



# Solidarity and responsibility in the European Union



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## A major but incomplete acceleration in European integration

For some observers attached to European integration, the economic and financial crisis that struck as from 2007 has – if one were to judge from the areas now covered by shared sovereignty in the macroeconomic domain - triggered an unexpected acceleration in the European Union's integration process.

There is a striking contrast between the cautious way in which the EU Treaty addressed issues related to the single currency as well as to budgetary and fiscal cooperation and the scale of the provisions adopted by the European Council on 24 and 25 March 2011. Faced with the risk of an irreparable weakening of the euro and the disastrous consequences that that would have had for all the countries taken separately, heads of state and government have put in place some considerable coordination: the establishment of a permanent European financial stability mechanism, for which the European Council was quick to announce a change in the treaty, along with, for countries choosing to use it, a lot of conditionality that could involve private banks; European scrutiny of draft national budgets and the issuing of guidelines before national budgetary discussions; the voluntary adoption of national provisions in the areas of competitiveness, remuneration and taxation including a prior commitment to consult partners with regard to any structural reform that might affect them.

The most surprising thing in this acceleration is that it has not, except perhaps in Germany, generated a lot of opposition from public opinion of Member States, in particular the French and Dutch people, who had expressed their hostility to the draft European Constitutional Treaty. In France,

even Jean-Pierre Chevènement is not asking for the abandonment of the euro but rather more stress on social and political guarantees that support the legitimacy of it as well as the strengthening of its international capacity. One has the feeling that, as the international crisis passes by, all calculate that European economic and financial pooling is, for want of something better, essential.

Critics put more stress on the unbalanced nature of this progress, by forced march, of European integration. *Notre Europe*, which is in favour of making a permanent financial solidarity mechanism to face the markets, has matched this proposal with an instrument to support growth in Europe and in affected countries, thus warding off the risks of a deflationary spiral<sup>1</sup>.

In addition to these economic dangers are the strictly political dangers that would result from a mechanical application of the 'Euro-Plus Pact', such as structural adjustment programmes imposed by the European stability mechanism. The European Confederation of Trade Unions staged a vigorous demonstration in Brussels, during the European Council, and in Budapest, towards the Hungarian presidency of the EU, against measures perceived as "anti-social" and ignorant of the inequalities of the situation and responsibility within the countries of the Union. It therefore made itself the spokesperson of political opposition to blind regulation, inspired by a sort of European ordoliberalism cut off from democratic deliberation. This new criticism addressed at democratic legitimacy is today the subject of reflection and

1. Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, *Stability, yes; but also growth*, October 2010.

debate, especially in the European Parliament to which the guidelines for applying the conclusions of the European Council will be sent.

Beyond the issue of growth, it continues to be clear that the European economic situation requires a demonstration of solidarity and justice, showing that rigour thus agreed does not have to exacerbate the dangers of exclusion and poverty. It calls

for more European solidarity, which one could, in other words, call a supplementary stage for social Europe. However, one would be mistaken to see this solidarity as a straightforward compensation for events that have led the EU into the current situation. It fits into a logic of Member State responsibility towards each other, powerful or small, advanced or poor, which is precisely what has been lacking for around ten years or so.

## 1. Solidarity and responsibility, an inextricably linked duo.

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Solidarity between nations has been at the heart of the EU project right from the outset. But the same goes for a community of peoples as for a community made up of people: solidarity is born and grows stronger only with responsibility.

### **Solidarity and responsibility at the heart of complex societies.**

To understand the role that solidarity plays in developed societies, Philippe Van Parijs<sup>2</sup> places it at the juncture between two ‘polar’ modalities of social relations, charity or generosity and insurance. The link that charity establishes between two people does not have any requirement for reciprocity. As such, it is no less able to establish relations but the links that result from it do not have a contractual nature<sup>3</sup>. Their unpredictability and revocability have led to the establishment of stable mechanisms, guaranteeing, in the long term, mutual support beyond a two-person relationship.

Mutual organisations, which have become widespread and have spawned the huge system of compulsory social security that we know today, encourage collective foresight based on the solidarity of the community towards a danger. The link thus established between the members of a mutual is reciprocal in nature because everyone is meant to benefit, when the time comes, from a guarantee of assistance. But this reciprocity is exerted irrespective of the capacities or the merits of each of the members that it binds together: the contributions of everyone serve to support everyone if necessary; the wellbeing of everyone is an issue for everyone. Beyond these compulsory solidarity mechanisms, individual insurance contracts can be signed and the funds that they distribute also form a type of reciprocity. But one that is proportional to the merits (amount of the insurance signed up to) or to the particular risks run by each insured party.

