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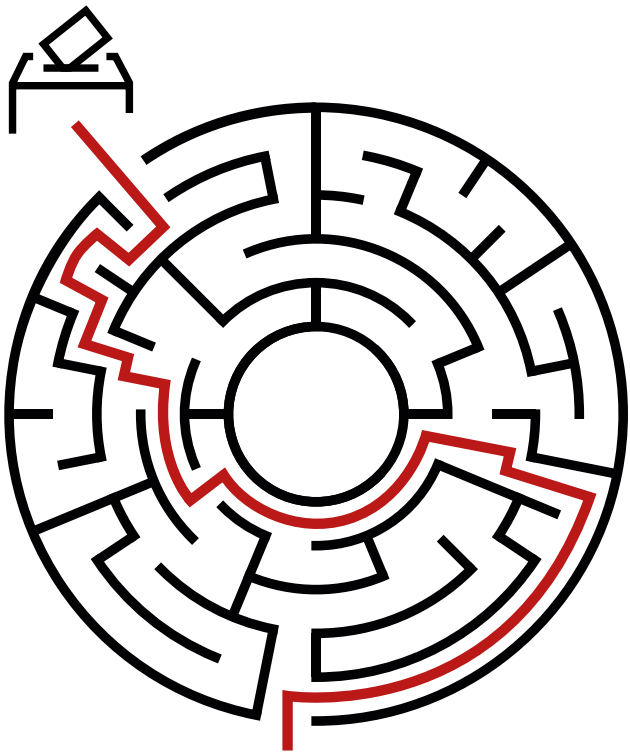

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The politics of solidarity: a social democratic account

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Introduction

Social democrats are closely associated with the values they hold dear. Social democratic parties were founded on values, and on many occasions, they have been able to enact policies that reflect and advance their values. In communicating their agendas, social democratic parties often appeal to groups by highlighting how a group would benefit from social democratic policies. But even then, the significance of values for social democracy persists as a constant background condition, and social democratic parties can choose to emphasise values or other motives for political action (such as group benefits). Equality, freedom and the pursuit of social justice occupy centre stage in the debate about social democratic values, and these values have animated not only manifestos and proposals but also social democratic policies, as evidenced by a track record of sometimes radical public policy reform (Tsarouhas, 2022).

One particular value, solidarity, is especially important for social democrats, although it is true that social democracy has no monopoly on it. Christian democracy and, in particular, the social doctrine of the Catholic Church have also given expression to the idea of solidarity (Stjernø, 2011). Still, solidarity is special and unique to social democracy. To begin with, one of the most prominent social democrats of all time, Eduard Bernstein, saw solidarity between workers and the middle class as the core ingredient of the left's political success (Skrzypek, 2022). Moreover, in contrast to the claims of Christian democracy about interclass solidarity (which echo Bernstein's convictions), social democratic solidarity is all-encompassing. It includes women and minorities, and it has an international dimension. Solidarity is part and

parcel of the social democratic political DNA. Furthermore, and in contrast to the conservative approach to solidarity that seeks to do away with conflict, social democracy is (or ought to be) frank about the battles that are to be fought in the name of solidarity.

This is not to suggest that nobody has ever criticised the ability and willingness of social democrats to translate their rhetorical commitment to solidarity into political action. On the contrary, accusations regarding the lack of solidarity toward one another have proliferated within the social democratic family in recent years. Perhaps the most obvious example is that of the eurozone crisis, when social democrats were (often rightly) accused of dispensing with the need to stand together in the face of punitive austerity and a set of disastrous economic policy choices. What they did instead was to adopt a "national" policy line and ignore the need to assist each other in designing a progressive alternative to fiscal orthodoxy and welfare cuts. Although the Party of European Socialists (PES) strove to promote an economic alternative against the tide of austerity, a "post-third-way agenda" (Moschonas, 2014), the gap between these new programmatic elaborations and the austerity implemented by social democratic governments demonstrates once again that social democracy failed to implement a coordinated set of policies at the supranational level.

