit by the crisis have had to undergo drastic reform programmes, including severe austerity policies and labour market reforms³⁶. This is the case for states who have cut social benefits, where the system of collective agreements has been dismantled, or where public sector wages and minimum wages have been frozen or reduced³⁷. These measures have had catastrophic consequences on the socio-economic situation in countries that were already in crisis. It was precisely these countries that also had to contend with very high unemployment, a steeply rising poverty rate and serious economic problems. The remaining elements of the Eurozone's economic and fiscal policy construct, reformed in the wake of the crisis, are also socially unbalanced.

The new procedures, which include sanctions, are aimed solely at consolidating budgets and increasing competitiveness. The problem, therefore, is not only a deficit in the protection of social rights in EU member states, but also the violation of these rights by European policy itself.

In its current version, the pillar overlooks two central problems: First, the cuts in social benefits and the erosion of the collective rights for working men and women in the Eurozone Member States, especially in the countries under Troika supervision. Second, the conflict between collective social rights and ECJ case law with respect to fundamental freedoms.

A document that adheres to generalities while holding no binding force will not be able to counter the attack on the foundations of the European social model carried out by fundamental freedoms, competition rules, the European balanced budget, the Troika, and the deficit procedures, since these instruments are binding and can be implemented by means of legal action or sanctions. After all, collective social rights are already explicitly protected by binding European law – specifically

³⁵In this sense, we recommend the insights offered by Georges (2015); Giubboni (2015).

³⁶Di Majo (2015), text available at: <http://www.edizioniesi.it/dperonline/data/uploads/articoli/dima-jo-quo-vadis.pdf>, asserts, agreeably, that "the economic crisis has stimulated the production of a law 'parallel' to the Lisbon Treaty, characterised by a series of austerity policies that, connected to the consequences of the sovereign debt crisis, represent a terrible mix that, in front of a trend of increasing social spending, of the prolongation of the average life, of the low fertility and of the decrease of the population of working age, worsens the problem of the sustainability of the welfare state, concretising in a fall of prescriptiveness of fundamental rights".

³⁷Examples are given by Busch, Hermann, Hinrichs & Schulten (2013); Rasnača (2017).

by the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. Yet these protections have so far not prevented the EU from circumventing or even directly infringing upon these fundamental social rights.

For a more effective protection of social rights in the EU, further concrete and targeted measures would be needed. Firstly, the basic relationship between social rights on the one hand and the fundamental freedoms of the European single market on the other should be properly balanced through a limitation of fundamental freedoms by secondary legislation. Secondly, social rights could be protected and extended in a much more targeted way by setting concrete European minimum standards for various social benefits.

States would be allowed to deviate from the standards only upwards. For example, minimum replacement rates could be introduced for state benefits such as unemployment benefits or pensions. Similarly, indications regarding the guarantee of a minimum level of care are also conceivable. Depending on their economic capacity, Member States could be divided into groups with different replacement rates, but these should be subject to upward adjustment in the long run³⁸.

Finally, no possible solution to another important problem is proposed in the pillar. In the long run, the Commission aspires to establish binding rights of individuals vis-à-vis Member States. At the European level, this would obligate the Member States to implementing principles that they can, to a large extent, agree with. However, no European policies that would enable them to bear the economic burden of such implementation are envisaged. At the same time, the straitjacket constituted by the budgetary provisions of the monetary union forces them to strictly limit their spending.

Given these considerations, the best path towards a green, fair and just transformation is that of a multi-level operational structure³⁹. The author will explore these arguments in the paragraphs below.

Jobs, Equal Opportunities and E-Skills: The Crux of Education

One of Europe's recommendations to Member States is to focus on training, in order to better manage the increasing job turnover and new flexible working models. Specifically, Europe views the constant need to learn as the solution to these problems. Indeed, the skills acquired make it possible to take advantage of a rapidly changing labour market, while also being prepared to meet the challenge of the changes required by the Green Deal⁴⁰.

The point is not trivial, considering that too many young people today lack basic and digital skills, and too few have the opportunity to catch up after graduating

³⁸See Busch (2005); Dyson (2013); Dawson & De Witte (2013).

³⁹Alahuhta (2012).

⁴⁰In fact, it is estimated that half of the current workforce will need to update their skills within the next five years, for more details see: Mosso & Ghio (2020). See also, Arnaud & Schminke (2012).

school⁴¹. Only one in 10 adults participates in training and a million vacancies for ICT specialists are inhibiting investment in digital transformation⁴².

