ADVANCING EUROPEANIZATION THROUGH DIGITAL AGENDA: EFFECTS ON THE SOCIAL POLICY OF EU

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Abstract

In this paper, I will propose an analysis of the Digital Agenda (DAE) and determine if its successful implementation will foster the Europeanization process and create favourable conditions for the development of a European wide social welfare that can have lasting effects on the current EU social policy (European Social Policy).

To reach a conclusion on this subject, firstly the Digital Agenda and the impact of ITC have been highlighted, underlining the importance of the internet in delivering added value, boosting economic growth and cost saving measures.

Secondly, the European Social Policy is brought under scrutiny: its origins, history and relation with the national welfare state, the continuing conflict between the Europeanization process and the re-nationalization of the actual European social policy.

The third part of the article presents some of the digital instruments developed trough DAE and their implications on improving the Europeans social benefits. As a main idea, this research was conducted with the purpose of highlighting the importance of achieving the Europe 2020 strategy's targets for the future of EU and how this agenda will turn the union into a competitive, smart, innovative and economically sustainable global actor.

Keywords: Digital Agenda of Europe, internet, social policy, europeanization, social inclusion, economic growth

INTRODUCTION

"Europe today has seven percent of the world's population, produces 25 percent of the world's products, and accounts for 50 percent of its social spending. Without reform, in an ever more competitive international economic environment, it will be difficult to finance the generous welfare state that Europeans are used to".
German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Berggruen and Gardels, 2013)

As one article from the Economist was highlighting the problem, the future of the European Union will be an imminent break-up or the start of a super state construction (The Economist, 2012). And the EU is playing its odds in order to win this battle.

In a period when 24,2% of the European citizens are facing the risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2012), unemployment in the EU-27 is 10,9% and youth unemployment is around 23,3% (Eurostat, 2013) it is not a surprise that more and more Europeans are starting to have strong nationalistic feelings and the anti-EU establishment movements are increasing. In this regard, the social trust in EU is on a decreasing pattern, according to the European Commission, between 2007 and 2012, euroscepticism has risen to high values. Therefore, the confidence in the EU, in the bloc of the six biggest countries, has fallen to a record low (72% in Spain, 52% in Italy, 59% in Germany, 42% in Poland and almost 70% in UK) (Euronews, 2013). All of these values are an undeniable fact that the European Union has been unable to formulate a coherent response to the people's social and economic problems.

In 2012, the economic situation of the Union was fragile and for this year the EU's GDP is expected to contract by 0, 3% and 0, 4% in the Eurozone. The financial crisis has severely affected social systems, facilitating the expansion of unemployment and fostering the risk of poverty. In this regard, the welfare systems are the ones, which are feeling the consequences. (The European Commission, 2012)

In this paper, I will try to connect the social policy of the EU (European Social Policy) and the targets of the Digital Agenda of Europe (DAE) in order to see how the actions and results of DAE extend the Europeanization process and affect the areas of social policy. The main focus will be on the sub-domains of employment, social inclusion and social participation. In addition, I want to state clearly the main research question:

"What can be assessed about the impact of the Digital Agenda and its implementation on the advancement of the Europeanization process in the field of social policy?"

Although, there is plenty of works on the welfare systems and social policy (Castles & Pierson, 2000; Castles, Leibfried, Lewis, Obinger, Pierson, 2010; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Daly, M., 2006, 2008, 2012), little research has been carried out on the European Social Policy and the further implications of the Digital Agenda of Europe in everyday life.

In this regard, this article wants to shed some light on ESP, an important, yet overlooked EU policy and to present the main characteristics and goals of DAE. In addition, the relevance of this article is given by its original approach that consists of debating the Europeanization process of the social policy in the context of the ongoing implementation of the Europe 2020 agenda.

Furthermore, the current debate between the Europeanization and renationalization of social policy is another strength of this presentation because offers to the readers an updated status of European discussions regarding this subject.

As a plus, this paper is trying to forecast the future possible economic, political, social and educational advantages that the Europeans will benefit after the correct implementation of DAE's goals. In order to do this, my research was based mostly on primary sources.