Collective solidarity mechanisms therefore play an essential role in the cohesion of a community. Not only do they generalise or extend over time a guarantee against risks beyond what could be initiated by generosity or altruism but they are also the expression of mutual concern, of a common good. By agreeing on a compulsory and universal unemployment insurance mechanism, social partners not only show proof of humanity towards employees who have lost their job. They show that there is interest in the community of work as a whole, companies and employees, that all active people, including the unemployed, can benefit from minimum conditions of existence.

Through collective solidarity mechanisms, a virtuous circle can be developed over time. While, on the one hand, economic development generates resources that can be pooled and which extend collective guarantees to new risks or new populations, on the other the preservation against major risks and the cohesion that it generates allow for economic progress and changes. Thus we note that in the European Union the most efficient economies are generally those that devote most resources to collective solidarities.

However, adds Van Parijs, the virtuous circle does not develop smoothly or without difficulties, as can be seen from the shortcomings of the very sophisticated social systems that we know. Due to these shortcomings, there is a great temptation to limit the scope of solidarity to increase that of individual insurance. The growing heterogeneity of modern societies can be added to this: the feeling of belonging to the same community is weakening and so is the willingness to commit to a solidarity where reciprocity is unconditional. Maintaining collective universal solidarity, i.e. granted to all the members of a community in comparable conditions, ensuring everyone a high level of protection, therefore comes via an increased demand for responsibility. Thus the benefit of unemployment insurance is more and more subordinate, in all the EU states, to minimal conditions of maintaining or acquiring skills and often of looking for work. Similarly, mutualist insurance in the area of health works on the basis of a wide range of modalities

2. See *European Solidarity: Where Do We Stand? Should We Foster It and How?*, Elvire Fabry, report from the 2010 edition of the European forum of think tanks, *Notre Europe*. It can be downloaded from: <http://www.notre-europe.eu/fr/axes/visions-deurope/projets/projet/edition-2010-du-forum-europeen-des-think-tanks/>

3. Some, such as the philosopher André Comte-Sponville in his work *Is capitalism moral?*, make the case for the superiority of solidarity over charity. For others, there is no solidarity that does not come from charity.

to discourage risky behaviour. Granting, on condition of exercising personal responsibility, guarantees for collective foresight is on the agenda of reforms of compulsory social protection in all the EU states, and this raises serious dilemmas. The risk that such conditionalities bring with them is that they weigh unfairly and seriously on the most vulnerable populations: by depriving them of a minimum unconditional solidarity, and by excessively subordinating this material solidarity to disproportionate demands, they condemn them to definitive precariousness. But, more deeply, these conditionalities can imply that access to work, good health or mastery of essential knowledge are personal goods whilst it is in the general interest that everyone is in as good health as possible and that everyone masters the knowledge necessary to deal with how professional life is currently changing.

### **Active solidarity, long term solidarity, unconditional solidarity**

The link between solidarity and responsibility is therefore fundamental. The historic and current functioning of compulsory social protection systems, i.e. established by law, in the EU, shows the double significance of this link.

The first one, generally recognised, implies that the beneficiaries of a guarantee of solidarity do not cheat with its conditions of eligibility and strive, if necessary with the necessary support, to become contributors to the life of the community again. That is what one calls 'active solidarity' because it implies that the beneficiaries measure the meaning of their responsibility. The second dimension that ties together solidarity and responsibility concerns the contributing members. It is less frequently raised although it is essential to the community. Only the meaning of their long term responsibility, what one also calls the notion

of a well understood interest<sup>4</sup>, can encourage contributors or the members least exposed to risk to stay loyal to the initial commitment despite the temptation to free themselves from it in that very instant. Let us call this commitment to stay in solidarity over time 'long term solidarity'.

In reality, long term solidarity and active solidarity are closely linked. At every moment, confidence or mistrust in solidarity mechanisms feed each other with their complementarity. In the long term, contributors and beneficiaries can see their roles inverted over time. Thus, for a solidarity implying material support for a community to its members in difficulty to bear fruit, the two dimensions of responsibility must exist. Be it active or long term, solidarity between social groups links these groups through a pact of responsibility.

