

Social Policy in the European Sustainable Development Strategy

Polityka społeczna w strategii zrównoważonego rozwoju Unii Europejskiej

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Abstract

Sustainable development not only refers to the relationship between the economy and the environment, but it also has a social dimension. This article reviews the original acts and basic documents concerning EU's sustainable development strategy, from the *Maastricht Treaty* in 1992 to the latest *Europe 2020* (2010) economic strategy, in terms of their reference to the problems of social security and social policy. It also presents examples of EU's activities in the social pillar of the sustainable development policy, especially in the areas of health, demographic problems, poverty, and social exclusion. A system of indicators is presented as the measure of progress of sustainable development within the Communities. In the final part of this article the system of indicators for health is presented.

Key words: sustainable development, social security, social policy, European Union

Streszczenie

Zrównoważony rozwój odnosi się nie tylko do relacji pomiędzy gospodarką i środowiskiem, ale posiada także wymiar społeczny. W artykule dokonano przeglądu aktów pierwotnych i podstawowych dokumentów Unii Europejskiej podejmujących kwestie zrównoważonego rozwoju, od *Traktatu z Maastricht* z 1992 r. do najnowszej strategii gospodarczej *Europa 2020* z 2010 r., w aspekcie ich odniesienia do problemów bezpieczeństwa socjalnego i polityki społecznej. Przedstawiono również przykłady działań Unii Europejskiej w zakresie filaru społecznego polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju, zwłaszcza w dziedzinie zdrowia, problemów demograficznych oraz ubóstwa i wykluczenia społecznego. Miarą postępu w dziedzinie zrównoważonego rozwoju we Wspólnotach są systemy wskaźników. W końcowej części tekstu zaprezentowano system wskaźników w dziedzinie zdrowia.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, bezpieczeństwo socjalne, polityka społeczna, Unia Europejska

Introduction

Sustainable development has been for several years an important development goal and one of the EU's horizontal policies (Papuziński, 2011). Its presence and importance is associated with the transfer of declarations, from international conferences organised by the UN in Rio de Janeiro and Johannesburg into the regions. It also includes ecological cooperation between Member States, especially around the Baltic Sea. The concepts of sustainable development in the European Union also result from the environmental protection policy, whose expression

are the *Action Plans*, developed and implemented since 1973, as well as the *Lisbon* and *Gothenburg Strategies*.

The most quoted definition of sustainable development, introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, states that sustainable development is such a development in which the needs of the present generation can be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. From this definition a commonly so-called narrower interpretation of the sustainable development concept is

derived, limited to the protection of the natural environment from the risks emanating as a result of economic development in present-day nations. It is thus usually synonymous with environmental and ecological policies. However, it is just one area of interest within the framework of the sustainable development concept. From the quoted definition, it follows that the second area of interest is satisfying social needs (Tuziak, 2010; Piontek, 2010). Thus we can speak, not only of ecological but also of social objectives of sustainable development, which belongs to two groups:

- the first group includes initiatives to help the most vulnerable communities, thus protecting them from the threat of outbreaks of social conflict,
- the second group contains objectives to change social attitudes towards implementing ecologically sustainable development practices (Mazur, 2008, p. 69-70).

From different perspective, for sustainable development purposes, besides maintaining the communal production potential, development and operation prospects, it is necessary to guarantee people an ontic security. It would depend on, among others, protecting human health, guaranteeing a basic level of supply, and reducing the extreme differences in income (Papuziński, 2006, Table 1, p. 118-119).

This objective is often referred to as social security, which is spoken of as a social value, occurring together with other values recognised in most societies, such as social justice, egalitarianism and social solidarity. Providing citizens with a sense of social security is, in turn, the primary objective of social security systems, which operate in present-day European countries and are an important part of these countries' social policy.