The left sees solidarity in different ways and in accordance with the evolving circumstances of individuals, social groups and contemporary needs. Solidarity also affects different aspects of the activities of social democratic parties. In this chapter, we focus on *solidarity in policy* and *solidarity in communication*. In the discussion of policy, we address both cross-class solidarity within countries and cross-national solidarity at the European level. In the discussion of communication, we explore how solidarity (a value) has been used as a justification for social democratic policies, in comparison to group appeals (a promise of benefits). The chapter is organised as follows. In the next section, we

offer a brief overview of the evolution of the solidarity concept, focusing on the distinction between cross-national and cross-class approaches. After that, we discuss both cross-national and cross-class aspects of *solidarity in policy* for two key events, namely, the COVID-19 pandemic (in the third section) and the current polycrisis (in the fourth section). In the fifth section, we move on to discuss *solidarity in communication* using empirical evidence for value claims and group appeals from the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). In section six, we offer a brief conclusion.

Social democratic solidarity in the longue durée

Since the 19th century, solidarity has been a core value of the European left. The 1864 International Working Men's Association (IWMA), in which Marx and Bakunin played a major role, was connected to the heritage of the uprisings of 1848-1849, with pre-existing revolutionary references and with different traditions of solidarity among workers. Workers' solidarity in the economic struggle against capitalism was to gradually supersede the battle for democracy and self-determination as the main driver of cross-border activism. These practices of mutual aid between workers delineated efforts to correct labour's disadvantage against capital in a moment of accelerating globalisation (Delalande, 2019).

After the First World War, the ideal of international solidarity remained a key inspiration for the socialist movement, although it was strongly challenged by communist internationalism and the powerful *Comintern* that organised it effectively. However, practices of solidarity increasingly centred on the national level due to the nationalisation of the working classes being accelerated by the war. The efficiency of the warfare state convinced many socialist elites that the state could be used to

quickly improve the daily life of workers in the short term and promote a transition towards a socialist society in the future. Accordingly, the ideals of redistribution and social rights for workers through the enlargement and reinforcement of state prerogatives became dominant among western European social democratic parties. However, the relative electoral weakness of most social democratic parties, the adverse economic context in the wake of the Great Depression and the perspective of the war against fascism left little financial room for manoeuvre to implement an ambitious redistributive social policy agenda during the interwar period.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, western European social democrats conceived of solidarity primarily at the national scale. Although they did not have a monopoly over the establishment of the welfare state – Christian Democracy also played a crucial role in this process – they were very active in it. In the first years of the Cold War, the re-founded Socialist International (SI) and most social democratic parties (the German SPD and the Austrian, Belgian, Dutch and Scandinavian parties) loudly insisted on the imperative to extend social and economic democracy under a capitalist regime. The enlargement and reinforcement of social rights for workers was at the centre of this approach. In power, social democratic governments implemented social policies aimed at developing full medical coverage at lower cost, better public services and extended social benefits.

This approach to solidarity that operated within the confines of the nation state was widely shared among both the social democratic and conservative parties of government. Social democratic elites shaped a mixed economy in which the state provided direction for the production of goods and services without standing in for private enterprise, regulated the capitalist cycle through a Keynesian-inspired budgetary policy and corrected imbalances generated by the market through an assortment of redistributive policies. In the name of social

equality, for instance, the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP) achieved a striking number of reforms in the name of social equality under the first Palme government (1969-1976): housing allowances for families with children and for pensioners; a six-month gender-neutral parental insurance; greatly increased child allowance; and a decision on state-subsidised universal nursery provision for all children. Health insurance was also radically reformed, far-reaching improvements to unemployment insurance were implemented, and a retirement age of 65 and a 40-hour working week were enacted (Andersson and Östberg, 2020). Redistributive and strongly progressive fiscal policies played a crucial role, allowing the government to contain inequalities between social groups. Thanks to public action by the state, together with party pressure, trade-union activity and sometimes worker protests, the social democratic welfare state, which experienced a golden age at the turn of the 1970s, worked toward reducing inequality and developing social services. In western Europe, it generated a kind of national pride, reinforced the feeling of belonging to the nation and solidified the state's legitimacy.

Albeit less central, transnational solidarity between social democratic parties did not vanish. The German SPD provided crucial financial and logistic support to the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) throughout the democratic transition period (Muñoz Sánchez, 2012). Beyond European borders, some social democratic parties in office, like the SAP, implemented a foreign policy of solidarity with third-world countries – a symbol of social democracy's ability, when it exercised responsibilities, to propose an alternative to the bipolar order of the Cold War (Hellenes and Marklund, 2018). Nevertheless, the cross-national approach to solidarity failed to gain unanimous support within the non-communist left. From the 1950s on, many variants of the so-called new left, which sprung up throughout Europe and beyond, often strongly influenced by anticolonialism and third worldism, castigated

what they saw as the stalemate reached both by communism and social democracy (Renaud, 2021). The radical left saw the social democratic welfare state, taking care of people "from cradle to grave", as paternalistic and a source of alienation.