But this pact would be fragile if the most vulnerable people within these groups, those least able to take on the rigours of an active solidarity, were not the subject of a minimal and unconditional solidarity. Political action's responsibility comes under this complementarity of solidarities, as it is up to it to push them forward, to invoke them simultaneously with all the parties to the contract.

In the specific situation of solidarity between nations, this role of memory falls to the institutions. Jean Monnet already explained that "the institutions are the memory of peoples". More precisely, it is up to the European Commission, as guardian of the treaties, to continually update, when memory fails or when an emergency invades the public area, the initial pact of solidarity, what it implies of long term and active solidarity and what it costs in terms of material solidarity.

4. See *La crise de la dette dans la zone euro : l'intérêt et les passions et les intérêts (The debt crisis in the eurozone: interest and passions)*, Tommaso Padoa-Schioppa, Brief No.16, *Notre Europe*, May 2010. <http://www.notre-europe.eu/fr/axes/competition-cooperation-solidarite/travaux/publication/la-crise-de-la-dette-dans-la-zone-euro-linteret-et-les-passions/>

## **2. Solidarity and responsibility in the European Union**

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The European Union bases its dynamism very much on solidarity because it is woven from long term commitments by the Member States, either to note a common interest or to deepen it. However, it was only very recently, when the EU treaty was being drawn up, between 2002 and 2004, that the word solidarity appeared explicitly in its fundamental treaty<sup>5</sup>,

5. Article 2 TEU: "The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail." The content of the principle of solidarity is then developed extensively by articles 27 to 38 of Title IV of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union annexed to the treaty.

as if, seeking to discern the deep roots of a Union characterised by a certain pragmatism, it was paying retrospective tribute to this major mechanism of progress in the EU, since its origins.

In fact, each big step in European integration includes a solidarity contract, intended to pool the risks or the efforts that are a result for some of the quest for joint progress. It is not difficult, through some examples, to show that the two aspects of the responsibility of nations, measured in the sense that they give to destiny shared in the long term or in terms of a reaction of active solidarity,

are almost always closely linked from the original conception of this solidarity. Enshrined in the progressive development of an “ever closer Union between peoples”, the “long term solidarity” appears as a real engine for this rapprochement, for which “active solidarity” impregnates the specific instruments organising “material solidarity”.

- A fund for economic and social aid for restructuring, intended to remedy social impacts resulting from the elimination of excess capacities that no longer protected customs borders was linked to the project for a **European coal and steel community**. Member States signed up to it irrespective of their potential to produce coal and steel or the quality of this potential. They therefore showed long term solidarity, knowing that they would all be beneficiaries of industrial raw materials and raw products in the best conditions. The sums spent to accompany the restructuring in the areas went towards supporting a strategic modernisation plan (active solidarity of countries) and individual aid to people, not just through a minimum base of revenue compensation (material solidarity) but also by financing retraining or through aid for the creation of new activities (active solidarity of workers).
- Putting in place the **Common Agricultural Policy** in the early 1960s came from a long term vision of solidarity: France was at the time able to persuade its partners that sustainable economic growth, in the context of a customs union, implied security of supply for crops and stability in their prices. Thus, the financing of such an objective, the agricultural common market, was from the start placed under financial solidarity (long term solidarity) while the attribution of financial resources to farmers, in the form of price guarantees, implied by its nature a large productivity and modernisation effort from the farms (active solidarity of the farmers). What happened next showed that maintaining such a long term solidarity became a major issue for the coherence of the Union. While the attempts by Sicco Mansholt to expand the initial purposes to give a wider base to this long term solidarity failed at the time, they are now quite topical. The UK had to adapt to this long term vision that it did not share, but it contributed at the same time to strengthening the demands of active solidarity, to the extent that today inequality in condi-

tions between farmers, and the precariousness and poverty of many of them are major criticisms of the CAP.