Thus the narrow ecological-only interpretation of sustainable development would be inappropriate, or could actually even be harmful to the development of present-day countries. Equally important to, such as counteracting negative phenomena occurring in the natural environment, is solving social problems. Does this apply to Europe, most often associated with high levels of social security? The price paid by the majority of the highly developed European countries for the feeling of social security and for the welfare of the majority of their population is significant. Firstly, high labour costs, which resulted in the loss of European economic competitiveness in global markets. Secondly, there is the fall in employment and a rise in unemployment caused by promoting, even forcibly, technical and IT advances leading to, in effect, a so called growth in non-employment. Thirdly and finally, the occurrence of self-incapacitation in part of the population expecting state aid for its every need, without utilising its own efforts and capabilities. All this meant that the European welfare states (*social welfare, caring*),

already began to *collapse* during the 1980s due to their national budgets becoming overloaded. However, their dismantling (causing the European residents to feel primarily a weakening of social security, especially in the western and southern parts) was met with frequently harsh objections from society and a growing social unrest. This situation continues to this day, with the result that Europe needs to strike a new balance between economic and social development, which means new social policies. That difficult task stands not only before the individual European states, but also before the European Union, to which the majority now belongs.

The occurrence of social aspects in the sustainable development concept raises the question of mutual relations between the EU strategy for sustainable development and the social policies of the European Communities. More specifically, we can formulate two questions about the:

1. presence and extent of social policy issues in the design and policy of sustainable development, pursued in the European Union,
2. manifestation of sustainable development ideas (principles, concepts) in the Community's social policies.

However, it seems that the main problem comes down to whether, through the strategy and policy of sustainable development, the European Union will be able to restore to its citizens, heavily unsettled in recent years, a feeling of social security.

In seeking answers to this question I sought the presence of social issues and objectives in the European Communities' official documents on sustainable development and selected policies in this field. I also tried to explain the main concepts related to the topic and the relationships between them.

1. Sustainable development, social security and social policy – notes on the terminology

The idea of sustainable development has been around since the 1960s through U Thant's report, then the UN Secretary General, and the first commissioned report for the Club of Rome entitled *The Limits to Growth*, published in 1972 (Zabłocki, 2002, p. 13). Over the decades it has had many interpretations, explanations, and has been extensively written about (Piontek F., Piontek B., 2009). Sustainable development emerged in the European Union under the provisions of Article 2 and Article 3 in the *Treaty on European Union* (TEU), also known as the *Maastricht Treaty*, signed in February 1992 before the UN Rio Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June later that year. This is because, during the Dublin Summit in June 1990, the Heads of State and the Community governments recognised the Community's and the whole world's shared responsibility for the environment, indicating that preventive action in this respect should be

based on the principles of sustainable development (Ciechanowicz-McLean, 2005, p. 10).

The problem of satisfying social needs, which constitutes the sustainable development concept, is the subject of analysis in many fields, especially social policy, understood both as a science, as well as an activity, most of all, of the State, local government and/or non-governmental organisations. Although there is no single, commonly accepted definition of social policy, most of them refer to some important concept, with a rich theoretical and empirical content. Hence, there are definitions that relate not only to needs, but also to social welfare, social rights, social justice, social issues, and also to social security (Szarfenberg, 2008, p. 62-74). Some definitions of social policy point to this relationship directly. For example, according to Edwin Amenta, social policy is *the state's policy response to basic social risks to employment, income and social security* (Szarfenberg, 2008, p. 64). Also, Barbara Szatur-Jaworska and Grażyna Firlit-Fesnak, in their definition of social policy, regard social security as being one of the goals of the state and other organisations, in the development of the population's living and working conditions as well as social relations (Szatur-Jaworska, Firlit-Fesnak, 1994, p. 3).

