

Preface

The European Union (EU) is currently facing its biggest challenge since the signing of the Rome Treaty some 60 years ago. What started out as economic cooperation among six founding countries has developed over the decades into a union of 28 – soon 27 – member states, with in-depth cooperation in virtually all conceivable areas. Yet, despite its success, recurrent crises have revealed significant social and economic inequalities in the wake of European integration. The gap between the more fortunate and the least became apparent in the aftermath of the Great Recession, as certain countries teetered on the brink of national bankruptcy while others continued to prosper. The large gap between the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of integration has favoured political forces that want to roll back integration and which prefer national solutions to European ones. The wave of Euroscepticism grew and became particularly evident during the migration crisis and culminated in the referendum on Brexit.

What these intertwined crises show is that the construction of the Union is incomplete. It is not designed to help the worst-off countries, let alone the individuals in greatest need. Above all, the crises demonstrate the increasing imbalance in the Union between far-reaching market integration on the one hand, and minimal economic and social redistribution on the other. To remedy the growing economic and social inequalities, and to ensure fairness and social justice in Europe, the European Commission has taken several steps recently. It has launched a ‘European Pillar of Social Rights’ initiative, started an inquiry on the ‘social acquis’ and begun a debate on how to achieve greater social convergence within the Union. But will these measures lead to a stronger emphasis on social issues, or help diminish inequalities in Europe? This book addresses the great social challenge the EU currently faces, as a multifaceted problem that requires interdisciplinary analysis. What can be done to bridge the prosperity gap in Europe?

The impetus for writing this book came from Swedish scholars with a special interest in understanding the major challenges facing the EU. Since 1998, Swedish universities have cooperated within a national network structure for European studies. This structure consists of networks for political science, economics and law. Special resources are made available

for this purpose by the Swedish parliament (*Sveriges Riksdag*). The present book represents a joint effort by the three networks.

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