Later, in the 1970s, the emergence of neoliberalism increased pressure on the social democratic approach to solidarity in western Europe. Conservatives and the radical right increasingly pointed to the limits of the universalist social democratic welfare state. They claimed that, given the scale of public spending it required, the welfare state's economic cost was excessive and harmful. By the end of the 20th century, social democrats themselves came under the influence of anti-statist neoliberal and radical leftist theories, yet without ever fully embracing them.

The same ambiguities emerged in the debate about solidarity between northern and southern countries. In 1977, Willy Brandt, who had taken the lead of SI one year before, chaired the UN international commission dealing with development issues. He strove to forge a middle way between the plea for a new international economic order (NIEO) by numerous leading southern politicians and the economic interests of northern industrialised countries. In the first half of the 1980s, however, the SI remained one of the rare, if not only, international organisation which was still claiming that the NIEO should be the legitimate framework for approaching north-south relations.

The 1980s marked the end of the post-war social democratic approach to solidarity at both national and international levels. The fundamental transformation of capitalism in the 1970s, which led to the re-emergence of mass unemployment and high inflation in western Europe, as well as the increasing financialisation of capitalism, were huge challenges for democratic socialism. Globalisation, progress with European integration and the advance of neoliberal policies embodied by Margaret Thatcher in the UK and Ronald Reagan in the USA directly

affected the welfare state. Over and above often rhetorical differences, social democratic policies converged with those achieved by their rightist opponents. This phenomenon was clearly visible during the 1990s (Huo, 2009; Pierson, 2000). Each socialist party, in its own way and at its own pace, through radical and incremental change, engaged in privatising, liberalising and deregulating financial activities, balancing public accounts and controlling social spending, while redirecting spending mostly toward education and research. The aim was also to reduce labour costs by improving workers' productivity, as well as the efficiency of capital to lower taxes –particularly for business – to facilitate investment and to change the organisation of the labour market. Western European social democratic elites appeared increasingly attracted by Clinton's experience in the USA and his workfare approach to the welfare state, which required welfare recipients to engage in compulsory work programmes (King, 1995; Cooper, 2017).

Reform of the state machinery was also central to the social democratic agenda during the 1990s, notably among the most vocal supporters of the so-called third way. Social democrats encouraged the spread of evaluation procedures and the rationalisation of public services and companies through new management techniques, and they agreed to delegate some of the state's non-sovereign functions to other organisations (regions, agencies or the private sector). These changes were quite similar in Sweden, Austria and the UK during the governments of Tony Blair (1997-2007) and, with a few modifications, Gordon Brown (2008-2010). In Germany, the second Schröder government liberalised the labour market through the Agenda 2010 reforms.

Ultimately, solidarity was increasingly conceived on an individual rather than a collective basis. Equal opportunities for citizens through education and lifelong training substituted the aim of social equality between classes through redistributive policies and strict regulations

of capitalist activities. Beyond their national peculiarities, the Blair, Schröder and Jospin governments in the late 1990s stressed the need to adapt social policy to the major technological transformations induced by liberal globalisation, which they described as an unavoidable development that could not be ignored. Still, the economic and social policies implemented by social democratic parties were not the same as those enacted by conservatives. Nor did western European social democracy break with the ideals and practices of solidarity from the 1980s onwards. But it is true that, from then on, social democratic governments implemented a "supply-side socialism" with monetary stability and international competitiveness of national private firms as top priorities to the detriment of full employment and the struggle against inequalities. Some social democratic governments did a better job than others at preserving the heart of the welfare state, but none of them attempted to extend its scope – quite to the contrary.