Social security has no universally accepted definition. One definition states that they are guarantees to meet the social needs of individuals and families, safe-guarding against poverty or the lowering of the quality of life (money.pl, 2011). According to Anthony Rajkiewicz, it is understood to be a collective term covering human needs, civil rights and state obligations. Its existence is a guarantee for obtaining external assistance (outside the family) in cases of change of fortune and other situations determined by law or specific agreements (Rajkiewicz, 1993, quoted in Uścińska, 2007, p. 1). Niklas Luhmann links them to the type of state, using the term *social security state* and points out that social security today means and requires something more than just social care or compensation for harm caused by accelerated industrialisation. It is also about compensation for losses, which individuals experience as a result of a particular life-style (Luhmann, 1994, p. 3-4). Social security is considered in most European countries, and also in international legislation, as the main goal of a country's social policy. However, it is worth noting, that it is also refers to some of the sociological type categories, which indicates a certain conceptual chaos¹.

¹ *a nation's social security is that quality of society's culture and social structure, as well as the system of division of labour, which allows citizens to achieve individual values, and which manifests itself by individuals, natural and formal groups undertaking action-oriented cooperation for the common good, the realization of recognized cultural values using accepted means and also upholds and strengthens social bonds ensuring the shaping of the community's identity enclosed within the*

Social policy occupies an important place in the European Union's activities, especially since the *Amsterdam Treaty* came into force. This manifests itself mainly in the form of numerous regulations and directives governing the working conditions for EU citizens, and also in a number of strategies related to social issues (employment, social integration, health, pensions and education). The social security system also has a big meaning for EU citizens and migrant workers, guaranteeing them a sense of social security.

In practice, for European countries, social policy is a very extensive area. It is primarily associated with the shaping of working conditions, the existence of society and social security, i.e. the traditional social domains, but it also encompasses areas shaping human capital: health, education and culture. Its domain also includes policies towards the different social groups: the family, the disabled, the elderly, children and young people, the poor, the socially excluded and discriminated. The concept of the European Union's social policy has a much narrower scope than that of its Member States. It mainly covers the issues of employment, safety and working conditions, social security, and more recently social exclusion and equality between women and men (Anioł, 2003, p. 10; Żukowski, 2010, p. 2).

In principle, in the policy documents for sustainable development in the EU, there is no concept of social policy or social security. The sustainable development categories, taking into account its social pillar are most often general, expressing its intended targets, such as:

- *Social cohesion*, sometimes referred to as building a new social state, as adopted by the *Lisbon Strategy* of 2000.
- *Quality of life* which is the most widely used term referring to the objectives and effects of sustainable development. T. Borys presented this category's possible inclusions in the context of sustainable development. He points out two interpretations for the quality of life – *having* understood as well-being and *being* or welfare. He also differentiates seven quality of life concepts which differ in principle according to the domain, which make up the quality of life category. For example, the tridomain concept differentiates quality of life into social, economic and environmental, whilst the tridecadomain concept has: marriage and family life, health, neighborhood, friends and acquaintances (level of life in the USA as a reference point), place of residence, housing, professional work and house work, leisure, education and its

nation's political organization, quoted in Jakubczak et. al, 2008, p. 60.

usefulness, financial security (Kielczewski, 2009, p. 109-110).

- *Social welfare*, used as an alternative to the *quality of life* category in sustainable development and understood as an opportunity to satisfy basic needs, not just *here* and *now*, but also by future generations (intra-generation and inter-generation solidarity appears among the methods which determine the policies for maintainable development in the *Renewed Gothenburg Strategy*) and others cohabiting Earth (cifalpllock.eu. 2011).

In addition to these general concepts related to social development, there are specific issues which are included in the social problems catalogue. These are: public health, employment, demographic changes, education, poverty, social exclusion, migration. They are treated as challenges or areas that should be addressed within the framework of the sustainable development policy.

Attention is drawn to a lack of consistency in highlighting these social problems in successive EU legislation and strategies, which address the issue of sustainable development. The only permanent issues seem to be employment and health, though the goals which should be achieved in these areas, in order to realise the sustainable development concept, are formulated differently. Therefore, instead of talking about social policy as one of the pillars of sustainable development, in terms of the European Union it is preferable to use the term *social development*, *social goals* or *social development policy*, a category which appeared in the *EU's Renewed Sustainable Development Strategy* in 2006.

