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**AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE**

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# **STRATEGIC STREAMS 2019:** EUROPEAN ELECTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

EDITED BY

Dr Neven Cvetićanin

Dr Andrei Radulescu

Prof. Dr Jovo Ateljević



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Forum for Strategic Studies  
of Institute of Social Sciences, Belgrade

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# Neoliberalism, Inequalities and Social Movements in the European Union<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The paper discusses the growing literature on the interrelations between neoliberal policy and rising inequalities in the European Union, and their impact to the growing social movements. The analysis shows that inequalities within the EU member states and between them are the results of the current EU policy due to fostering marketization, trade liberalization, privatization and financialization at the expense of social, economic and political rights of the majority. This trend has induced social movements to campaign and advocate for social changes. These civil society networks share same position in demanding transformation of the current 'market Europe' into 'social Europe'. Their proposals to counter economic difficulties are based on introducing transformative economies that 'works for people'. They advocate for alternative economic models, prioritizing socio-economic justice, gender justice, tax justice, food justice and environmental justice. Thus, their position is far from populist 'radical right'. The analysis also shows that these social movement networks may constitute corrective to democracy.

*Keywords:* neoliberal policy, European inequalities, social Europe, social justice, European social movements

## Introduction

■ On 17 November 2019, it was two years that the European Pillar of Social Rights was proclaimed by EU institutions and leaders in Gothenburg, Sweden (European Commission, 2019, 15 November). Delivering on the Pillar was a shared political

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commitment reiterated by EU Heads of State and Government in their New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024. In her political guidelines, the new Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen committed to putting forward an action plan to fully implement the European Pillar on Social Rights as a part of the broader initiatives for an economy that works for the people. The 2019 European Semester focuses on the three areas of the Pillar: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion. In its resolution of 16 November 2017<sup>2</sup>, the European Parliament considered combating inequalities as a lever to boost job creation and growth and affirmed that inequalities threaten the future of the European project and can damage trust the EU as an engine of social progress. In response to the demands of leftist parties, trade unions and social movements, the discussion on the social dimension of Europe became the part of the broader debated around the Commission's White Paper on the Future of Europe. The European Pillar of Social Rights has been proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission in 2017, at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth.

On the other side, statistics and data report on rising inequalities within the member states and between them (Eurostat, January 2019). The economic and social situation, and prospects for economic development are unequal. Several counties, mainly at the North, develop well, and other countries, mainly at the South, are countering economic difficulties, unemployment, debts and weak outlooks for economic and stable growth. In addition, the current trend of mass migration brings a lot of issues that the countries have to deal with. The Brexit has fuelled a wide debate about the future of the European Union. As a consequence of all these tendencies, a general sentiment of insecurity is shared by the people (Villain-Gandosji, 2017: 74). Recent years witness rising citizens' discontent, Euroscepticism, the radical right and populism in many member

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<sup>2</sup> European Parliament resolution resolution of 16 November 2017 on combating inequalities as a lever to boost job creation and growth (2016/2269(INI))

states. The analysis of the result of the recent elections to the European Parliament in May 2019 indicates that large part of the vulnerable in society, those who have strong concerns about relative deprivation, and feel uncomfortable about the erosion of the welfare state and increased inequality, “are casting their votes in favour of Populist on the left (with their economic perspective) and in particular on the right (with their more socio-cultural perspective)” (Jun, 2019: 55). The causes of the rising Euroscepticism, populism and the radical right may be found in increasing discontent of the many with the EU policies, which also fuels social mobilization in the rise in different countries.

This paper examines two hypotheses. The first one is that the increasing inequalities in the European Union, caused by the prevailing neoliberal policy, contributed to the growth of social movements across Europe. The second hypothesis examined is that these social movements, fuelled by the rising discontent of citizens, contributed to increasing Euroscepticism and the radical right. The applied methodology is based on the desk research, review of the collected data, statistics, surveys, research, literature and reports, and the qualitative analysis of the collected information. In this paper, neoliberalism is considered as a state strategy / policy, in order to distinguish this term as an ideology and as a process. The objective of this paper is to point out the main findings of the analysis.