The 2007-2008 global financial crisis did not induce any real change of paradigm, at least not for social democrats in government. Although the PES drafted an innovative economic programme to break with financialised capitalism that had led the world to the verge of apocalypse, no social democratic government promoted a radical economic alternative (Moschonas, 2014). The Hollande presidency in France symbolises this approach. At a press conference in January 2014, François Hollande justified the decision to introduce a "competitiveness pact", focused on €30 billion of corporate tax relief through to 2017. Like Gerhard Schröder and Tony Blair before him, he saw himself as driving a "third way" for social democracy, between the post-war welfare state and neoliberalism (Davet and Lhomme, 2016). More radical approaches to pursue policies of solidarity were produced in supranational circles (like the PES), and some social democratic governments did struggle against inequalities through the implementation of more redistributive fiscal policies, but, overall,

it appears that solidarity was only a secondary concern for social democratic elites in government during the third-way era.

The COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for enhanced solidarity

Until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, cross-national solidarity had suffered heavily. The eurozone crisis highlighted the extent to which national priorities and perspectives continued to guide policymaking. The result has been a weakening of the EU manifested in the lack of policy coordination and the strengthening of centrifugal forces, especially in the European periphery (Parker and Tsarouhas, 2018). The revival of nationalist stereotypes suggested that the lack of cross-national solidarity had become a feature of the EU and, if so, the EU came close to an existential threat to its values-driven identity.

The next crisis, caused by COVID-19, came, therefore, at a seemingly inopportune moment, already characterised by mutual suspicion and finger-pointing. The morality tales of lazy southerners versus hardworking northerners had dealt a severe blow to cohesion in the EU (Matthijs and McNamara, 2015). In the early phase of the pandemic crisis, national reflexes worked on overdrive, as member-state governments sought to secure medical equipment and, ultimately, save lives from this new, unwarranted and unpredictable threat. As a result, medical equipment was hoarded by states in need and export restrictions were even temporarily introduced by some governments. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed some of the flaws in EU policymaking with respect to market-enhancing and market-correcting mechanisms: heavy on the former and light on the latter; health policy at the EU level has been characterised by the schizophrenic coexistence of health being a member-state responsibility, but, at the same time, subject to the interdependencies

and interactions of EU health systems within the context of the single market (Forman and Mossialos, 2021).

Nevertheless, the deepening of the crisis over time and its severe social and economic repercussions led to a lot of soul-searching within and across member-state governments and EU institutions. The fact that the origins of the crisis were fundamentally different from others played an important role. In contrast to the eurozone debacle, this time, the blame could not be placed on single member states; it was no one's fault. Furthermore, the crisis was symmetric in nature: everyone suffered from the pandemic and the fear of it. Finally, the crisis was also exogenous; not the result of mishandling of funds or wrong choices, but of mechanisms that were unclear and necessitated policy action at the highest level (Celi, Guarascio and Simonazzi, 2020).

Within that challenging context, fresh thinking was called for, and solidarity between member states became the best instrument to overcome the first, acute phase of the crisis. Member states upped their public health spending to face up to the challenge, with the Commission allowing for a flexible interpretation of state-aid rules. The Commission also initiated the general escape clause to allow for extra spending without penalising governments. The European Central Bank (ECB) also stepped up to the challenge: the pandemic emergency purchase programme (PEPP) allowed for more than €1.85 billion of bond buying until the programme came to an end in the spring of 2022.

Yet the most important aspect of the EU response to the pandemic crisis was the result of intergovernmental bargaining, Commission activism and solidarity in action: the NextGeneration EU (NGEU) programme, agreed on in the summer of 2020; and, in particular, the agreement on the setup of a Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The RRF, a €750 billion fund made up of both loans and grants from the EU to its member states, is a historic move forward. In a landmark

decision, the RRF allows the Commission, acting on behalf of the EU, to borrow from international money markets on behalf of all states; therefore, breaking the catastrophic link between sovereign debt ratios and borrowing cost that had plagued numerous member states during the eurozone crisis (Moury, et al., 2021). Secondly, the inclusion of grants (up to €390 billion) next to loans removes one of the fundamental areas of tension between creditor and debtor states during the eurozone crisis and allows for a genuinely solidaristic attitude towards those states that now hope the RRF will make a macroeconomic difference in their fiscal outlook.[1]