This article was built as a general framework for the readers to understand the core concepts and as such some scholars may consider this a minus.

Nevertheless, its findings can be used both in practical and theoretical work in order to further research a social policy sub-domain or a digital instrument. Due to the complexity of the topic, I have chosen to focus only on three elements of the social policy (employment, social participation and social inclusion) in order to delimitate my research from the vast possibilities offered by the social policy area.

I am fully aware of the fact that the subject in which I am engaging is under formation and that there is a possibility that the targets of the Digital Agenda might not be fulfilled and the Europe 2020 strategy will fail to accomplish its purposes.

Nevertheless, during the article I am inviting the readers to bear with me in my attempt to illustrate the benefits that Europeans will have after and during the Digital Agenda implementation and how this strategy will positively affect the image of the EU and its function in the eyes of the ordinary citizens.

THE DIGITAL AGENDA OF EUROPE

The Internet is an essential key in grass roots political activities and civil society organization (Brake et al., 2004). William Dutton, director of the Oxford Internet Institute at the UK-based University of Oxford said that:

 "The Internet is enabling people to network with other individuals, information and services to create a Fifth Estate, to the print media's Fourth Estate...These networks are surpassing, undermining and crossing the boundaries of existing institutions. This is creating a new form of social accountability in government, politics and other sectors" (NewsRxScience, 2008)

According to a 2012 European Commission communication, the future growth and competitiveness of Europe is in a direct correlation with its capacity to embrace digital transformation in all its sectors:

"Information and communication technology (ICT) is increasingly impacting all segments of society and the economy. It is estimated that half of all productivity growth derives from investment in ICT. Internet traffic is doubling every 2–3 years and mobile internet traffic every year.

By 2015 there will be 25 billion wirelessly connected devices globally; doubling to 50 billion in 2020. Mobile data traffic will increase 12-fold between 2012 and 2018, and data traffic on smartphones will increase 14 times by 2018.

There are more than 4 million ICT workers across many sectors in Europe and their number is growing by 3% annually despite the crisis.

The internet is empowering people to create and share their ideas, giving rise to new content, entrepreneurs and markets. ICT is the essential transformative technology that
supports structural change in sectors like health care, energy, public services, and education" (The European Commission, 2012).

As the report "*Anticipating the development of the supply and demand of e-skills in Europe 2010-2015*" indicates, even though Europe is facing the growing youth unemployment, by 2015, 700,000 to 1 million high-quality ICT jobs will not be occupied (eSkills Monitor, 2009).

One of the strong points of the Union is represented by the Europe 2020 Strategy, which was launched in March 2010 with the purpose of boosting the levels of productivity, employment and social cohesion by using a smart, sustaining and inclusive economy (European Council, 2010). Europe 2020 is organized into three priorities (smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth) that will create more jobs and will enhance the socio-economic policy coordination.

The Europe 2020 strategy's major goal is increasing the employment to a rate of 75% of employed individuals aged between 20-64 years. In order for the strategy to reach a smart and sustainable economy, European institutions need to focus on innovation so one of the targets of the 2020 Strategy, spending 3% of GDP on research and development, could be achieved (Chirila and Savu, 2012).

Flagship initiatives of Europe 2020

Priorities	Initiatives
Smart growth	Innovation Union
	Youth on the move
	A Digital Agenda for Europe
Sustainable growth	Resource efficient Europe
	An industrial policy for globalization era
Inclusive growth	An agenda for new skills and jobs
	European platform against poverty

Source: Europe 2020 Statistical aspects on the strategy – April 2012 (Chirila and Savu, 2012)

The Digital Agenda for Europe, as part of the Europe 2020 strategy, is considered the electronic frontier by some authors. An electronic frontier is defined as a sort of socio-economic frontier based on collaboration and cooperation that acts as an axis in order to provide economic gains and boost social inclusion(Marcut and Soproni, 2012).

It consists of 101 policy actions across 7 areas: fast and ultra-fast internet access; the digital single market; trust and security; digital literacy, skills and

inclusion; interoperability and standards; research and innovation; ICT enabled benefits for EU society. The purpose of these actions is to enhance the investment in digital technology and its usage (The European Commission, 2013).