Education and training are thus crucial to achieving the skills required by the labour market. Member States should therefore adopt inclusive, high quality national education and training systems from an early age, supporting those who take responsibility for their own lifelong development throughout their careers through lifelong learning pathways. Alternatively, skills and experience gained in the workplace, through internships, volunteering, or any other informal context, if recognised and valued, could certainly be an important asset and opportunity for job seekers.

In a fluctuating and changing labour market, it is therefore essential that everyone has a broad range of key competences that provide a solid basis for adapting to changing needs. It is no coincidence that in 2018, Europe set out the eight European key competences, which are designed to ensure the full development of individuals.

The topic is of particular interest if one relates it to certain regions or to the difficulties employers have in finding qualified workers, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the backbone of our economy. The creation of appropriate educational pathways to acquire the relevant skills will be even more necessary in areas where the green and digital transition will take place⁴³.

According to an operational and pragmatic logic, professional education, training and apprenticeships can promote the employability of both young people and adults and respond to the changing needs of businesses. In terms of costs, the EU suggests that this investment, made with a view to retraining and improving skill levels, should be borne by the public sector, employers and the individuals concerned.

While no problems arise for the involvement of the public sector and the people involved, there may be reluctance on the part of employers. It is important to keep in mind that quality education and training can break the vicious circle of poor performance, a valuable argument to get practitioners and employers involved.

With regard to digital expertise, the Digital Europe Programme will support the development of digital expertise with appropriate instruments, including economic instruments, to enable the deployment of these technologies throughout the economy and to strengthen the e-skills of education providers. To support the actions of Member States, the Commission has updated the Digital Education Action Plan to reinforce the digital competences of both young people and adults to ensure that all educational organisations are ready for the digital age.

⁴¹Colombo (2019). The problem also applies to teachers' e-skills, see at Capogna, Coccozza & Cianfriglia (2017); Anderson (2001); Bocconi, Balanskat, Kamylyis & Punie (2013); Capogna (2016).

⁴²In fact, a European study states that more than 50% of companies that recruited or tried to recruit ICT specialists in 2018 reported difficulties in filling vacancies. This study can be found in more detail at https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/it/news-articles/-/asset_publisher/L2ZVYxNxK11W/content/the-top-ict-skills-in-demand-by-companies-tod-1?inheritRedirect=false&_101_INSTANCE_L2ZVYxNxK11W_backLabelKey=news.articles.back.to.list&_101_INSTANCE_L2ZVYxNxK11W_showAssetFooter=true

⁴³Pitzalis (2016).

Supporting Professional Mobility

Almost all citizens endeavour to find jobs or to move from one job to another. In some countries, this is possible due to a strong network or to the citizen's own proven track record, while in others it is much more difficult. The reasons for this can be many, such as not having enough or useful information about job opportunities, not being able to find a job that matches their skills and experience, or personal and family difficulties. Public and/or private employment services should support not only the unemployed, but also those at risk for losing their jobs due to outdated skills, or those who wish to develop new ones.

The investment plan for a sustainable Europe, or the European Green Deal investment plan, contributes in its operational lines to financing the transition that Europe is facing, including the aspects mentioned above. The transition to a greener economy is likely to have a greater impact in some regions and sectors than in others. An integral part of the plan is a mechanism for a just transition, including a dedicated fund that will support the regions most affected by the transition, helping to ensure that no one is left behind.

The EU's commitment to ensuring that environmental sustainability goes hand in hand with social sustainability seems clear. Green investments will develop new economic activities and create new jobs, secure affordable energy, and enhance the acquisition of new skills. The Modernisation Fund will also enable a just transition in carbon-dependent regions by supporting re-employment, retraining, and upskilling of workers, education, job search, and start-ups.

Precisely to show solidarity with and support for redundant or self-employed workers, the EU has opened the possibility of using the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund in these situations, so that these workers are not kept on the margins of the labour market⁴⁴.

Creating New Jobs. Social Economy Contributions by SMEs and Social Enterprises

Although the European economy is generally growing, labour markets are uneven with high unemployment Member States and low unemployment Member States.

One of Europe's greatest challenges has always been to create the conditions for a social market economy that can create more and better jobs for all in the years to come⁴⁵. This requires a sound and well-considered industrial strategy, firmly anchored in the single market, enabling all companies to innovate and develop new technologies, promoting circularity and creating new markets. Addressing the social and employment aspects is indeed a very important part of the strategy that Europe cannot preclude when the aim is to reap the greatest possible benefits from industrial transformation.