In addition, the social security category is not present as a goal or a social aspect of the European Union's sustainable development policy. However, the attitude towards solving European problems, such as low levels of population growth, poverty, social exclusion and unemployment, suggests that it is precisely about achieving social security.

2. Social issues in the European Union's sustainable development documents

Article 2 and Article 3 of the *Maastricht Treaty* (1992) steered the European Union towards sustainable development, initially only in the spheres of politics and environmental law. This was before the UN conference in Rio de Janeiro, which took place in June of that year. In accordance with the provisions of the *Maastricht Treaty* environmental protection became an integral part of the European Union's so-called *first pillar*, i.e. the social and economic pillar, which consists of, among others, competition and the trade, social and employment policies (J. Ciechanowicz-McLean, 2005, p. 11 and p. 15). As mentioned previously, the *Maastricht Treaty* contains the important objectives of the

European Union's social policy. Article 2 states that the Community's duty, amongst others, is *to promote a high level of employment and social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States* (Głabicka, 2001, p. 162). They were to be implemented based on the principle of subsidiarity (Article 3 TEU) but were not yet linked to sustainable development (Hartman, 2009).

The Fifth EC Environmental Action Programme *Towards Sustainability* (1993-2000) directly linked environmental protection to the idea of sustainable development which was already evident from the title *Towards Sustainability – the European Community Programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development*. The programme set out strategic objectives, principles and an overall activity framework for achieving sustainable development and defined long-term activities in different sectors (environmental protection, energy, transport, agriculture, tourism), but did not include elements of sustainable impact in the social aspect, with the exception of indicators promoting changes in society's behaviour towards the environment (Ciechanowicz-McLean, 2005, p. 10).

Subsequent Community treaties: *The Treaty of Amsterdam* (2nd October 1997) and *Treaty of Nice* (26th February 2001) did not add any significant substantial changes to the environmental protection policy and did not expand on the concept of sustainable development. However, in the first of the aforementioned documents, for the first time a lot of space was set aside for social issues. The range of social objectives adopted in the *Maastricht Treaty* was extended and legislation was introduced for a number of social issues, including among others: free movement of people, employment, education and professional training, health care, social care, and migration policy. However, in Title XIX of the *Amsterdam Treaty*, relating to the natural environment, it was indicated that the Community's policy in this area contributes to achieving not only the purely environmental objectives, such as preserving, protecting and improving the natural environment, with prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources, but also protects human health, that is matters falling into the interests of social policy. Thus, the European Union treaties did not significantly change the regulation of sustainable development to the end of the twentieth century.

It wasn't until the *Lisbon Strategy*, adopted in January 2000, which brought to prominence sustainable development and its associations with the social sphere. The European Union has set itself in it, for the next 10 years, new strategic objectives to become the most dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth, with more and better jobs, and greater social cohesion. Despite the fact that social goals

were already revealed in the *Treaty of Amsterdam*, the *Lisbon Strategy* is quite commonly considered to be a turning point in the adoption of activities in the field of social policy by the European Union, understood as a policy to boost employment, fight social exclusion (Żukowski, 2010, p. 2) and to point to their links to the European sustainable economic development.

Although the sustainable development aspect appeared in this, important for European development strategic document, it was not developed relative to the natural environment. However, a year later, in Gothenburg in 2001, a successive EU strategy entitled *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development* known as the *Gothenburg Strategy* was devoted to sustainable development. Sustainable development, as accepted in this document, has to ensure for the Union a long-term vision of society – wealthier, just, with a cleaner, safer and healthier environment. Among the main threats to sustainable development, apart from greenhouse gas emissions and loss of bio-diversity, i.e. clear ecological threats, the following are listed:

- Severe threats to public health are posed by new antibiotic-resistant strains of some diseases and potentially, longer-term effects of many hazardous chemicals.
- One in every six Europeans lives in poverty which has a direct impact on individuals causing them ill-health, suicide, and persistent unemployment, particularly affecting single mothers and older women living alone.
- An ageing population threatens a slowdown in the rate of economic growth and adversely affects the quality and financial sustainability of pension schemes and public health care (Rosicki, 2010, p. 46-47).