The prospects of implementing the Digital Agenda imply that the EU's GDP will grow with 5% in the next 8 years (or 1500 euro per person); if the investments in ICT will continue, the e-skills benchmark in labour market will be fostered and the framework of internet economy will be reformed.

It is considered that the DAE will create, on a long term, 1.2 million work places in infrastructure construction and 3.8 million jobs in the whole economy. Plus, it is estimated that the productivity of traditional industry will have tremendous benefits after the introduction of internet-related processes (The European Commission, 2012).

As the European Commission suggests, the production lifecycle of products and services have started to be transformed by the internet. Manufacturing domains benefit from the progress of logistics and chain supply management and in the health care sector we can observe a revolution that will provide the patients and professionals with more personalized and cost efficient services (The European Commission, 2012).

Moreover, the internet economy is fostering efficiency in all processes of production by "liberation resources for new investments and growth" and by creating new types of jobs based on creativity, new skills and specialization.

European welfare would benefit from a gain of 204 billion euro (1.7% of EU GDP) if trade barriers would be eliminated from the Single Market and e-commerce would increase by just 15% of the retail sector (The European Commission, 2012).

In order for the European Union to be capable of providing public services in the context of a Europe "eaten" by austerity measures, cutting-edge solutions are needed. ICT technologies allows for a more efficient use of resources, a more end user approach (be it business or citizen) and a more effective implementation of digital instruments that permit a real time data processing.

A clear example of this is e-procurement that can be used to save more than 100 billion euro (The European Comission, 2012). The successful use of e-Government can reduce the cost of the administration by 15 to 20%. Also, the infrastructure will require less funds as ICT will improve energy networks and consumption, thus saving money and reducing the pollution associated with the energy sector.

Besides cutting costs, digital technologies create plus value in the economy enabling businesses to create 140 billion euro. In addition, ICT can be used in healthcare and can drastically augment the delivery of healthcare services.

In the Annual Growth Survey 2013, the European Commission highlights that public administration modernization is one of the main goals for the next period. By improving this, European authorities intend to enable digital public services to all citizens regardless of their current living place.

In order to achieve this task, EC created an instrument called Connecting Europe Facility which aims at building hubs between national infrastructures and new applications for cross-border interoperability such as e-IDs, Safer Internet for Children,

business mobility, Europeana, eProcurement, eJustice, eHealth, eSignatures, Smart Energy Services, Internet Security. All of these examples are developed with the intent of facilitating the mobility of people and businesses and support a sustainable economic growth. (The European Commission, 2012)

Since 2010, the internet has spread enormously among regular users but also among disadvantaged groups while the rate of internet non-usage has decreased rapidly. Nowadays, people involve more and more the internet in their life's for different purposes such as faster and cheaper communication, online shopping, more use of online public administration services/e-Government, online banking etc. Basic broadband coverage is almost complete; the roaming prices have fallen much faster due to European legislation. All these targets show the EU's strong fight to accomplish the DAE strategy (The European Commission, 2013).

As Mrs. Lucilla Sioli, Head of Unit at the European Commission DG Information Society and Media said:

"A quarter of Europeans have never used the internet, and in some countries this rises to 40% of the population. We know this is largely due to a lack of skills. We need training and re-training at all levels and we need to understand how to best equip the labour force to compete globally" (ECDL Foundation, 2012).

More importantly, when it comes to the young generation, the European and national institutions have to surpass the misconception of the digital natives generation trap. Even more, although the level of unemployment among young people is high in many EU countries, the politicians still consider them the most prepared social group, when it comes to digital skills. This preconception is creating more harm than good and in order to start eradicating the rates of young individuals' unemployment we need proper training for digital skills (ECDL Foundation, 2012).

As Olli Rehn argues, the EU has to excel in information and communication technology in order to regain the people's trust in European institutions and economy. In order to regain trust in economy, the European representatives should focus on competitivity and innovation but also on ICT development that will foster more jobs (Marcut and Soproni, 2012).