## **European inequalities**

Over the last decade, inequality within member states has become much researched issue (Dauderstäd, 2017, 17 May). Its reducing is a target the European Union has set itself in its treaties and monitors through its cohesion reports (European Commission). In 2017, median equivalized net income varied considerably across the EU member states, ranging from purchasing power standards (PPS) 5.239 in Romania to PPS 28.820 in Luxembourg. The EU-28 average was PPS 16.748 (Eurostat, January 2019). Median equivalized net income fell, in real terms, in 2 out

of the 28 EU member states in 2017 — they were Sweden and Belgium.

Official statistics show that no substantial worsening have been observed; however, this applies only to relative inequality, which indicates the income of richer people, regions and countries as a multiple of that of poorer ones (Dauderstädt & Keltek, 2017). In their comprehensive study on inequality in Europe, Dauderstädt & Keltek (2017: 2) have concluded that it was relatively stable, and absolutely alarming: “If one looks at the absolute differences between the higher and the lowest incomes, an alarming increase in inequality is to be observed in Europe”. This increasing trend of the European inequality is the result of changes in income distribution within and between the countries; inequality between member states is higher than inequality within them (Dauderstädt and Keltek, 2017: 3). Even in traditionally egalitarian countries – such as Germany, Denmark and Sweden – the income gap between rich and poor is expanding – from 5 to 1 in the 1980s to 6 to 1 today (OECD, 2011: 1). Dauderstädt (2017, 19 April) further explains that European inequality has not two, but three dimensions: within member states, between member states, and in the European Union altogether.

Statistics on living conditions show growing income inequality. Across all 28 EU Member States, the top 20 % of the population with the highest national net disposable incomes (the top quintile) accounted for at least one third of total income, a share that rose highest to 46.0 % in Bulgaria in 2017. By contrast, the bottom 20 % of the population with the lowest incomes together accounted for less than one tenth of all income, except in Czechia (10.3 %) and Finland (10.0 %). Luxembourg recorded the biggest fall in income share (-1.4 %) (Eurostat, January 2019). Statistics indicate that social transfers, the main instrument for the realization of welfare policies, played a major role by helping to reduce income inequalities. In 2017, social transfers reduced income inequality among the EU-28 population: the Gini coefficient for income (including pensions) was 51.7 % before social transfers and fell to 30.7 % after taking account of these transfers (Eurostat, January 2019).



The impact of pensions and other social transfers on income inequality was particularly large in Portugal, Greece, Germany and Sweden.

The comprehensive study of Blanchet, Chancel and Gethin (2019: 58) also shows that as a result of a limited convergence process and rising inequality within countries, Europeans are more unequal today than four decades ago. Between 1980 and 2017, per adult average annual pre-tax income growth was below 1% for bottom 50% earners, while the top 0.1% grew at a rate higher than 2% per year. The top 1% captured about as much growth as the bottom 50% of the population.

Social networks (ATTAC) claim that the European 'debt' crisis is basically not the result of government spendthrifts, inefficient bureaucracy or whatever else is produced as an explanation but is the result of an extreme disparity of existing wealth, and of a system that continuously intensifies these disparities. While public indebtedness is increasing, the private wealth continues to grow in value.

The figures indicate that private wealth grows faster than workers' income. According to the data of the European ATTAC Network (2013, 22 March), in 2011 the private wealth in the European Union amounted to 69.5 trillion euros. The private wealth is highly concentrated. The richest 1% of European society hold more than 30% of it, while the poorer half of the society has more or less nothing. Almost 142 million Europeans (out of around 500 million) are at risk of poverty (Dauderstädt, 2019, 15 January). National poverty rates vary between over 25% in Romania and less than 10% in the Czech Republic. The official Eurostat figure for the EU as a whole is 17.3%. However, if a proper poverty threshold is calculated, the figure comes out significantly higher, at 28.2 %.