- The establishment by the Single Act in 1987 of a large single market was followed in 1992 by the consecration of a major role for structural policies in the context of an **economic and social cohesion policy**, whose financing through structural funds has become the second largest item in the community budget’s expenditure. The most competitive and the most advanced countries in the EU showed long term responsibility by accepting that nearly 80% of the sums allocated to structural funds were allocated to the regions and countries lagging behind in terms of development. But it was also clear that the expenditure agreed in this way was to support regional development and modernisation plans or efforts to retraining workers. This reality was to be proven by detailed projects, to be then carefully monitored (active solidarity of regions and workers).
- According to this analysis, **the recent crisis of the euro**, and the developments to which it has given rise to safeguard it, well and truly come from a crisis of responsibility. When, in 2002-03, France and Germany managed to escape from reference mechanisms for their shortcomings in the context of the Stability and Growth Pact, the two countries clearly broke with their active responsibility. At the same time, without knowing it, they showed long term irresponsibility, as what followed demonstrated. Without being the cause of the serious Greek breaches from its own responsibilities, the Franco-German laxness contributed to weakening the general mechanisms for supervising active solidarity in the eurozone. But, later on, it was only the sense of a well understood long-term interest that allowed the German chancellor to confront a national opinion sickened by what it considered as complete irresponsibility by its partners and that would have willingly abandoned any solidarity with the failing Member States of the eurozone. Together with, Germany demanded and obtained some exceptionally strong commitments in terms of active solidarity from potential beneficiary countries of the European financial stability mechanism and from a large number of countries that were or were not members of the Economic and Monetary Union.

### 3. Strengthening European solidarity and responsibility together

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The example of the euro crisis shows to what degree restoring conditions of responsibility is essential for a long term spirit of solidarity. But the “active solidarity” that “long term solidarity” demands is not a sustainable issue if it is not

accompanied by sufficient material solidarity, maintaining the situation of the most vulnerable, also ensuring fairness in the face of efforts to make up for past mistakes. Even if material solidarity between individuals, through taxation and

social protection, remains the main responsibility of Member States, the Union must commit itself more in this area, as these are the main issues of solidarity within the EU that are important to safeguard. The affirmation of the principle of solidarity at the heart of the EU treaty is timely in this sense.

### **The Union needs to commit more to the protection of the most vulnerable citizens**

This is the first lesson of this reflection on the link between responsibility and solidarity that we would like to draw here: the crisis of the euro was translated into a surplus of responsibility taken on by all the Member States, a prelude to a long sequence of budgetary rigour whose political consequences are visible in Greece, Ireland, Spain and Portugal. The EU is therefore called on to take a more visible place alongside its Member States in unconditional material solidarity while taking account of the inequalities of the situation between citizens. It is not the aim of this contribution to open a new chapter of social Europe on its own<sup>6</sup>. We will simply underline certain potentialities of the new treaty.

A first potential track is focussed on the new Article 3(3) of the TEU, which tasks the EU with working for a “highly competitive social market economy”. To come out of the crisis, social cohesion cannot be sacrificed to competitiveness. It is therefore important that Article 14 of the TFEU is put into practice – this article confers on the EU and its Member States a joint responsibility, each in its order of competence, to ensure that economic services of general interest have the required means for their social and territorial cohesion mission. I would suggest that we do not strive to take from this article directives that frame the organisation of social services of general interest. We should rather apply it to the letter by inviting Member States to present a national framework of action designed to preserve continuity and quality in the performance of some essential social services for a social market economy: social housing, access to basic healthcare, tackling the problem of failure at school, training the least qualified workers and young children’s services. The approval of these national frameworks should pave the way for a simplified implementation of competition and single market rules. It could also, as the authors of the manifesto for a European social investment pact suggest, pave the way for an exemption in the calculation of Stability and Growth Pact deficit rules.

6. On the need for such a new chapter, which should take its place in the Europe 2020 strategy, if the objectives of inclusive growth were to be taken seriously, it is necessary to mention the robust set of arguments that has just been published by a group of economists led by the former Belgian Minister for Work, Frank Vandebroucke, *Why Europe needs a social investment pact?*

In the same spirit, under Article 9 of the TFEU<sup>7</sup>, the social quality of all the structural policies implemented under the aegis of “economic, social cohesion” and now “territorial” should be considerably strengthened. A dichotomy has emerged between a social fund that would only target competitiveness and employment and a regional fund for the reduction of disparities between regions with considerable social responsibilities that fall to the regional and local authorities in Europe. We dare to hope that the new cohesion agenda, in the framework of the Europe 2020 strategy to be discussed until 2014, will not merely toughen the conditions for active solidarity, in other words conditionality, but will simplify and unify the tools of European territorial solidarity around development contracts bringing together economic, social and environmental aspects.