The Digital Competitiveness Report of Europe suggests that "the societal processes, such as globalization and mobility" are enhanced by new technologies. Tomas Friedman considers that the people's engagement in online activities by creating, distributing and administering content are creating a "collaborative power" which is the base of social change.

He highlights that the dynamic communication created by the social networks are breaking the barriers between individuals and gather them to a common idea regarding their national, cultural, religious or educational background (Marcut and Soproni, 2012).

EUROPEAN SOCIAL POLICY

The European Social Policy is one of the most ignored and poorly developed policies at Union level. Most nations have their own social policies and implement them after their own model. The EU legislation is transposed in the national law for the guaranteeing of a similar level of protection and rights throughout the EU. According to the reports of the European Commission, citizens are entitled to:

- *"look for a job in another EU Member State;*
- *work there without needing a work permit;*
- *reside in another country whilst seeking work;*
- *stay in that country even after employment there has come to an end;*
- *enjoy equal treatment as nationals with regard to access to employment, working conditions and all other social and tax advantages*." (European Commission, 2013)

The European construct is based on a social market model. Therefore, social inclusion and protection, solidarity, cohesion and full employment are fundamental principles. In accordance with this, the EU Treaty lists among its objectives high levels of employment and social protection (European Commission 2013).

Social policies are needed for assuring these objectives and are seen as a political actions directed at improving living conditions, income and welfare for citizens with below average income (Feldmann, 2002).

At present, in the EU, there are more than 26 million unemployed (European Commission, 2013), therefore a coherent European Social Policy is indispensable.

However, at present, there is no such thing but there is a certain improvement in this direction, to which ICT technologies have significantly contributed. In order to understand the present situation, we must comprehend the background and developments of the social policy.

According to Mary Daly, social policies at EU level have never been a priority or constant. There have been 3 growth periods. First of all, in the 1970s the social democratic influence has engineered social action programs to improve working conditions and to increase involvement of social and economic stakeholders. The main achievements of this period are registered in the area of women and men equality and health at work (Daly, 2008).

The second period highlighted by Daly has been in the late 1980s and has lead to the extension of the qualified majority voting to health, safety and working conditions. Also, there have been steps taken to include persons excluded from the labour markets (Lange, 1993). Daly argues that this period is the stepping stone for

the final period and the basis of the European social policies and methodologies (Daly, 2008).

The third phase has started with the signing of the Lisbon Treaty in 2006, which introduced the concept of knowledge-based economy and has put more emphasis on social cohesion and increased employment throughout the European Union. In the continuation of the Lisbon Agenda the Europe 2020 Agenda has been launched. Bart Vanhercke and David Natali argue that:

"*Europe 2020 was launched at an important moment for the EU. The Lisbon Treaty had not long entered into force and the potential for its provisions to animate a new agenda – including its social dimension – were untested. Yet politically, the agenda was being pulled in different directions. On the one hand, the transition from the Lisbon to the Europe 2020 agenda acted a focal point for demands by social NGOs for a more decisive break with the revised Lisbon agenda, which they viewed as lacking the necessary balance between economic and social objectives. On the other hand, political energy was being directed to the strengthening of EU economic governance and for an acceleration of the sort of structural reforms that the Lisbon agenda had sought to pursue*" (Natali and Vanhercke, 2013).

The social dimension of Europe 2020 agenda albeit fragmented and centred on the nations has grown significantly and has been taken more seriously by the Member States and other stakeholders. This in turn may lead to a better decision-making process and more powerful tools for implementation at European level (Natali and Vanhercke, 2013).

The most important five social areas treated by the flagship initiators of Europe 2020 strategy are employment, working conditions, social inclusion and social protection, gender equality and anti-discrimination (European Commission, 2013).

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL POLICY: EUROPEANIZATION VS. RE-NATIONALIZATION

I will use the definition provided by Janina Witkowska as the core definition for Europeanization that states:

"*Europeanization is understood as a political process bringing with itself continuous, mutual influence and negotiations among the various actors involved in the process of shaping policy on the integrated group's level. On the one hand, these are the Member States, while on the other they are the EU institutions, mainly the European Commission*" (Witkowska, 2011).