In other words, the NGEU and the RRF, in particular, enable, for the first time, a potentially redistributive element (between member states) into EU economic governance rules, to accompany the regulatory system that has hitherto existed (Ladi and Tsarouhas, 2020). Interestingly, the final allocation of NGEU funds between the individual member states has been linked to some macroeconomic variables, such as the observed rate of change of GDP, which might have facilitated the shift towards more international solidarity within the EU. Arguably, this approach helped in two ways: (1) transfers between countries were not predetermined and immutable, and they did not encompass a one-way system, in which certain countries would always and necessarily be net recipients and other net beneficiaries (as, instead, is the case for the structural funds and, consequently, for the overall EU budget, which makes agreement on new schemes and more expenditure especially difficult); and (2) transfers were made dependent on objective variables outside of the control of single member states (thus avoiding issues

1 An ECB document estimates that the whole NGEU would have an impact of 1.5% of GDP (Bańkowski et al., 2022). However, as of today, we are still far from tapping the potential firepower of €750 billion, because several member states did not apply (or did not fully apply) for the loans part of the fund. The actual impact is thus likely to be even smaller.

of reciprocal blaming, moral hazard and gaming the system). This characteristic of institutionalised international solidarity, of being linked to objective, observable indicators, should definitely be considered in the design of new schemes in the future.

Besides the human suffering that it caused, the pandemic has been an opportunity for a serious rethink of economic governance in the EU and the balance between the state and the market, both in terms of public investment and in terms of fiscal rules. The success of the EU response to the pandemic shows the need, particularly for progressive political forces, to articulate a concrete vision of solidarity premised on sound public services and the protective, inclusive role the state can play. In sharp contrast to the previous eurozone crisis, this has been a chance to reshape public debate on the role that the state can play in contributing to a fairer society with solidarity at its core. The fact that the USA has been undergoing a similar process of rethinking the role of the state in public policy after the pandemic is important. Similar to the NGEU, and for all of the trimming and cutting that has accompanied the Biden administration's Build Back Better program (then the Inflation Reduction Act), the fact that public spending and investment in both physical and human capital is now considered essential, common-sense policy, highlights the new discursive environment in which the world finds itself.

Yet, social democrats have not fully exploited the opportunity to rethink the respective roles of the state and markets, possibly due to the pressure of emergency and the obvious priority of health and safety concerns. Some degree of gradualism was always necessary in the face of mutual mistrust inherited from the eurozone crisis; this might explain, for example, the temporary nature of joint EU borrowing under the NGEU scheme, instead of permanent eurobonds. Of course, in the face of the new polycrisis we currently struggle with, a decision to make this instrument permanent would

be more than welcome. However, more courage (including at the member-state level) might have led to bolder approaches, at least in the way the crisis was tackled. For example, almost all countries have used the additional deficit made possible by the escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact for subsidies and cash relief schemes for families and firms. In contrast, the nature of the pandemic made the very material needs, in terms of healthcare and long-term care, as well as European people's difficulties in managing work time and care and household chores, especially in times of lockdowns and remote working, evident. This situation provided a great argument for an expansion of the public provision of social services and the care infrastructure, but this argument has never fully been articulated since, and conservative and progressive governments alike relied almost exclusively on cash transfers.

Unfortunately, the momentum generated at the height of the pandemic crisis has now been largely lost. The primary, but not only, reason behind this development is the new set of crises the EU and the rest of the world is battling now, punctuated by Russia's war against Ukraine. The next section on the energy crisis elaborates further on that aspect. What is certain is that the closing of this window of opportunity is an ominous sign, in the sense that a new economic policy paradigm premised on solidarity remains elusive, and a progressive leap forward has yet to be made. Europe, as well as the USA, are now plagued by new, yet more urgent, crises.

From the COVID-19 crisis to the current polycrisis

The sudden eruption of the first global pandemic of the new century marked the beginning of what Adam Tooze (2022) has called a polycrisis. Countries faced simultaneously a health emergency and

a financial and economic collapse (see the previous section). Two years later, and before the COVID-19 crisis was over, the human and international relations tragedy of the Russia-Ukraine war produced an energy crisis, a rebound of inflation, risks for food security around the world, and new waves of refugees and migrants, all with a looming environmental and climate crisis in the background.

The idea of a polycrisis is precisely to stress that the simultaneity and interaction of these calamities result in an even more problematic situation than the sum of the single crises. But this time, the polycrisis erupted at a potentially favourable time for the EU. On one hand, mutual trust among member states had improved thanks to the NGEU (although tensions with some countries remained on issues pertaining to the rule of law conditionality provisions and the associated conditionality of funding). On the other hand, there was widespread belief that a return of the *status quo ante* was not desirable, as the track record of the EU between 2008 and 2020 had been less than satisfying.