### **Solidarity, a source of inspiration for sectoral policies**

However, the dialectic of joint strengthening of solidarity and responsibility could also inspire the renewal of European sectoral policies.

This is how the next reform of the financing of the CAP is being presented. In this area, we see a growth in long term solidarity (demonstrated by the addition of new environmental and territorial purposes) as well as extra active solidarity demands from beneficiaries. These conditions have been deemed to be necessary so that the preexisting financial solidarity principle is maintained. However, what is missing is to better ensure material solidarity between the beneficiaries themselves by ensuring greater degression in aid for revenue such as production. Tackling the poverty of farmers, up until now not really considered as being among the aims of the reform, would be a reason, notably via systematic aid for multiple activities, for the renewal of habitat and tools for pooling investment risks in the face of the growing variations in prices<sup>8</sup>.

Solidarity and responsibility could also become the leitmotif of a renewal of a *European energy policy*, as it is outlined in the new Article 194 of the TFEU. A “spirit of solidarity between Member States” is there out of principle. But to give substance to and to generate long term solidarity around common objectives, there is still a need to define areas of active solidarity that might enable reciprocity to be established between countries whose capacities and needs are often very far

7. “In defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health.”

8. *How to reform the CAP to improve the contribution of agriculture to the Europe 2020 strategy?*, a record of the Madrid seminar, organised by *Notre Europe*, put together by Nadège Chambon and Sofia Fernandes.

apart. The integration of energy networks, the adoption of common objectives to diversify primary energy resources, the financing of energy investment projects of common interest and

external energy policy would be pillars of this new European energy deal in view of a European community of energy for which Notre Europe has already sketched out the principles.

## Solidarity: the bedrock of the EU

Is it a dream to want the principle of solidarity to have all its strength among peoples in a more diverse Europe but also a Europe much more exposed to common dangers? Here, we wanted to show that the principle of responsibility gives solidarity a solid anchoring and would give those responsible in the EU, particularly those who have a vocation to embody the common fate of nations, arguments that could be acceptable to Member States. This same principle also legitimates a much greater European supervision authority than

exists today. Other Notre Europe publications will put more concrete flesh on this idea.

Today, the spirit of solidarity is threatened by the fears and anxieties that nationalisms and populism know how to exploit. But it is also threatened by the intellectual laziness or shortsightedness of overly global economic analyses that do not take account of the major economic challenges and major technological ambitions can only be addressed via a feeling of common belonging, of which solidarity is at the core.

9. *Towards a European energy community: a political proposal.* A project proposed by Jacques Delors, based on a *Notre Europe* study led by Sami Andoura, Leigh Hancker and Marc Van der Woude.

## Presentation of the project: A test for European solidarity

With the economic and financial crisis having hit European countries in different ways since 2008, the EU is considering how far each country is responsible and what kind of solidarity is needed to overcome this challenge. Europeans have hastily set up solidarity mechanisms that their monetary union was lacking. Questions about the legitimacy and the limits of European solidarity are now very much being asked out in the open.

They are all the more crucial as they generate tensions in national public opinions and among European political decision-makers. These tensions are not just about macroeconomic issues but have recently been about solidarity mechanisms put in place in the 'Schengen area' and also relate to the different extents of other EU interventions, such as in the area of agriculture or energy.

In this context, Notre Europe's work is inspired by the vision of Jacques Delors, who advocates articulating European policies around three key points that are more necessary than ever: «Competition that provides a stimulus, cooperation that strengthens and solidarity that unites.» This vision, which embodied the Single Act of 1988, draws inspiration in particular from the 1987 report entitled « Stabilité, Efficacité, Équité » [Stability, Efficiency, Fairness], in which Tommaso Padoa Schioppa sets out how to push ahead with European economic and social integration in a balanced way.

Having put solidarity at the heart of the European forum of think tanks held in Barcelona in September 2010, Notre Europe has defined a broader project on this theme, which will allow it both to publish crosscutting reflection documents as well as 'policy papers' covering different sectors.

**To know more about this project:** <http://www.notre-europe.eu/en/axes/competition-cooperation-solidarity/projects/projet/translate-to-english-la-solidarite-europeenne-a-lepreuve/>