Intra-country inequality is increased by welfare cuts, labour market deregulation and globalization. Inter-country inequality is rooted in complex causes with historical, social, political and economic dimensions. And inter-country inequality is higher than inequality within them. Compared at exchange rates, the average per capita income of the richest countries is 10 times as high as in the poorest. And even more dramatic pic-

ture of absolute inequality emerges if one compares the average per capita income of the richest national quintile and the poorest national quintile. As data indicates, the richest national quintile is that of Luxembourg, with an annual income of almost 74.000 euros at exchange rates. The poorest quintile is that of Romania with an annual income of only 685 euros. The ratio is more than 1 to 100 at exchange rates. Probably the most important consequence is the high emigration from the poorer EU member states to the richer ones. Countries such as Romania, Lithuania and Latvia have lost about 10 % of their population. In the receiving countries, immigration has bolstered national-populist tendencies. Many researchers warn that the dynamics of inequality gives little prospect of reducing absolute inequality in the future. The recent drop in Europe's poverty and inequality rates is a welcome break from the stagnation of the preceding years. But, given the vast scale of the problem, which is underestimated in official figures, Dauderstädt and Keltek (2018: 4) estimates that it represents far too small a step in the right direction, and that "more decisive policies will be needed if the disintegration of Europe is to be prevented".

Inequality is particularly present in the peasant agriculture. In agricultural work small farmers are the majority. Only 2.7% of the total farms are large ones of more than 100 ha. They control 50% of the total agricultural land in the European Union, but Eurostat data show that they produce only 11% of total agricultural outputs. The remaining half amount of land is shared among 97% of farmers (almost 12 million farms) (European Coordination Via Campesina, 2017, 19 July). Data show inequality regarding the distribution of the aid, as the main beneficiaries of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) are large farms and big agrobusinesses. About 80% of the CAP aid goes to about 20% of EU farmers, those with the largest holdings (European Coordination Via Campesina, 2017, 19 July). As a consequence, small farmers' income decreases, and one third of small farms have disappeared in the last decade because unable to survive. Meanwhile, land in the hands of large farms is increasing. Rural waged workers, women, migrants and youth

are among the most negatively affected by current adverse agricultural policies.

The comprehensive study published in 2013 (Franco and Borras, 2013) shows that Europe is experiencing tremendous and rapid land concentration, adversely affecting the livelihoods of millions of small-scale farmers and agricultural workers. Against these trends and in favour of alternatives, cross-class people's movement is growing. On the basis of the case studies in the Member States, the authors of the study conclude that there is a need for an agrarian reform in Europe, as well as to revise and reform the CAP due to the role it plays in fostering land concentration and an unsustainable agricultural model (Franco and Borras, 2013: 233). Civil society calls for real alternatives to the current model based on sustainable production of food through peasant agriculture, equitable access to land, with a particular focus on marginalised groups, and the sustainable use of natural resources.

The researchers for the EU-funded GINI project also say that growing inequality in Europe is a problem (European Commission, 2014, 2 June). The researchers have also found that in countries with higher income inequality, the poor tend to be less politically involved – meaning their interests are not well represented in democratic decision making. “The research shows that the best performers among rich countries in terms of employment, economic and social cohesion have in common a large welfare state that invests in people,” says GINI project coordinator Wiemer Salverda (European Commission, 2014, 2 June). On the other hand, increasing income for a few and greater concentration of wealth in their hands means more political influence for the rich. This is a danger to democracy and a major concern. The conclusion of the GINI project is that as inequality increases, political participation tends to fall among those who are at the bottom in terms of earnings, while the rich tend to have a bigger influence on policy.

Despite the number of projects and papers relevant to diversifying inequality (European Commission), and despite economic recovery and decreasing unemployment, this issue is still at stake. At the thematic plenary debate in the European Parlia-

ment about socio-economic inequalities on 6 February 2018, it was highlighted that “clearly, the neoliberal myth of trickle-down economics is not going to sort out the situation, [...] The growing gap between the rich and the poor is undermining the social and democratic fabric of our societies. It is high time to act now” (EAPN, 2018, 7 February).

## **Neoliberal policy and the European Union**

Many scholars (Milanovic, 2016; Milanovic, 2017, 1 December; Varoufakis, 2016; Dauderstädt and Keltek, 2017; Donald & Martens, 2018) argue that the accelerated accumulation of private assets and the associated rise in wealth inequality is a major determinant of the global and EU crisis, and it is also continuing in the midst of the crisis.