After the European Commission reviewed the EU strategy for sustainable development the European Council adopted in June 2006 a comprehensive new strategy for sustainable development called *Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy*, which applies across the enlarged Union. *The overall aim of the Renewed EU SDS is to identify and develop actions to enable the EU to achieve continuous improvement of quality of life both for current and for future generations, through the creation of sustainable communities* – says the document.

It contains four main objectives:

1. *Protection of the natural environment.*
2. *Justice and social cohesion*, a social aim explained as the promotion of democratic, cohesive, healthy, safe and just society, realising the idea of social integration and respecting the basic rights and cultural diversity which creates equal opportunities and combats all forms of discrimination.

3. *Economic prosperity*, not new but derived from the *Lisbon Strategy*, the combination of competitive knowledge-based economic development utilising the resources of the natural environment, ensuring a high standard of living, full employment and high quality jobs.
4. *Implementation of our obligations internationally* which means in brief, promoting sustainable development throughout the world.

The headline objectives translate into operational objectives related to social areas such as health, social integration, demography and migration. There are many goals and they cannot all be mentioned here, but it is worth looking at those which most attract the attention of EU experts and officials as essential activities for sustainable development within the social policy framework. Thus, the operational objectives of *Public Health* include:

- improving food and fodder legislation, through food labelling verification, amongst others,
- reducing the growing incidence of lifestyle and chronic diseases, especially in communities and regions with an unfavourable economic situation,
- reducing health disparities in Member States and between them,
- improving mental health and preventing suicides.

In turn, for *social integration, demography and migration* aims, we find:

- reduction in the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with particular emphasis on child poverty,
- support for Member States in their efforts to modernise social security in the face of an aging population,
- increasing the number of women and older workers in the labour market and increasing employment of migrants and persons with disabilities,
- reducing the negative effects of globalisation on workers and their families,
- promoting employment for young people (every young person who has left school and is unemployed should, within six months, get a job offer, apprenticeship, or additional training).

Even these mentioned social objective examples for supporting EU's sustainable development are impressive in number. They are largely subordinated to one of the most important Community goals of the last decade, which is a rise in employment, which should in turn, serve economic growth. We are dealing with an economic priority, characteristic for the functioning of the Community, whilst social issues are unfortunately in second place.

The latest EU document entitled *Europe 2020* (Hoedl, 2011), undertaking the sustainable development issues was adopted in March 2010 and sets out *a vision of the social market economy for Europe in the 21st Century*. It identifies sustainable development as one of the three most important factors of economic growth alongside smart development i.e. knowledge-based economic development, innovation and development favouring social inclusion. Here we have a triad of objectives similar to that in the *Lisbon Strategy*. Then it was the development of a knowledge-based economy, high employment, environmental protection and fight against poverty and social exclusion. Now Europe is to become *smart and balanced, will promote social inclusion, will be able to boast high employment and productivity indicators, and greater social cohesion* (Europe 2020, 2010). In order to assess the progress in implementing the *Europe 2020* strategy, the European Commission identified five EU headline targets which have to be realised within the agreed priorities by 2020. As many as three have a social dimension, since they refer to employment, education and social integration:

- 1) 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed.
- 2) The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have completed tertiary education.
- 3) Reduction of poverty by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion (Europe 2020, 2010).

These are long-term objectives whereas the new EU strategy emerged in conditions of economic and financial crisis. However, as Jose Manuel Barroso stated, though the difficult period for EU countries is not over, in order to build a SUSTAINABLE FUTURE one must look beyond the short term (Europe 2020, 2010). In the context of this analysis, once again considering the wide range and depth of social goals related to the prospective development of Europe, including sustainable development, it can be assumed that it is not even possible without a solution, or at least to mitigate, the severe social issues, acknowledged by low levels of employment, educational exclusion of the young generation, and a significant spread of poverty.