What the Commission has proposed is a specific strategy for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to be implemented during 2020 and in the years to come. The strategy targets SMEs since they account for 85% of new jobs

⁴⁴See Daley (2017); Goodstein, Butterfield & Neale (2016).

⁴⁵Cullen, Parboteeah & Victor (2003).

created in the last five years. Promoting innovation, securing funding, and cutting red tape for SMEs is vital for job creation in Europe.

The European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus and the Cohesion Fund will continue to play a crucial role in supporting social cohesion in Member States, urban and rural regions, and will help keep pace with the green and digital transformation taking place.

Noteworthy in this respect is the Commission's proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), which sets the total allocation for a cohesion policy for the period 2021-2027 at EUR 373 billion in current rates. The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will also contribute to territorial cohesion. The Commission's proposal also foresees an InvestEU programme, which is expected to mobilise EUR 650 billion of investment, including EUR 50 billion for social infrastructure projects and social investment in education and skills, social entrepreneurship, and microfinance. InvestEU will also test partnership and new business and financing models to improve social outcomes, unlocking the potential of investor and philanthropic capital.

According to the European estimation, an important part of job creation will come from the social economy and its operators. Social enterprises and organisations generate commitment, initiatives and results in local communities, bringing citizens closer to the labour market⁴⁶. It is no secret that the social economy offers innovative solutions in education, healthcare, energy transition, housing and social services⁴⁷. The social economy is also a potential pioneer in local 'green pacts', establishing alliances in the areas that enable citizens and businesses to participate in the climate transition. Moreover, as of 2021⁴⁸, the Commission proposes the launch of an action plan for the social economy sector aimed at encouraging social investment and innovation and promoting the potential of social enterprises in creating jobs⁴⁹, including for those on the margins of the labour market⁵⁰. Referring to the latter, socially responsible public procurement could, for example, ensure that existing funds are spent in such a way

⁴⁶See Mezzano (2019).

⁴⁷See Giovannini (2018); Luchena (2020); Coletta (2014).

⁴⁸The EU will reduce its net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, as agreed in the EU Climate Law. On 14 July 2021, the Commission presented proposals to deliver these targets and make the European Green Deal a reality.

⁴⁹These proposals will have an impact across the entire value chains in sectors such as energy and transport, and construction and renovation, helping create sustainable, local and wellpaid jobs across Europe. Investments in a low carbon economy will boost the green recovery following the COVID-19 crisis. The electrification of the economy and the greater use of renewable energy are expected to generate higher employment in these sectors. Increasing the energy efficiency of buildings will create jobs in construction, with local labour in higher demand. The proposals facilitate growing sales of clean new vehicles and cleaner transport fuels, providing major opportunities for the European car industry.

⁵⁰In the Joint Declaration on EU Legislative Priorities for 2023 and 2024 – Working document (December 2022), are evident the Proposal for a Regulation on prohibiting products made with forced labour on the Union market; the Proposal for a Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence and amending Directive (EU) 2019/1937 and the Proposal for a Regulation on the coordination of social security systems.

that supports inclusion by providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities or those at risk of poverty⁵¹.

The Promotion of Gender Equality, Inclusion and Equality of People with Disabilities or those from Third-world Countries

It is noted among many that one of the strengths on which the EU was built is its diversity: that of peoples, cultures and traditions. But for this potential to not boomerang for Europe itself, these diversities must be levelled out, if at all possible, through targeted state intervention so that those who share the same aspirations have the same opportunities to realise them.

To this end, Europe needs to strengthen its commitment to inclusion and equality in all its dimensions, regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. Equality is high on the political agenda of the European Commission, which for the first time has a portfolio and a new working group to participate in policies to develop substantial equality.

The situation for women is of major concern⁵². Women are on the margins of the labour market and many of them contribute to low levels of employment, which is detrimental to the economy and to women themselves. Despite having higher levels of education, women have shorter and more fragmented careers than men, often due to family care and responsibilities. Their careers are slower or intermittent and their incomes or pensions lower, yet their life expectancy is longer. In some sectors, women are under-represented and often do not hold senior roles or positions. This is also the case in digital professions, where less than one in five ICT specialists are women⁵³. At retirement, women's pensions are on average only two-thirds of those of men, and the pay gap is even greater⁵⁴. Combating stereotypes in the work world is crucial to ensuring that women progress steadily in their careers and obtain fair wage. The Commission has proposed a new European strategy for gender equality to help close the gender pay gap, including through compulsory measures on pay transparency and the gender pension gap, in

⁵¹On the contribution of green procurement, see Clarizia (2016); Feliziani (2017); Mauri (2018).