The inequalities accelerated aftermath the global economic and financial crisis in 2008. Social movements and networks (ATTAC, 2013, 22 March) indicate that it is completely unacceptable for the costs of the crisis to be imposed mainly on those who had nothing to do with creating it. While banks are being saved with trillions of euros, and private wealth remains untouched, large sections of the population are confronted with massive decreases of living standards. The policy of cuts and austerities makes matters even worse. ATTAC warned that nobody ever succeeded in getting out of a debt crisis by cutting spending. It will not work this time, either, since the spending cuts are causing a deep recession and intensifying the crisis. The economies of Portugal and Spain have both shrunk by 6.5% since 2007. The Greek economy has shrunk by more than 20%, and the outlook is even worse. The study on the national responses to the financial crisis in 2008 in the Central European Countries (Dokmanovic, 2017: 89) shows that they were “focused on saving the banking system and the big capital, socializing the risks for the wealthy, while privatizing the risks for the majority”.

The trend of increasing inequalities has not emerged accidentally, ‘but is the result of deliberately policy choices’ (Donald

& Martens, 2018: 41). The policy choices that have produced these inequalities in the EU are the same that have produced emerging inequalities at the global scale; namely, market concentration, corporate concentration, and financial capital concentration. Moreover, these choices have been rooted in and bolstered by the prevailing neoliberal policy.

The key pillars of the neoliberal agenda are free trade and free unrestricted capital mobility, monetary restraint, and budgetary austerity; the ‘flexibilization’ of labour markets, the free movement of labour and the repression of wage demands; the privatization of public companies and services, as well as the restructuring of welfare states. These principles have been quite central to the idea of the European Union. The major policy issues, such as the Single Market Strategy, European competition policy, Economic and Monetary Integration, and even the European Employment Strategy, have enhanced free trade and free capital mobility, monetary restraint and budgetary austerity, the flexibilization of labour markets, and the erosion of employment security.

In his paper “Neoliberalism in the European Union”, Hermann (2007) demonstrates that the European integration process was used to adopt mainstream neoliberal policies. The Schuman Plan and the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) were initially inspired by the notion of coordination and cooperation, rather than market-mediated competition. The EU has been created by the interest of the big businesses, and in fact, it is still managed by the interest of the big businesses. The Treaty of Rome created an institutional framework and laid the foundation for the establishment of the Single European Market and the adoption of the Single European Act in 1986. The single European market was a response to the economic crisis after national therapies had largely failed. The unification of European markets was a demand from the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) — an organization that assembles and represents Europe’s most powerful corporations. The common market has thus become a neoliberal market characterized by weak regulations or even deregulation. With the weakening of national regulations, barriers to entry for

non-European corporations were also minimized. Since 1990, 'individual EU member states have unilaterally abolished over sixty-three hundred quantitative restrictions against imports from third countries' (Hanson, according Hermann, 2007: 72).

Hermann explains that the creation of the Single Market advanced intra-European competition, which, according to liberalization advocates, would strengthen European businesses and benefit consumers, because monopolistic firms or oligopolistic cartels can no longer use their economic dominance to distort market pricing. In the period of good time, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the wealth and the profit have been distributed less or more on the fairer basis, securing social welfare for the majority. However, the costs of the 2008 crisis have been imposed on the majority. The implemented policies delivered austerity for many and socialism for the few.

Besides, the most important factor in driving the concentration of wealth has been the adoption of more regressive tax policies, with increased reliance on indirect taxes, declining corporate and personal income rates on the highest earners. Meanwhile, expenditures on public services and social protection have been cut back. These policies have always fallen disproportionately on those who can least afford to pay. The gender impact of the austerity measures is well-documented (Karamessini & Rubery, 2014; Durbin, Page & Walby, 2017; Conley, 2012; Dokmanovic, 2017: 81-88; Dokmanovic, 2017a: 48-57).

The liberalization of public services gained momentum in the early 1990s, demanding the liberalization of telecommunications, electricity, postal services and gas. The EU Member States have created large public sectors in the post-war years to achieve a broader influence in the economy beyond monetary and tax policies (Hermann, 2007: 74). The expansion of public services played a special role in the post-war expansion of European welfare states. It created not only employment opportunities for women, but also aided them to combine paid work with care duties and family responsibilities.

