

Vandenbroucke, Frank, Solidarity through Redistribution and Insurance of Incomes: The EU as Support, Guide, Guarantor or Provider? (February 3, 2020). Amsterdam Centre for European Studies Research Paper No. 2020/01 .

Abstract:

Income redistribution and insurance are core functions of welfare states. What role should the EU play in this domain? I examine the purchase of normative theorizing on social justice on this question, building on the contrast between three models of EU involvement: the EU as Support, which implies the sharing of resources through intergovernmental transfers; the EU as Provider, which implies EU cross-border transfers towards individual citizens; the EU as Guide or Guarantor, which implies that the EU formulates normative policy ideals.

I review different normative accounts of justice for the EU (Ronzoni, Viehoff, Sangiovanni, Van Parijs), and how they bear on the choice between these models of EU involvement in welfare state solidarity. These accounts evolve between two extreme positions. On the one hand, an account based on supranational justice as 'background justice for nation states' implies that the EU should be a mere instrument in the hands of its member states. The opposite extreme position is that EU should be a laboratory for international distributive justice, whereby national welfare states are demoted to the toolbox of instruments. I argue that an account of justice for the EU must search for a middle ground, whereby neither the national welfare states nor the EU are demoted to mere instruments.

I conclude that the EU should support the member states' welfare states in some of their key functions, on the basis of common social standards and in pursuit of upward convergence. Such a 'Social Union' would be a Support, Guide and Guarantor, both in the realm of insurance and redistribution. Through the establishment of interstate insurance, it would be a true 'insurance union', but, from the point of view of individual citizens, it would not become a direct Provider of insurance. It would engage in interstate redistribution, but not in interpersonal cross-border redistribution.

Keywords: insurance, redistribution, European Union, solidarity, European Social Union, Social Europe, basic income, global justice