⁵²With particular reference to the remuneration aspect, see Battisti (2019). See also the Opinion of European Economic and Social Committee, Eco/584, "Gender-based investments in national recovery and resilience plans (Own-initiative opinion)". The EESC points out that most of the national recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs) have been drawn up by the Member States without an *ex-ante* assessment of the impact of individual investments in terms of removing gender inequalities and making it easier for women to access and stay in the labour market. Very few Member States have taken a strategic approach with specific, cross-cutting measures and reforms to the six investment strands under the NRRP. The methodology adopted by the European Commission is based on an impact assessment of how effective the measures implemented are. To this end, the EESC recommends that the Commission adopt comparable specific indicators at the evaluation stage to measure improvements in equal pay, access to the labour market, the reconciliation of work and care time, and in promoting of women's self-entrepreneurship.

⁵³See also the 2018 European Union study, at https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/it/news-articles/-/asset_publisher/L2ZVYxNxK11W/content/the-top-ict-skills-in-demand-by-companies-tod-1?inheritRedirect=false&_101_INSTANCE_L2ZVYxNxK11W_backLabelKey=news.articles.back.to.list&_101_INSTANCE_L2ZVYxNxK11W_showAssetFooter=true

⁵⁴On which see Peruzzi, Gottardi, Conley, Healy & Mikołajczyk (2018); Day (2012); Bloom & Michel (2002).

order to promote women's access to the labour market and increase their numbers in senior positions in companies and organisations⁵⁵. But much remains to be done.

Another important piece of Europe's vision is the obligation of the economy to serve people with disabilities. The European Accessibility Act will provide an opportunity to develop accessible products and services. Technology, combined with the removal of architectural barriers, can offer great opportunities for people with disabilities to meet their needs and ambitions. Despite constant warnings, however, people with disabilities continue to face adversities in accessing education and training, employment, social protection systems and healthcare in some European states. They also face difficulties in participating actively in the political or cultural arenas of their communities. The Commission will pursue the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and plans to present an enhanced strategy in the course of 2021, based on the results of the ongoing evaluation of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020⁵⁶.

With reference to the pervasive issue of migration, there is a need for inclusion also with regard to third-world nationals. This can be done through faster and more effective integration pathways for these individuals who, it should be noted, often contribute to the labour market and economic performance of society. Many Member States could make better use of this population's skills and qualifications and promote their access to inclusive and quality education and training. Here again, the Commission, following the Green Deal and based on the 2016 Action Plan on Integration, intends to strengthen support for integration measures implemented by Member States and other key stakeholders, such as local and regional authorities, civil society organisations, and social partners⁵⁷.

⁵⁵ Neale (2020).

⁵⁶ In March 2021, the European Commission published the strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities that embraces the period from 2021 to 2030. It aims to ensure that all people with disabilities: can fully exercise their human rights; have equal opportunities and equal access to participate in society and the economy; can decide where, how and with whom to live; can move freely in the EU; are no longer victims of discrimination. The strategy will bring about positive changes in the lives of people with disabilities, for example: the proposal for a European Disability Charter to be extended to all EU countries by the end of 2023, which will facilitate free movement, making it easier access to services anywhere in the EU; the establishment of a European resource centre (AccessibleEU) to allow European countries to work together in order to improve accessibility for people with disabilities. This strategy represents the framework for EU actions aimed at creating a more equal society, and includes sharing concrete ways to ensure that people with disabilities can assert their rights.

⁵⁷ Alvesson (2016).

Fair and Decent Work

Working does not simply mean earning a living, but also having social relationships and holding a place in society, as well as opportunities for personal and professional development. However, this can only be achieved if one enjoys fair and decent working conditions. Fair and decent working conditions are derived, first and foremost, from fair pay. All workers in Europe should have a fair minimum wage that allows them to live in dignity. This does not mean setting the same minimum wage for every worker in the EU. Minimum wages should be set in accordance with national traditions, income or contribution policies, through legislation or collective agreements. Collective bargaining seems to be the most appropriate way to adapt to the needs of the particular territory and the sectors in concern⁵⁸.