There was a fundamental belief running through all these provisions that the liberalisation of these sectors will create competition, and that that would benefit consumers. However,

it showed that this consumer-oriented action presented a lucrative business opportunity for private capital. Whereas the EU countries previously had publicly owned monopolies, now they have “politically created multinational private oligopolies.” (Hall, according Hermann, 2007: 76).

The employment has become a major policy issue with the Treaty of Amsterdam. The first set of employment policies adopted in 1997 specified employability, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunity as the four main pillars of the European employment strategy. It now constitutes the part of the Europe 2020 Growth Strategy. While the European Employment Strategy is of great importance to maintain sufficient support for market and monetary integration, job outcomes have been moderate at best. Employment guidelines have been used to decrease employment protection and standards, and to flexibilize labour markets and labour regulation (Hermann, 2007: 83). The integration process allowed policymakers, backed by the leading players of European capital, to erode the social rights that were achieved in the post-war decades. The integration has given the priority to competition and monetary issues at the expense of social demands. The structural imbalance has been created, which gives priority to economic over social and other issues.

Macartney (2011) in his book *Variegated Neoliberalism* demystifies the process of neoliberalisation focusing on the European case study and on EU financial market integration in the post-2000 era. He noticed that that period witnessed a new degree of impetus in neoliberal reform, with over forty directives aimed at integrating financial markets, as it is based on a finance-led mode of accumulation. Macartney explains the EU integration as driven by capitalism’s accumulation imperative. The neoliberal shift which occurred after the financial crisis was an attempt to restore the class power of sections of the capitalist class over European working classes (Harvey, according Macartney, 2011: 11). The neoliberal policy is based on economic growth as an ultimate goal. Economic development is measured by the level of the economic growth and the GDP, but monetary incomes do not constitute the wholeness of the human liveli-

hood. The real purpose of economic development, improving the livelihoods of the people, is neglected. As a result, “in many countries, economic growth has not been translated into human development” (Dokmanovic, 2017a: 24). Under these circumstances, many are losing opportunity to participate in decision-making and to control their own space and resources, that contributes to rising economic, social and political insecurities (Op. cit., : 26).

Notwithstanding, in contrast to the widespread perception of European distinctiveness, Europe shares with other regions of the world the same outcome where neoliberal restructuring has been put into effect: “there has been a major redistribution of wealth from work contingent income to ownership-contingent income” (Hermann, 2007: 86).

Despite extensive academic scholarship about the neoliberal nature of the process of the European integration, there is still a debate about the nature of the European neoliberalism. Birch and Mykhnenko (2009) do not assume that neoliberal integration has homogenization effects. They rather argue that neoliberalisation as a process has produced varieties of neoliberalism across the European regions and not one hegemonic form of capitalism. On the other hand, Abrahamson (2010) argues that neoliberalism in the form of the so-called Washington consensus is no longer promoted from the perspective of the late 2000s, and that we are now beyond neoliberalism. This author considers that social policies are no longer regarded as a burden on economies, but rather as an investment in human capital.

### **Social Movements: Eurosceptics or Alter-Europeanists**

Rising inequalities and decreasing the social welfare state have fuelled discontent of many citizens, as well as their fall of trust in the EU. Factors such as support for austerity and the migration issue have caused growing Euroscepticism, mistrust towards the EU institutions, and thinking about alternative, visions of Europe “from below”. Due to the lack of space, this paper analysis the activities and policy demands solely those social



movements which are grass-rooted, have established network based on associated members in at least ten EU member states, have established institutional structure and are active in the debate on the EU policies and future at regional and European level. Under these criteria, the following European networks attitudes towards the European Union have been examined: ATTAC<sup>3</sup>, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)<sup>4</sup>, the Social Platform<sup>5</sup>, the Tax Justice Europe<sup>6</sup>, the European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad)<sup>7</sup>, the European Coordina-

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<sup>3</sup> ATTAC, the 'Association pour la Taxation des Transactions financière et l'Aide aux Citoyens' (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Aid to Citizens) was founded in France in December 1998 after the publication in the *Monde Diplomatique* of an editorial entitled 'Désarmer les marchés' (Disarm the markets) that launched the notion of creating an association to promote the Tobin tax. The organization expanded rapidly into the Europe and the rest of the world with an ATTAC network that is today active in some 40 countries with numerous local groups and organizations supporting the network. IN Europe, ATTAC network is active in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and UK. See: ATTAC, ATTAC in Europe, <https://www.attac.org/en/attac-europe> (accessed 20 May 2019).