More simply, it is my opinion that re-nationalization is the focus of national governments: returning to the national legislation and conferring more

importance to the local prerogatives than to the European laws and set of rules in a domain. It is a shift of competence from the EU to the national states in terms of financing, implementation, decision-making etc.

At the national level, social policy is characterized by having a national baseline of living standards and social protection for all the citizens. The national social policy include among others employment, heath care provisions, unemployment insurance, work and accident insurance, pension and safety, education and training, welfare systems and workforce mobility (Witkowska, 2011). Within the European Union, there are four welfare systems: Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, Mediterranean and Continental (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and 27 ways of implementing them.

The Europeanization of the EU social policy/European Social Policy is not as advanced as other EU policies, especially the economic ones. The defining character of this policy is that it was built on the prerogatives which member countries voluntarily gave to EU.

Taking into consideration the fact that action in the area of social policy at EU level is based on three divisions (the principle of unanimity, exclusion from harmonization and the principle of voting supermajority), we can understand the sensibility of the Member States when it comes to this policy. This is derived from the various social models used by the countries and their need for autonomy in implementation (Witkowska, 2011).

As professor Mary Daly accentuates, some of the EU subjects of interest in the social policy are not treated with the same consideration by the states (as gender equality at work, workers rights, unemployment, work force mobility, industrial health and safety).

But also, at European level, subjects such as social security and income distribution, which are important for the nation states, are offered less approach (Daly, 2006).

The difference between the European social policy and the national welfare systems consists of the following elements:

- the principle of solidarity and subsidiary are the core values on the European Social Policy;
- the goals through which the welfare system has expanded at EU level are European integration and market growth while at the national level there are group identification and welfare state creation;
- the European Social Policy doesn't address social security and income redistribution - core aspects of national policies;
- ESP focuses on conducting policies based on discursive methods and rational models;
- The European Social Policy is mainly based on obligations for social dialogue and the promotion of social partnerships, meanwhile at national level the institutions behind social policies are developed strictly out of the implementation of said policy (Daly, 2006).

86

In most of EU Member States there is an unclear situation about the objectives they have to fulfil in order to achieve the overall EU social inclusion targets of Europe 2020. Even though, many states have set clear targets for reducing poverty and social exclusion, there are various differences across Member States when it comes to the quality and appropriateness of the social inclusion targets.

In this way, some high-risk groups or specific policy domains are not sufficiently covered by the employment and educational targets. There are gaps in the link between the indicators at national and EU level that hinder the achievement of the Europe 2020 goals (Frazer and Marlier, 2011).

The social protection systems in reducing social exclusion and poverty are considered less important by the Member States because most of them are focusing on economic growth by investing a lot in smart and sustainable growth and less on inclusive growth.

According to the findings of the National Reform Programs, social protection and social inclusion matters are handled as side aspects of the economic growth and not enough attention is given to them, except in the case that they hamper the economic growth. There is no surprise that issues like a fair redistribution of resources in society are still considered unimportant (Frazer and Marlier, 2011).

Some authors believe that European Social Policy, in reality, is just a glimpse of the national social policies. They are claiming that the ESP and European Social Model are only concentrated on work-related policies and labour market and little attention is given to sub-domains such as housing policy, health policy and personal social care (Sykes, 2005).

Even though there has been some progress in the last years in social policy at European level, academics like Leibfried and Person argued that we still don't have a "*European welfare state in the sense that entitlements are provisions are organized at the EU level*" (Sykes, 2005). In this regard, social policy is still a national matter, which is exercised almost exclusively by the Member States.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that social policy is strongly linked with market integration, there is enough evidence that in time and, in this case, through the Digital Agenda, the European Union will gain territory when it comes to social aspects, leaving the Member States with less sovereignty and autonomy in social policy area (Sykes, 2005).

The statements of Leibfried about the desire of member countries to preserve their welfare systems and their specificity are still valid after a decade. If at the beginning of 2000, the states were frighten about globalization, global economic competitivity, now the economic crisis and the effects of the EU itself are reasons for a return to nationalistic patterns of work in social policy.