Yet, at the time of writing this text, European countries are mostly coping individually. If the NGEU has a potential firepower of €750 billion over six years, in 2022 alone, member states have launched plans to cope with the energy crisis for a total of €573 billion. This time around, however, almost half the total amount (€264 billion) will benefit German families and firms.[2] The European approach has been to allow member states to incur new deficits and to further relax competition rules on state aid. But as welcome as these measures are, in practice, they mean that each country cares for itself. Consequently, member states with less fiscal space may be unable to cope with the crisis, should the situation further deteriorate, and countries with more fiscal space may use the opportunity to help their firms gain a competitive edge on

2 See the estimates by Sgaravatti, Tagliapietra and Zachmann: S. Sgaravatti, G. Tagliapietra and G. Zachmann (2022) "National fiscal policy responses to the energy crisis". Brugel, 29 November.

the internal market. It is definitely to be hoped that future decisions will entail a greater display of solidarity.

Recent proposals by the European Commission on economic governance (European Commission, 2022) point to this overwhelming sense that something was amiss in the previous system, and change is a precondition for continued relevance in a rapidly changing world. Nonetheless, such proposals point to the road that has yet to be taken and the big choices that remain. The Commission is rightly suggesting that the fiscal straitjacket that all member states have been wearing since Maastricht ought to loosen up in the form of a four-year "fiscal adjustment path" for highly indebted states. The rationale is clear: remove the year-on-year pressure to balance the books; offer more breathing space to governments; and facilitate a tailored approach befitting the needs and priorities of the various member states. On the other hand, the proposals do not go far enough: the debt and deficit targets set at Maastricht remain, despite the higher debt levels that inevitably accompany the pandemic and the fact that a new normal of acceptable inflation levels may be around the corner. More importantly still, public spending on investment has not been exempt from debt calculations, rendering a large part of the progress in economic thinking mute, at least for the time being.

Concerning specifically the energy crisis, the two dimensions of solidarity – class-based and country-based – are obviously related and European social democrats should aim for both. At the class level, the spike in inflation, and the very high energy and food prices, in particular, weigh disproportionally on the less-well-off households. Social democrats must quickly come up with solutions on how to support the incomes (and the material well-being) of these families, for example, by relaunching the problem of energy poverty, and moving the agenda from the current intergovernmental approach to a more communitarian one.

However, because of the functioning of the energy markets, this is not only an issue of the redistribution of resources, but of redesigning market regulation too. The debate on imposing a price cap on gas has highlighted the difficulty of reconciling different national interests (those of gas exporting and importing countries, and those who gain from financial transactions and speculation on commodity prices). While it is true that the main aim must be to favour a reduction in gas consumption, too many voices objected to any form of regulation, as if it were an undue "intervention" in (supposedly) smoothly functioning markets.

At the international level within the EU, the situation during winter (2022-2023, but possibly for two to three years to come, in the worst-case scenario) in the worst-case scenario could make it necessary to implement some form of rationing. In that case, difficult decisions will have to be agreed upon: which countries and which industrial sectors or classes of families would need to restrain their consumption of gas or even electricity. These choices, however, cannot be avoided because, currently, the risk is that larger and richer countries (and possibly those geographically luckier on this occasion), and the more powerful segments of society, will impose their own solution on all others. At the time of writing, only six bilateral agreements among member states exist,[3] to share their gas reserves in case of an emergency.

Overall, the polycrisis demonstrates that difficult choices lie ahead for European social democrats, but also that supposed solutions which do not imply a substantial degree of solidarity are less than optimal both for the EU and for the lower classes and more fragile sectors of the European economy.

3 Between Germany and Denmark, Germany and Austria, Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania and Latvia, Italy and Slovenia, and Finland and Estonia. In December 2021, the Commission proposed the introduction of harmonised clauses directly applicable in the absence of a bilateral arrangement.

Solidarity in party communication

Social democrats have to make hard choices, not only between different policies, but also between different party strategies and the role of values in them. Social democratic parties need to *communicate solidarity* in order to *be parties of solidarity*. This is true in an abstract way because, as a political party, the identity of social democracy depends on how voters and supporters see it. It is also true in a more practical way because social democrats need to receive support from voters to implement policies of solidarity. This has always been the case at the national level for cross-class policies of solidarity. In addition, given the increasing politicisation of European integration, parties now also need voter support for policies of cross-national solidarity in the EU. Social democrats have to explain to voters why the policies they want will promote solidarity, both within and between nation-states. Doing this effectively is not only a way to win votes. It is also a mechanism of democratic accountability, because it allows voters to evaluate parties, not only in terms of the policies they promise, but also in terms of the values that parties claim are advanced by their policies.