<sup>4</sup> The largest European network of national, regional and local networks, involving anti-poverty NGOs and grassroot groups as well as European organizations, active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. It was established in 1990. EAPN has consultative status with the Council of Europe. <https://www.eapn.eu> (Accessed 19 May 2019).

<sup>5</sup> The largest network of European rights- and value-based civil society organization's working in the social sector. Its areas of focus include building Social Europe and advocating for a comprehensive implementation approach to the European Pillar of Social Rights. <https://www.socialplatform.org> (Accessed 19 May 2019).

<sup>6</sup> European network, part of the Global Alliance for Tax Justice, a growing movement of civil society organizations and activists, including trade unions, united in campaigning for greater transparency, democratic oversight and redistribution of wealth in national and global tax systems. <https://www.globaltaxjustice.org> (Accessed 20 May 2019).

<sup>7</sup> A network of 50 civil society organizations from 20 European countries existing since 1990. Eurodad works for transformative yet specific changes to global and European policies, institutions, rules and structures to ensure a democratically controlled, environmentally sustainable financial and economic system that works to eradicate poverty and ensure human rights for all. <https://eurodad.org> (Accessed 20 May 2019).

tion Via Campesina<sup>8</sup>, Friends of the Earth Europe<sup>9</sup>, Alter Summit<sup>10</sup> and Women in Development Europe+ (WIDE+)<sup>11</sup>.

The hypothesis that these social movements contributed to increasing Euroscepticism and radical right is examined by the following methods: desk research and collecting data, information, publications, reports and research available on their websites, and a qualitative analysis of the collected information. The research was focused on identifying their mission, core values, areas of work, themes in the focus of work and research, and advocacy activities at the level of the European Union.

The social movements include the labour movement, regional movements, the environmental movement, feminist movement, and the anti-nuclear movement. There are many of them being active at European, national and local level in bringing citizens' voices at the public and political fora.

The key finding of the research is that, despite differences regarding the main topic they are dealing with (labour rights, social security, gender in development, peasants' rights, eradication of poverty, economic development, environmental protection, food sovereignty, etc.), they share many same characteristics, such as:

- All these networks share similar mission in opposing neo-liberal policy.

<sup>8</sup> The network is a part of the international peasants' movement La Via Campesina fighting for food sovereignty, peasants' rights, agroecology, dignity for migrants and waged workers in rural areas, environmental justice and international solidarity. <https://viacampesina.org/en/> (Accessed 10 May 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The largest grassroots environmental network in Europe, uniting more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups. <http://www.foeeurope.org> (Accessed 20 May 2019).

<sup>10</sup> A network made up of feminist, antiracist and citizens' movements as well as trade unions and campaign groups from over twenty European countries, opposing austerity policies implemented by EU Institutions. <http://www.altersummit.eu> (Accessed 20 May 2019).

<sup>11</sup> A European network of associations and activists that fights for women's rights, as part of a larger struggle for social justice, sustainable livelihoods and human rights. <https://wideplus.org> (Accessed 10 May 2019).

- Their demands are focusing on social and economic changes.
- They are active in searching, formulating and proposing social and policy interventions that may produce desired social and economic changes.
- They share same values that are in the core of their work and advocacy efforts, and they are: protection and fulfilment of economic, social, political, civil and cultural rights, equity, equality, gender equality, protection of vulnerable groups, labour rights, fair distribution of income and profit, social security, North-South solidarity, international solidarity, people's sovereignty, democratization of decision-making processes at all level, just trade, fair production, fair wages, protection of environment and natural resources, sustainable livelihoods, regulated markets and supply, corporate responsibility.
- Their approach to the current economic, financial, social and environmental crisis is based on demanding justice (social justice, food justice, gender justice, tax justice and environmental justice).
- They have developed and are working to develop further alternative models to the neoliberal policies that would put people and the environment at the centre of the economy and contribute social justice and sustainable livelihoods.
- They are active in advocacy for their demands before the EU institutions.
- They have developed a valuable and vast source of knowledge through research, including participatory, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary research.
- They address the EU's democratic deficit demanding civil dialogue.
- They are active in the debate on the future of the European Union and Europe.