Moreover, the author argues that the involvement of the European Union in social policy has affected, over time, the national welfare systems of Member States in three ways (positively, negatively and indirectly). Positively means that

some measures were taken to harmonize the welfare systems across the EU in matters as gender equality, health and safety at the workplace.

Negatively is referring to the social policy provisions regarding the Single Market and trans-border market compatibility. A good example is the "portable" welfare benefits of workers who are moving from one EU country to another And indirectly, the pressure that companies are exercising on the Member States' welfare systems in order to avoid welfare claimants and to pay lower taxes.

This practice in which the firms are searching for the more profitable welfare systems inside the EU has led to a competition between the states when it comes to attractiveness to foreign investments (Sykes, 2005).

Due to the low social trust of some Member States in European institutions, there is a tendency to ignore the European legislation and Europe 2020 targets in favour of national objectives which are considered to bring more stability and economic growth to that state. A clear example is the nationalization campaign started in Hungary by the Orban administration.[1]

Despite of all these re-nationalization tendencies, I consider that the Digital Agenda is fostering the Europeanization of the European Social Model and is promoting a European welfare system through its strategy and social objectives.

EFFECTS OF THE DAE ON SOCIAL POLICY

For the first time in recent history of the EU, the attention is orientated on a possible model of Social Europe and the social aspects are treated with the same attention as the economical domain. Throughout this article, I've argued in favour of the need of implementing ICT and digital tools and instruments in the EU's strategy.

The Digital Agenda of Europe not only can boost the economy and sustainability of the continent but also, through its actions, is changing the social environment and is contributing to the delineation of a European welfare system.

The most common benefits that this agenda will bring are the creation of new firms and jobs, the growth of economy, the access to the internet and competitivity on the global market. Digital technology can enable old or disabled people to take part in society and these online instruments can ease their life.

By participating in the online world and having the possibility of accessing services, these technological instruments are improving their lives by offering them an equal representation in this online world (Jewell, 2013). Even more, ITC is providing disabled people an option for independent living, through digital services such as banking, transportation, grocery shopping, utilities and governmental transactions.

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[1] "Hungary's bid to nationalise E.ON could spur funding backlash". Retrieved from [http://www.euractiv.com/energy/hungary-plans-eon-spur-funding-b-analysis-514562], last access at 20.10.2013.

By facilitating the access to these types of digital services, the Digital Agenda is enabling the social protection and social inclusion of disabled citizens (Jewell, 2013).

Nevertheless, the most important element of the DAE in social terms is the harmonization of welfare systems within EU in order to achieve wider employment, social inclusion and social participation. In the next section, I will briefly present some digital instruments that will ease the citizens' life and how they are affecting social policy.

- *Digital Single Market*

One of the targets of the DAE is the creation of a Digital Single Market that will update and make more dynamic and flexible the current project of the Single Market.

In a world in which the consumers and businesses have started to move their actions and interactions on the virtual environment, the European Commission highlights the vital necessity of implementing a Digital Single Market in order to maintain and increase the benefits of this project.

The Digital Single Market is estimated to create a growth of 4% during its construction until 2020. The European representatives who argue that the future successes or failures of businesses and consumption lay down on the proper implementation of this goal by 2015 reiterate the importance of this target (Harbour, 2012).

Until 2015, the European Commission is trying to achieve the next "key performance targets":

- increasing the online shopping to 50% (in 2009 it was 39%);
- the cross-border online shopping to achieve the 20% rate (from 9% in 2009);
- the online purchase and selling coming from small and medium-sized enterprises to fulfil the 33% target (it was 24% purchasing and 12% selling in 2009) (Center for European Politics, 2010).

- *e-Government*

According to the United Nations, e-Government can be defined as: "*The employment of the Internet and the world-wide-web for delivering government information and services to the citizens.*" (The United Nations, 2012). Basically, e-Government is the way that services are to be provided to citizens via Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

While the definitions of e-Government and e-Governance have overlapped, I wish to differentiate between the two. e-Governance implies a dual channel communication between state and the beneficiary parties (either business or citizens) (Rossel and Finger, 2007), while e-Government at the moment is more of an informational and providing tool. Joshi and Tiwari have argued that "*e-Governance is used to provide a SMART government, where SMART captures all the necessary attributes of a good government. In SMART, 'S' denotes 'Simple',*

'M' denotes 'Moral', 'A' denotes 'Accountability', 'R' denotes 'Responsiveness' and 'T' used for 'Transparency." (Tiwari and Joshi, 2012). I consider that the current state of affairs is an embryonic faze of larger participation and communication of stakeholders with the governing bodies.

