

Eco-social policies in a multilevel setup: from Brussels to Berlin

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In December 2019, the EU has launched the European Green Deal (EGD), through which the EU is supposed to become “... a fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, with zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and economic growth decoupled from resource use.” (European Commission 2019: 1). Acknowledging that “[t]he participation and engagement of the public and all stakeholders is crucial to the success of the European Green Deal” [ibid.: 27], the EGD also tries to reconcile the European ‘green transformation’ with a social growth strategy. The EGD recognizes that “careful attention will have to be paid when there are potential trade-offs between economic, environmental and social objectives” (ibid.: 4), referring specifically to the social risks of the low-carbon transition. To address such risks, the EGD endorses a just transition approach, in an explicit attempt to leave “no one behind”. This should be achieved mainly through the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) and the Social Climate Fund (SCF), which provide funding for social policy measures – targeted respectively to workers and territories in carbon-intensive sectors and to vulnerable energy and transport consumers – and aim at stakeholder and citizen participation. Nevertheless, the implementation of the EGD – and, more specifically, of its just transition component – is largely left to the remit of the Member States, raising a question about the functioning of the EGD’s multilevel governance from an eco-social perspective.

In the proposed paper, we argue that the EGD constitutes a twofold challenge for EU member states: a) from a Europeanisation perspective, it brings in a new supranational governance and policy strategy, with new objectives and also new governance instruments, and hence new challenges for domestic adaptation and implementation, and b) from an eco-social perspective, it introduces a specific model of ecological modernization and green growth, complemented by the promotion of a just transition approach and eco-social instruments, which most likely will require new social policy frameworks. Our paper sets out to analyze these challenges for EU member states by drawing on an analytical framework which aligns the Europeanisation literature and eco-social debates. Empirically, we discuss EGD policy-making and implementation processes both at the EU level and the national and regional level, selecting Germany as a case study. The latter constitutes a relevant case to study the multilevel governance of EU’s eco-social policies, given that, in light of its high dependency on lignite, the country ranks second (after Poland) with respect to the total amount of JTF resources received. We deploy document analysis and interview data and adopt a multilevel perspective in scrutinizing, in a first step,

the EU's eco-social approach, comprising particularly the EGD as the core supranational strategy and the JTM and SCF as the main policy instruments with regard to the social dimension of ecological modernization. Second, we focus on how these EU initiatives relate to domestic eco-social settings by analyzing original empirical data from the policy-making and the policy implementation stage in Germany. In particular, we will investigate the extent to which national policies incorporate the EU's just transition approach and we will focus specifically on the multilevel implementation of the EU JTF in Germany. Ultimately, the paper aims to put flesh to the bones of eco-social multilevel interactions in Europe, shedding light on how the politics of just transition policies connects Brussels to Berlin.