Historically, social democrats have used value claims and group appeals to explain the policies they endorse (Jobelius and Vössing, 2019, 2020; Jobelius, Schulze and Vössing, 2023). These are distinct mechanisms of communication, historically bound to different stages of party development and best suited for varying political contexts, and even though both are deeply connected to the idea of solidarity, the shape of these connections varies tremendously between them, with important implications for social democratic parties and their electoral support.

Using group appeals to justify policies means to claim that a policy benefits a group (Thau, 2019). The group appeal can be based on invoking a specific material benefit. One example of this type of group

appeal would be the statement that "raising the minimum wage will improve living conditions of workers in the meat-packaging industry". A different type of group appeal to justify a policy is based on making a claim of symbolic representation. The statement "we support raising the minimum wage because we are a party of workers" is one example of how symbolic group appeals can be used to justify policies.

Group appeals of social democratic parties are often implicitly linked to the idea of solidarity. They best perform in this way on the background of an established reputation as a party that stands for *solidarity with particular groups*. The group appeal to workers in the meat-packaging industry is a request to vote social democratic, which is directed not only at the particular social group that benefits from the policy, but also at other people who believe that the group deserves solidarity and that social democrats should run the government and implement policies to make this happen.

Group appeals for *solidarity with social groups* also contribute to more encompassing claims that social democrats stand for *solidarity between social groups* (most importantly, social classes). As explained above, the call for cross-class solidarity is the most fundamental claim that western European social democratic parties have made during the post-war era. It constitutes their very approach to the political process (and as one part of that to political communication), and it defines the type of party (the *social compromise party*) that they used to be during this period (and still are in many ways). Earlier, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, social democratic parties had established themselves as class parties that claimed to represent and advance the political and economic interests of industrial workers (Vössing, 2017). This is a type of group appeal that was simply too narrow to win majorities of voters (Przeworski and Sprague, 1987). It was replaced by appeals to several social groups, in combination with the promise to

organise a compromise between them. This is the manifestation of the logic of cross-class solidarity in party communication.

The social compromise model was infused with the value of solidarity for particular groups, as well as solidarity between groups, as organising principles of the good society. But the model is based on the rationale that social democratic policies advance the interests of certain social groups. The value of solidarity is the implicit motive behind these policies, and the collateral or automatic consequence of them, but the political communication of the social compromise party does not highlight clearly and explicitly how its policies promote solidarity as a desirable value. This is what value-based political parties do. They explain their policies by claiming that they promote values (such as solidarity), and while they do not need to give up group appeals, they combine them more explicitly with explanations that highlight the positive effects of their policies on values. My colleagues and I have argued that social democratic parties should transform themselves from *social compromise parties* into *value parties* because voters' group affiliations have an ever-declining effect on their vote choices. And if voters do not vote anymore on the basis of being a worker or a teacher or a Catholic and so on, then social democratic parties should do more than justify their policies with statements that contain claims of how these policies benefit workers, teachers or Catholics (Jobelius and Vössing, 2019, 2020; Jobelius, Schulze and Vössing, 2023).

To be a value-based social democratic party means to communicate how social democratic policies promote values, including the key social democratic value of solidarity. Social compromise parties, by contrast, use group appeals (both benefits-based and symbolic) to justify their policies. Empirical analysis (in the case of Germany, for now, but to be expanded in the future) shows some interesting patterns about the extent to which social democracy has already become a value-based party and the extent to which it still is a social compromise party. We have identified

the policies demanded in the manifestos of the German SPD and its domestic competitors (Jobelius, Schulze and Vössing, 2023). Then, we have identified how political parties justify policy demands, distinguishing specifically between group appeals and value claims.