The main advantages of e-Government are quite obvious as they provide a significant incentive for using these services: the time needed to complete the necessary forms for different bureaucratic activities is significantly reduced. Also, the costs are brought down.

As many modern institutions already have electronic infrastructures, the additional costs for developing e-services is significantly lower that the paper and office variant that they could potentially replace. As Tesu points out, this can be achieved through typical web portals and a user-friendly environment that promotes self-services (Tesu, 2012).

A good example of e-Government is DirectGov, implemented by the UK's Cabinet Office e-Delivery, team which is a central platform that contains core content and materials with links to other departments. This platform uses tools and techniques for the study of user behaviour, content organized around "franchises", issuance of beta versions to scan new features. Online public services as filling a tax return, paying bills or applying for a passport are available (Yiu and Fink, 2013).

- *e-Health*

One of the Digital Agenda actions is referring to eHealth services. The goal of this project is to offer to the European citizens the possibility to access online their medical background and data, until 2015 and to widespread the use of telemedicine services by 2020.

This action intends to provide empowerment to people and cross-border e-Health services that support efficient, secure and safe medical assistance for individuals who are travelling across the EU. Not only it will help patients who are searching for health care in other countries but it is also an instrument through which information and knowledge will be trans-border shared.

All of these are in order to harmonize the research, for comparison purposes, for the creation of common products and services, for analyzing the population health and to facilitate medical services that currently are not available, such as e-prescriptions of medicines (Zilgalvis, 2012).

Due to the high cost of medical services, the aging of the population and the shortage of medical professionals, the introduction of ITC in health related services can find new models of care and disease management that are more cost efficient and offer better care standards.

Personalized care software and technologies are working to reduce the visits of people to doctors and also to help the medical personnel to find and treat more efficiently the patients' problems (European Disability Forum; AGE, 2010).

- *Digitalization*

Digital libraries, such as Europeana, which are based on the digitalization of European cultural heritage and the possibility of finding online materials and books offer tremendous chances to groups that in the past didn't have the access to these sources (older people and disabled ones) (European Disability Forum; AGE, 2010). By investing in digitalization, new companies and new jobs will be created.

It is a source of economic gain in sectors such as tourism, design, learning and games. The EC vice-president for Digital Agenda, Neelie Kroes stated that the "*Investments in digitization are investments in our digital future that will benefit citizens and the economy alike.*" (Charlton, 2012).

- *e-Participation*

New Media not only promotes social movements but has also started to change their basis. Nowadays, is very simple for a citizen to find how to organize a protest or a march, how to organize a petition or a boycott because there are many websites designed especially for this purpose, for example www.e-how.com.

To highlight the idea, Meyer and Tarrow argue that "*ordinary citizens are no longer simply passive consumers of the media but instead are learning how to influence media coverage*". Due to the three main advantages of the internet (fast, wide and cheap), the online protest of political and cultural life has experienced an increasing volume in the recent years (Earl and Kimport, 2009).

Not only that the Europeans will socially and economically benefit from the implementation of ICT and digital technologies in everyday life but it also offers a great shift in terms of political involvement. Due to social networks, in the recent years, we all have discovered the powerful tool that the Internet and online communities are in changing and establishing a regime.

All these actions have led to the spread of democratic ideas in the virtual space. This process is called eDemocracy and is defined by the European Science Foundation as: "*the use of technical tools - particularly the Internet - to allow citizens access to information; to take part in petitions, consultations, deliberation, referenda and elections; and communicate with each other to form e-communities and movements, and take part in e-campaigning and e-activism.*" (NewsRxScience, 2008).

Some authors use the term of Digital Democracy when they are referring to the same concept. According to some scholars, we can distinguish two facets of eDemocracy: electronic voting (e-voting) and electronic participation (e-participation), (Damodaran, 2005) both of them being presented and discussed for implementation in the Europe 2020 strategy.