Furthermore, fair and decent work is further derived from the contractual model and the working conditions embedded within it⁵⁹. New forms of work are developing rapidly, spurred mainly by digital technology, contributing to growth and employment, promoting innovative services, offering flexibility and opportunities to employees and the self-employed as well as customers and businesses, but can also lead to new forms of precariousness⁶⁰. To build confidence in the digital transformation and realise its full potential, new business models need clearer rules that prevent abuse, maintain high standards of health and safety, and ensure better social security coverage and decent working conditions. Technological innovation must go hand in hand with social innovation. Indeed, it is in fact difficult to imagine a high-tech model that is completely detached from a human reference model that considers fairness and dignity in the workplace⁶¹. In particular, the sustainable growth of the digital platform economy makes it necessary to improve the working conditions in this sector⁶². A more far-reaching intervention at the European level would be appropriate, such as a new Digital Services Act to improve liability and safety rules for digital platforms, services and products, defining the boundaries of the digital single market. This should also cover digital platform work to address priority issues and generate possible solutions⁶³, such as job position, working conditions and access to social protection of platform workers, access to representation and collective bargaining, as well as cross-border aspects of this type of work. New work patterns constantly evolving, the rise of online and mobile work, human-machine interfaces, worker monitoring, recruitment and management by algorithms, to name just a few, can lead to increased productivity, which is key to overall improved living standards, but

⁵⁸See Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw & Rich (2010).

⁵⁹See Case (2001).

⁶⁰Nandedkar & Brown (2018).

⁶¹For challenges to the founding values of Western civilisations related to the digital economy, starting with democracy, T. Bussemer, C. Krell, H. Meyer, *Social Democratic Values in the Digital Society Challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, no. 10, 2016.

⁶²Tsai & Huang (2008); Victor & Cullen (1987).

⁶³On the underlying problems, see, without claiming to be exhaustive, Valenduc & Vendramin (2016); Degryse (2016).

should evolve in such a way as to avoid new patterns of discrimination or exclusion or new risks to the physical and mental wellbeing of workers⁶⁴.

In operational terms, a fair and decent work model could be achieved with the help of social dialogue and consultation. Fair working conditions start with a strong social dialogue: workers and employers (or trade union representatives of both) can find common solutions that best meet everyone's needs. It is very important to have strong and representative trade unions that are involved at an early stage in policy-making at both national and European level. Social dialogue is also effective for companies, especially during restructuring or major business changes. As companies increasingly operate across borders, full use should be made of existing instruments to involve workers and European Work Councils to promote a culture of information and consultation with workers⁶⁵. This is not insignificant when one considers that millions of businesses, especially SMEs, operate across borders and benefit from the single market, which over time has become a key driver for growth and jobs. EU policies and rules are thus designed to ensure fair competition between businesses, protect worker rights and avoid social dumping. At the operational level, the recently established European Labour Authority (ELA) could well be the body that links and moderates the various requirements.

Social Protection between Social Assistance and Healthcare

In order to provide a high level of social protection, Member States should build on strong solidarity. What is lamented in some geographical areas of Europe is the lack of subsidies to support those who lose their jobs due to external events. However, in the author's opinion, these subsidies should go far beyond a mere economic figure and should instead be based on policies to promote retraining and reintegration into the labour market. At European level, the Commission is advocating a European unemployment benefit reinsurance scheme to protect citizens and reduce the pressure on public finances during external shocks⁶⁶.

Consequently, social protection standards will also have to be adapted to the new realities of the work world, namely to the new vulnerabilities and new expectations of citizens, agile and/or fragile workers being one such example. We have also to deal with the fact that in several Member States, some self-employed and atypical workers do not have adequate social protection. The implementation of the various European recommendations on access to social protection will undoubtedly serve as a reminder that everyone is protected during unemployment, illness, old age, disability or in the event of a workplace accident, regardless of their employment status⁶⁷.

The argument that is being made applies not only to labour issues, but also to those concerning health. The underprivileged populations tend to have lifespans

⁶⁴The issue has been addressed in the literature. Refer to Caponetti (2018b).

⁶⁵On this theme see the studies by Guarriello (2005).

⁶⁶This issue has already been addressed in Anibaldi & Caponetti (2019).