3. EU's sustainable development practices in social areas

For several years the EU has taken into account the objectives of sustainable development in its policies in several areas. In particular, it has assumed a leadership role in tackling climate change and in promoting an economy based on low emission technologies, knowledge and efficient management of resources. Periodic reviews of the EU strategy

for sustainable development analyse the effectiveness of these actions which are delivered to the EU's bodies in the form of communications from the European Communities Commission (Communication..., 2005).

Analysis of the first of these communications from 2005 shows, that three social issues were the subject of the evaluation: public health, social exclusion, demography and migration, which together were treated as interdependent issues and challenges of global poverty and development.

The key health activities of the EU and its Member States (planned rather than implemented) were:

- refining plans to counter various pandemics,
- agreeing and implementing a HIV/AIDS strategy, and also fighting malaria and tuberculosis,
- coordinating research into the links between environmental pollutants, health risks and health impacts, with the aim to improve our knowledge of what environmental factors cause health problems and how to prevent them.

Another social issue, which the EU's actions focus on, are the demographic problems, which is understood as being Europe's ageing population, the decline in indicators for fertility, and the reduction in the professionally active population. This in turn reduces the number of employed and threatens the Member States' economic growth. The economic social conditions in a united Europe are clearly evident here. A key action that is being proposed is to analyse the ways aid is provided to Member States in responding to demographic problems, in particular by promoting active ageing strategies, integrating immigrants, better conditions for families, and identifying new initiatives to promote a balance between work and private life.

And one final question. Poverty and social exclusion, which is no longer only linked to increasing low income, but also with promoting access to employment, worker mobility, health care, telecommunication and information services, and – above all – education and professional training. In this regard, as a corrective action the Commission proposed:

- announcing 2010 as the European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion,
- providing a roadmap for equality between women and men in order to achieve gender equality and solving demographic problems.

The proposed actions took on real shape in the form of action plans, campaigns, communications, strategy and even regulations, not only to stimulate the decision makers to act, but actually to force them. They were focused on promoting better legislation. The role of the impact assessment system should also be emphasised. It shows that it has a big signifi-

icance for sustainable development, as it foresees the potential impacts of new legislation or policy proposals.

The global economic and financial crisis in 2008 became the impetus to take stock of current policies and to intensify the activities of sustainable development. It contributed to the publication of a successive European Commission communication on the inclusion of sustainable development in EU policies in various areas (Communication..., 2009). It also applied to social issues according to the previously approved scheme. Thus, amongst the actions for promoting health the following were included:

- activities in the field of major and chronic diseases,
- political initiatives related to mental health, alcoholism, obesity, smoking and combating HIV/AIDS,
- authorisation system for feed additives and action plans to implement a new strategy for animal health,
- implementation of the *Youth Health* initiative in 2009, which aims to improve the health and well-being of young people.

In turn, activities in social inclusion, demography and migration include:

- moving the retirement age to 65 years²,
- social inclusion and social protection reforms in the Member States supported by the open method of coordination (some 10 billion euros were allocated for this purpose for the period 2007-2013),
- the creation of a European alliance for families and a new government advisory group dealing with demographic issues³,
- An in-depth analysis of the impact of ageing on the budget and the economy up to 2060. This resulted in the Commission producing the *2009 Ageing Report* – dealing with the impact of an ageing population in the EU (Communication, 2009), and an action programme of research into how modern technologies can serve elderly people (Decision 742/2008/WE).
- An outline for the policy on legal migration aimed at harmonising migrant admission procedures and the introduction of an EU Blue Card system for highly-skilled migrants, whilst on the other hand accepting directives foreseeing sanctions against employers who employ workers from third

countries who are illegally staying within the EU.