CONCLUSION

The European Union is facing a lack of competitiveness, the financial crisis and the aging of the population. Most of these challenges can be resolved by the online environment and by digital technologies, which through innovation,

R&D and free access to information can boost the economy and improve the social benefits of the Europeans.

Concluding, the Digital Agenda is a European initiative for creating a Digital Single Market by removing the national online market barriers and by increasing the rate of Internet penetration to people and areas where it is not used (Marcut and Soproni, 2012).

Through this article, I have tried to mix the Digital Agenda prerogatives and effects with the social policy objectives in order to see if this fusion can promote the advancement of Europeanization and increase the social confidence of citizens and the legitimacy of EU institutions and policies. I have started this paper by presenting the Digital Agenda's programs and targets.

Then, I have highlighted the most important episodes in the EU's social policy trajectory. I have continued by analyzing the social policy from a European and national character, in order to distinguish between the double-standard policies and to forecast what path the social policy will take. One of the main findings of this section is that, even though the states are trying to preserve their national welfare systems, the engagement of EU in the social policy has started to change the nature of these systems in various ways.

As a result, the nature and basis of this policy have started to be altered by the introduction of digital tools in everyday life. Moreover, another consequence of the Digital Agenda is the advancement of Europeanization of the European Social Model and the strong claim for a common welfare system throughout all EU Member States. In the last part, taking into account all the information presented in the DAE section, I have given some examples of digital instruments that will affect positively the life of the Europeans.

To be more clear, while I have briefly described these technological means, I have pointed out the gains through which they are affecting the social policy' sub-domains (focusing especially on employment, social inclusion and social participation).

When it comes to employment, the main finding of this paper is that the usage of ICT and the creation of the Digital Single Market is estimated to create a growth of 4% until 2020 and will increase the number of jobs by 3.8 millions.

Another result lays on the emergence of new types of jobs, businesses, skills and specializations. Not only that the implementation of digital instruments will foster the economic sector but also, in the same time, can streamline the actual work by reducing the costs, offering more personalized services and addressing some problems such as aging of the population, reducing the pollution and finding ways to respond to the lack of personnel in some domains.

The results of implementing the objectives of DAE for the social inclusion area consist of enhancing the Internet broadband penetration rate and usage across the EU, reducing the cost of Internet and roaming taxes, reducing the barriers of trans-national businesses, increasing mobility and access to the cyber-space.

Through programs like Europeana, eHealth, eGoverment, eProcurement, the rate of social inclusion of elderly, disabled people will rise because these

92

programs will offer the possibility of living more independently. And from programs of IT trainings, the gap between the citizens who know how to use a computer and navigate the Internet and the ones who don't will decrease.

As presented above, the social participation of the Europeans is crucially affected by the Internet and the new digital tools. People, nowadays, not only can join common causes on the online space but also have started to organize, support, sustain different campaigns and projects.

The main result of this phenomenon is the creation of democratic online environment, eDemocracy, which is based on the online participation of individuals in every area from social policies, environmental causes to political activities.

At the beginning of this paper, I've posed the following question: "*What can be assessed about the impact of the Digital Agenda and its implementation on the advancement of the Europeanization process in the field of social policy?".* After taking into account the findings of this research, I can state that DAE has a significant impact on the spreading of Europeanization process by developing the European Social Policy and affecting positively the said sub-domains. The major strengthen of this article consists of its original approach of mixing two insufficiently studied concepts with the purpose of forecasting the future of the European Union. This broad article can lead to deeper investigation of the effects of the digital instruments on the social policy domains.

It will be interesting to develop the concepts of eDemocracy and eParticipation in finding how they are changing the social participation and movements. Furthermore, a comparison between the same welfare system adapted in different states and the impact of eGovernment on them represents a subject that should be taken into consideration.

In conclusion, the main results of this research show that the Digital Agenda can advance the Europeanization phenomenon and in the same time positively affect the social policy. All of the foreshadowed effects will be fulfilled only if the Europe 2020 strategy will be fully implemented.

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