⁶⁷Turato (2012). With reference to the pension system, see Signorini (2020).

ten years shorter than the well-off⁶⁸. Promoting healthy lifestyles, better preventive risk measures and patient-centred healthcare can ensure affordable, good quality care for all.

Developing social protection systems anchored in the EU values and principles of universality, solidarity and equity will require the development of new and integrated models of health and social care⁶⁹. This could make the most of cost-effective innovations that address real public health needs. A patient-centred approach would contribute to better outcomes, such as reduced waiting times and easy access to care⁷⁰.

A more complex issue is that of pensions: In many cases they are undeniably the main source of income for Europeans. However, Europe is pushing hard to extend the retirement age, linking increased longevity to extended working years. Yet, this does not take into account the general health of citizens (and working conditions) that must be improved in order to make this feasible. If this were to be the European project, then Europe itself should take steps to pay greater attention to the needs of older workers in the workplace, stimulating member states to implement active ageing or co-working pathways between older people and new recruits, with a view to a generational parity. This could help maintain the sustainability of pension systems that are now in default and to strengthen occupational and third-pillar pensions. A further necessary step would be to

⁶⁸A new study carried out in the UK shows a 10-year gap between the life expectancy of the better-off and the poorer classes. In other words, the poor are destined to die 10 years younger than the rich, according to the study by researchers at Imperial College London, published in the *Lancet Public Health*. The work shines a spotlight in particular on the 'pink quotas' of British society, because the analysis shows that the life expectancy of the poorest women has decreased since 2011 and this trend is defined by the authors as "deeply worrying". The study, funded by the Wellcome Trust, analysed data from the Office for National Statistics on all deaths recorded in England between 2001 and 2016 - a total of 7.65 million deaths. The results show that the gap in life expectancy between the richest and poorest sections of the population has increased for the fairer sex from 6.1 years in 2001 to 7.9 years in 2016 and from 9 to 9.7 years for men. In the most deprived communities, life expectancy for women in 2016 was 78.8 years, compared to 86.7 years for the wealthiest group. For men it was 74 years among the poorest, compared to 83.8 years among the richest. A more recent study 'Socioeconomic Inequalities in Disability-free Life Expectancy in Older People from England and the United States: A Cross-national Population-Based Study', published in the *Journal of Gerontology* by an international team of scientists led by Paola Zaninotto of the Department of epidemiology and public health at University College London, analysed data from 10,754 and 14,803 adults aged 50 and over from the Longitudinal Study of Aging (ELSA - UK) and the US Health and Retirement Study (HRS) respectively. The researchers began by examining life expectancy in the UK and US without disabilities, such as being able to get out of bed or cook for oneself, and the extent to which socioeconomic factors play a role. The data was collected starting in 2002 and the two study samples were followed for 10 years, until 2013. This is how the researchers found that "Socioeconomic inequalities in disability-free life expectancy were similar across all ages in England and the United States, but the largest socioeconomic advantage in both countries and across all age groups was wealth." The results show that "By age 50, the richest men in England and the US lived for an additional 31 'healthy' years compared with around 22-23 years for those in the poorest wealth groups. Women in the richest groups in the US and England lived about 33 more "healthy" years compared to 24.6 in England and 24 in the US in the poorest groups.

⁶⁹Recently Botrugno (2020).

⁷⁰On which see Battisti (2019).

implement specific care. Ensuring access to quality and affordable long-term care would be key to sustaining a dignified life in old age, while seizing the employment opportunities offered by the care economy. This should then be translated into the European strategies contained in the "Green Paper on Ageing" that the EU is currently drafting, designed to launch a debate on the long-term effects of population ageing, particularly on care and pensions, and on how to promote active ageing.

Conclusion

The European Green Deal marks the debut of a new EU growth strategy. It supports its transition towards an equitable and prosperous society, capable of responding to the challenges related to climate change and environmental degradation by improving the quality of life of present and future generations.

Although the investment plan⁷¹ contributes to the achievement of the sustainable development goals and to the transition towards a climate-neutral economy, in line with the commitment expressed in the communication on the European Green Deal, much still needs to be done on a concrete level. The years 2021-22 have been those destined to materialize the foundations of the European Green Deal, but there are still many member countries that have not implemented - in their national policies - the sustainable development objectives as the fulcrum, the benchmark of the defined financial policies and interventions of the Union.