Even this sample review of the EU's objectives and social activities, is convincing of their major importance for the realisation of the sustainable development policy. The *Renewed Sustainable Development Strategy*, and documents monitoring its implementation progress, place a strong emphasis on the objectives and activities in the employment arena, in which the European Union has been implementing since 1997, one of its most important strategies⁴. Improving the health of Europeans and freeing them from the most serious threats in this area, and reducing the number of poor and those threatened with social exclusion, especially women and older people who remain outside of the labour market and in need of State aid, are the goals and in their wake activities, which support the European employment policy. They are the subject of the *Social Security and Social Integration Strategy*, encompassing three groups of problems: social integration, pension schemes and health care combined with long-term care, which has been implemented since 2006 using the open method of coordination: OMC (Żukowski, 2010, p. 2; Rosati, 2009, p. 285-288). The implemented social strategies, in relation to the sustainable development policy, serve mainly for economic growth in Europe, but one can also assume that they confirm the ec humanitarian trend in the European Union which depends on rejecting the *zero growth* strategy in favour of the sustainable development strategy (Michnowski, 2008, p. 89-90).

Progress in the field of sustainable development in the European Union is monitored by a system of indicators. The first set of indicators was adopted in 2005 and then updated in 2007. Alongside the structural indicators which monitor the Lisbon Strategy, such as employment levels, a catalogue of monitoring indicators appears in as many as three social spheres: poverty and social exclusion, educational policy, and public health.

The indicators which monitor each of the EU SDS priorities form a three-level pyramid. At the top the first level indicators (so-called headline indicators) relate to the main purpose of a given priority, and at the same time have the largest communication capacity. The second level comprises of indicators for operational purposes, whilst the third relate to the activities (Sulmicka, 2010, p. 6).

² Achieving this objective in the short term is considered unlikely, although demographic trends are disturbing and indicate that the population of working age in the EU-27 will start to fall from 2013 and will decrease to around 39 million (12%) by 2050 compared with 2008.

³ These actions indicate a widening of interests in European social policy regarding family issues and associated demographic processes.

⁴ The *European Employment Strategy*, launched at the Luxembourg Employment Summit was the EU's response to the decline in the level of employment and rising unemployment in Europe since the 1970s. In 2003, the European Council in Thessaloniki adopted *New Employment Policy Guidelines*, organised around the *four Luxembourg pillars* of the *European Employment Strategy*.

The *Public Health* theme, having strong ties with both environmental considerations, as well as with economic development, is particularly suitable for assessing progress on sustainable development in Europe. Its headline indicators are the number of years lived in good health broken down by gender, and the average life expectancy at birth. In 2007 the statistical life expectancy of a newborn male in the EU was 76.07 years. The second level (operation target) indicators, measuring health and social inequalities relate to: mortality from chronic diseases in the population aged over 65 years, suicide, as well as the unmet needs in healthcare. The third level indicators are the health determinants such as the exposure of the urban population to air pollution by particulate matter and by ozone, noise nuisance, and accidents at work (Eurostat, 2012).

In view of these indicators a whole range of concerns, especially methodological (ozone indicator) can be put forward, but in the light of Eurostat data, the majority of monitored countries present a varied, but generally positive picture, with the exception of the third level indicators, where no progress is visible.

Summary

Ever since sustainable development appeared in EU's documents and activities, the role of social factors within it has greatly increased. Social policy, not only in the EU's narrow but also in the wider definition, taking into consideration demographic issues, health and education, is now an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development in the European Union. Although the EU's social policy does not explicitly state the notion of social security, the goals that are placed in this area, must unconditionally lead to its achievement.

It should be noted that in the context of the deepening 2011 economic crisis, particularly the financial and consequently the political crisis, which the EU Member States are now going through, social security for Europeans has drifted away. Jeffrey Sachs, one of the world's eminent economists, commenting on the symptoms of this European and global crisis, points out that the way to overcome it is to help the poorest countries in their fight against poverty, hunger and disease, and to repair capitalism, according to Scandinavian templates, where the country's policy is oriented towards the implementation of social rights (Sachs, 2011). This postulate can be read not only as a departure from the neo-liberal solutions that were espoused in Europe since the 1990s, but also as a clear focus of the current policy determined to implement the social aspects of sustainable development.

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