Majority of these European movements are members of a global network and/or have taken active role in the global alter-globalization movement, the World Social Forum and the Eu-

ropean Social Forum. They collaborate with each other and support each other in campaigning, advocacy and research. They also cooperate with similar civil society organizations and networks in countries outside the European Union. A number of their projects and activities has received the support of the European Commission.

These above-mentioned findings support the conclusions of the Donatella Della Porta that contemporary European social movement organisations are to be defining as “critical Europeans” instead of Eurosceptics (Della Porta, 2006). They are dissatisfied with the current economic policy and criticise neoliberalisation, marketization and privatization, but they seek for and offer alternatives based on research and empirical information. Their solutions are based on transformative economies, such as social economy, solidarity economy, feminist economy, and transformative practices, such as food sovereignty, agroecology, fair trade, financial transaction tax, regulation of financial markets, gender just trade policy, entitlement of communities and local producers, debts cancelling, and redistributive land reform. These models are based on new collective rights promoted from grassroots such as right to seed, right to food sovereignty, right to culturally appropriate food, and right to maintain, control and protect traditional knowledge.

Social movement advocacy for transformative policies of the European Commission that would enhance economies and eliminate inequalities. These demands have been introduced to the forthcoming European Parliament elections in May 2019 as a ‘Manifesto for a Sustainable Europe for its Citizens’ (Friends of the Earth Europe, 2018, 25 September).<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the Alter Summit network has called for establishing a political, social and democratic Europe, building on the basis of equality, solidarity and genuine democracy (Alter Summit, 2019). For example, after the EU elections in May 2019, 37 social movement organizations called for EU food policy and European Commission

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<sup>12</sup> On this occasion, Jagoda Munić, director of Friends of the Earth Europe, said: “At the moment too much of the debate about the future of Europe is stuck in the question of ‘more or less EU?’. We need to move the conversation on to ‘what kind of Europe do we want?’.

Vice-President for Food for ensuring the sustainability of the European food systems (Friends of the Earth Europe, 2019, 17 July). These networks are also united in insisting the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Agenda 2030. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> Social Platform Flagship Conference in Helsinki, in September 2019, the recommendations have been developed for an economy of wellbeing approach that leaves no one behind. The economy of wellbeing encompasses a long-term approach 'that looks at the impact of decisions and policies on people's lives, is based on a participatory governance structure, and ensures socioeconomic and environmental justice for all' (Social Platform, 2019, 24 September).

They also call for involvement of civil society organisations in all stages of the EU decision-making process to ensure decisions are based on the impact they have on people's lives. Recently, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Social Platform Flagship Conference has called the future Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for 'An Economy that Works for People' to go beyond engaging only in social dialogue and to establish a structured relationship with civil society organisations (Social Platform, 2019, 24 September).

## Conclusions

The findings of this paper confirm the first hypothesis examined, that the increasing inequalities in the European Union, caused by the prevailing neoliberal policy, contributed to the rise of social movements across Europe. The hypothesis that these social movements contributed to increasing Euroscepticism and radical right has been refuted. The demands of these civil society networks, as well as their advocacy efforts, are oriented to transform current 'market Europe' into 'social Europe'. They use social pressure for system change. They insist in having a permanent dialogue and a structured relationship with the EU institutions, but they do not tend to transform themselves institutionally in a form of a political party. They stay focused on examining and proposing alternatives to counter current economic

and social difficulties, calling for social justice. Thus, their position is more on the 'left' side than the 'right'. Instead of being Eurosceptics, members of social movements are rather Eurocriticals and Alter-Europeanists demanding for a more sustainable, inclusive and democratic Europe. Although there is still a scholarly debate about the European dimension of these movements and the nature of contemporary collective action (Mathers, 2016), apparently, they may constitute corrective to strengthening democracy.

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