The analysis of group appeals and value claims in party communication shows that social democrats rely more than other parties on references to solidarity to justify their policies. For instance, in Germany in 2021, social democrats invoked the value of solidarity about one time for every ten policy demands they made. The liberals did not invoke solidarity at all, and compared to the SPD, both the Christian Democrats and the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) were around ten times less likely to invoke solidarity to justify their policies. Even within the camp of centre-left and left parties, social democrats rely more on solidarity. They are five times more likely than the Greens to justify policies by invoking solidarity, and 1.3 times more likely than the left populists.

The use of solidarity to justify policies illustrates one important way in which social democrats do have a distinct value profile in communication. But, overall, social democracy is still more of a group-based social compromise party than a value-based party. Most importantly, the ratio between group appeals and value claims in social democratic communication has been remarkably constant during the entire post-war period (Jobelius, Schulze and Vössing, 2023). Values overall have not become more important than groups in the communication of social democratic policies, and the number of value-based justifications has not increased at all. This goes a long way to show that social democracy is still far from qualifying as a value-based party. It remains wedded to the group orientation typical for the social compromise model, which has become obsolete with the decline in political behaviour based on membership in social structural groups (such as workers, Catholics, Protestants and middle classes).

While social democrats rely as little on value claims to justify their policies as they did in the 1960s, their main competitors in the progressive camp have embraced the value-based party model, and this is one major reason why left-libertarian and green parties have thrived, while electoral support for social democrats has steadily declined since the 1990s. For instance, compared to 1983, the Greens use significantly more value claims today (3.2 per policy demand in 1983 compared to 4.4 in 2021), and more than twice as many appeals to progressive values, such as solidarity and care (0.9 per policy demand in 1983 and 2.2 in 2021). Interestingly, the increase in value appeals has not coincided with a decline in group appeals. On the contrary, the Greens used more than two group appeals for each of their policy demands in 2021, compared to 1.4 in 1983. During that same period, the frequency of value appeals (and of group appeals) has remained almost constant for social democrats. Social democrats might be the party of solidarity and other social democratic values, and they might even make the right hard choices for the best policies of solidarity, but they need to do a better job of explaining to their voters how their policies promote not only the interests of certain social groups but also the value of solidarity and other social democratic values.

Conclusion: challenges and choices to be made

Big questions remain unanswered, yet they must be dealt with systematically and carefully. Where do social democrats go from here? How do they articulate a concrete set of policy reforms premised on solidarity between classes domestically and across states at the EU level? And how do they translate their policy agendas into effective communication strategies? To take but one example, the pandemic was an opportunity not only to rearticulate the salience and cash

transfer to offset the crisis effects and boost the purchasing power of households and vulnerable individuals. It was also a momentous occasion to highlight the salience of generously funded and protected public services (United Nations, 2020), which stand between life risks and individuals and allow for the grand rhetoric on a European social model to reflect something more than "cheap talk". Steps in that direction are currently being taken on a fragmented basis by trade unions across much of the western world – but with only latent and apologetic support from their supposed representatives on the party-political arena.

For solidarity to become a distinguishing feature of the social democratic platform, concrete steps in the direction of its articulation need to occur. During the eurozone crisis, the national antagonisms manifested in the media often obscured the cross-class element of (lack of) solidarity: the well-off in southern Europe were able to shield themselves behind a rhetoric that horizontally accused "the Germans", as if the latter were not divided along class lines. The reverse was and remains equally true. Public policy post-pandemic needs, therefore, to consider both cross-class and cross-country solidarity as constituent elements of a new economic policy settlement. After all, the EU is no longer able to afford a flare up of nationalism masquerading as patriotism, and thus, rejecting cross-class solidarity. Fair taxation and solidaristic economic policy options are central to European integration, overcoming of the crisis and the rejuvenation of the European social model.

As a new set of economic policy rules is debated, pan-European solidarity can be enhanced through the adoption of rules that will come into effect automatically and be built into the new economic policy paradigm. The idea of an EU-wide unemployment benefit scheme, for instance, could prove a crucial step towards sharing risk and stabilising labour markets (Claeys, Darvas and Wolff, 2014). There are

real problems with implementing such a system, however, not all of which relate to the lack of solidarity across member states. To start with is the issue of democratic legitimacy for such a measure that goes beyond the nucleus of the traditionally sovereign state and associated decisions on resource allocation, including welfare spending. There is also the issue of heterogeneity within the EU: labour markets across the EU are organised differently; their institutional setups varying dramatically from region to region. Can such a scheme prove beneficial on the aggregate, which would be a precondition for its adoption at the EU level?

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