The litmus test of a "Just Transition" must be the efficiency in dealing with the adaptation challenges of businesses, employees and citizens. The transition must encourage, for instance, restructuring of business activities, upskilling and reskilling of employees and avoidance of energy and mobility poverty, with a view to ensuring that no one is left behind. Special attention must be given to the degree to which the individuals, whose jobs will disappear or be downgraded or otherwise threatened, are engaged, assured of a useful, fulfilling and secure future in good quality employment, and assisted in developing themselves to enable them to fill these roles.

The scale of the challenge cannot be underestimated. It will entail the development of well thought-out, integrated medium and long-term economic and social objectives. It will embrace a position toward ensuring productivity and inclusion with due regard to specificities of different Member States. It will involve social partners at national, regional and local levels in all stages of policy making, including through social dialogue and collective bargaining, where appropriate. These necessitate the deliberate, conscious redirection of resources at national and central levels towards the areas and regions affected. Apart from incentivising new investment with grants, loans and the provision of expertise, and helping the operation of MSMEs, start-ups will be helped through capital participation, while new public enterprises will also be created. Besides the commitment of public resources, it will be necessary to optimise the flexibility of state aid rules and even to suspend them in some circumstances.

⁷¹The investment plan took place with the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 10 January 2020, with the document COM(2020)21 final.

The participation and engagement of the public and all stakeholders is crucial to the success of the European Green Deal. Recent political events have shown that the boldest policies work only if citizens have been fully involved in their formulation.

If we want to ensure the success of the Green Deal and bring about lasting changes, the Commission must heed the demands of citizens, who are and should remain the drivers of the transition⁷². After all, the European Climate Pact aims to inform, inspire and foster cooperation between people and organisations ranging from national, regional and local authorities to businesses, unions, civil society organisations, educational institutions, research and innovation organisations, as well as consumer groups and individuals. In fact, the Pact encourages people and organisations to commit to concrete actions, designed to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and/or adapt to the inevitable impacts of climate change.

Unquestionably, the Commission and the Member States will have to ensure that policies and legislation are applied correctly and produce tangible and measurable results. The review of the implementation of environmental policies will be essential to document the situation in each Member State step by step.

On the labour law front, trade union participation in the implementation of the European Green Deal is further food for thought.

We welcome the strong and ambitious climate policy framework adopted by the European Commission. It has been set up within European Green Deal, supported by the corresponding reforms. We still must also underline that, in spite of all the positive declarations, its social dimension is still underdeveloped. The social dimension of the European Green Deal remains primarily in the hands of the EU Member States and national social partners, as they are best-placed to understand the situation and propose measures at the local, regional and national levels. However, the social and employment-related challenges of the green transition span many dimensions, such as job loss and employment transitions, the reskilling and upskilling of the workforce, distributional effects of decarbonisation policies, and the protection of social rights and citizen participation. Therefore, coordinated action and measures at the EU level are necessary to accompany and support the national initiative. If not well addressed at an appropriate level, climate mitigation measures are likely to increase and exacerbate social inequalities.

In Italy, the first steps are moving in this direction. Proof of this is the unitary document of CGIL, CISL and UIL of 18 December 2020 on “A Just Transition for work, personal well-being, social justice, and the protection of the planet. For a green transition of the economy.” It is a text of a programmatic type, through which the three large confederations express their position about investments financed by the EU to face the economic and social crisis triggered by the pandemic through the green transition. However, considering how delicate the issue of ecological transition is for the workers' organization, this document is at least indicative of the existence of a new sensitivity, as are the first experiences of collective bargaining on these issues.

⁷²Happened with COM(2020)80 final.

It is likely that similar initiatives will burgeon in the next few years, both in sector and company bargaining. This will be accompanied by the creation, by collective autonomy, of professional figures able to play a specific role in the green transition of the activities of enterprise. From the considerations made in these pages, it is possible to test some reflections on future developments in labour law.

With all this in mind, the adoption of adaptation and mitigation measures at national and supranational levels, as well as combating the climate crisis, should support the affirmation of an alternative model of economic development. Implementation requires immense public investments and a direction shared with the union, based on the dignity of work and a more acceptable balance with the natural world.

Will this become reality? Or will it be a "green sauce" review of the theories of flexicurity and transitional labour markets? In any case, the attempt to overcome, at the concept level, the historic contrast between labour and the environment, allow us to start, albeit here, with only a few ideas: a reflection on the theory of the relationship between the environment and labour, and how much labour law can derive, in positive terms, from this relationship.

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