

*Aktivering, flexicurity, the surface Europeanization of employment?**

Jean-Claude BARBIER

Emeritus CNRS researcher, Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne
Centre d'économie de la Sorbonne
Jean-Claude.Barbier@univ-paris1.fr

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ABSTRACT

In the domain of social protection and social policy, a conventional way of trying to document “Europeanization” has always been to track European English policy discourses at the EU level and in the nations of Europe. Notions that crystallize the normative orientations promoted in the forums of political communication and in the policy communities are numerous. All of them are crafted in English and travel across national forums of political communication and national scientific forums. The present paper selects two such notions, i.e. “activation” and “flexicurity” and carefully studies the locus of their inventions and the travels across many countries and many forums – national and transnational. The precise documentation is based on participation in numerous forums, field studies in Denmark, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy over a long period (1997-2008). The findings are all relevant for this period, i. e. prior to the upheaval of social policies at the EU level and in the member states provoked by the financial and economic crisis. They have in common to identify the dissemination of a standard discourse and the resilience of national substantive choices and roles of actors of social protection and labour market policies. Because the paper is written with hindsight, taking stock of the late 1990s and early 2000s, a de facto comparison unexpectedly becomes feasible with the crisis period (2008-2014). The counterfactual is easy to design: a powerful Europeanization of systems of social protection and labour markets has happened in this second period, via the highly constrained implementation of structural reform and budget cuts programmes deemed to satisfy macroeconomic and macrofiscal orientations decided at the EU level, especially within the Eurozone, and especially in the Southern member states. Whereas the Europeanization of discourse and social policy concepts remained superficial in 1997-2008, actual and hard Europeanization really bit deeply since the crisis into national arrangements, even affecting international and European labour law.

Keywords: social europe, europeanization, european social policy, flexicurity, activation of social protection.

Activación y flexiguridad. ¿La europeización superficial del empleo?

RESUMEN

En el ámbito de la protección social y de la política social, una forma habitual de intentar ilustrar los procesos de “europeización” ha sido la de rastrear los discursos políticos europeos en inglés a nivel de la Unión europea y de los estados nacionales. Son numerosas las nociones que cristalizan en orientaciones

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normativas promovidas en los foros de comunicación política y en las comunidades políticas. Todas ellas están diseñadas en inglés y se desplazan a través de foros nacionales de comunicación política y foros científicos nacionales. Este artículo selecciona dos de estas nociones, la de activación y flexiguridad y analiza cuidadosamente el origen de sus invenciones y de sus viajes a través de muchos países y foros nacionales y transnacionales. La documentación específica se basa en la participación en numerosos foros, estudios de campo en Dinamarca, Alemania, Francia, Reino Unido e Italia a lo largo de un largo periodo (1997-2008). Los resultados son relevantes para este periodo previo al revuelo provocado por la crisis económica y financiera, de las políticas sociales de la Unión europea y de los estados miembros. Comparten la difusión del discurso estándar y la resiliencia de las elecciones sustantivas nacionales y de los papeles de los actores de la protección social y de las políticas del mercado de trabajo. Ya que este artículo está escrito en retrospectiva, teniendo en cuenta finales de los noventa y principios del primer decenio del s. XXI, nos permite realizar una comparación con el periodo de crisis (2008-2014). El contraste es fácil de diseñar: se ha generado una poderosa europeización de los sistemas de protección social y del mercado de trabajo en este segundo periodo, a través de la implementación, altamente constrictiva, de reformas estructurales y de recortes presupuestarios dirigidos a satisfacer las orientaciones macroeconómicas y macrofiscales impuestas por la Unión europea, especialmente en la eurozona, y particularmente para los estados miembros del sur de Europa. Mientras que la europeización del discurso y de los conceptos de política social era superficial en el primer periodo 1997-2008, la europeización dura actual influye profundamente desde el periodo de crisis en los acuerdos nacionales, incluso afectando al derecho del trabajo internacional y europeo.

Palabras clave: Europa social, europeización, política social europea, flexiguridad, activación de la protección social.

REFERENCIA NORMALIZADA

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Introduction

At a certain level of abstraction, all things are the same: as the great comparatist G. Sartori once wrote, the world will be populated with "vacche grigie" (grey cows) (Sartori, 1991a:35). Such an assessment may apply to "welfare" programmes and systems, employment contracts, their qualities, and the normative frameworks into which they are embedded. These have been increasingly and extensively compared across Europe for the last 20 years, especially in the wake of the European Employment Strategy since 1997. *Functional* comparisons abound, that stem from very different sources: some academic, with a relative domination of economics, some political or administrative. At the same time, European political discourses, finely worded in European English, travel all the time transnationally. However, the norms of employment, the industrial relations systems by which they are

¹ This section of the paper draws on Barbier (2007).

determined, as well as the social protection systems they are intrinsically associated with, have remained extremely diverse across the countries of Europe.

In some – for instance in Britain – the very notion of “social partners” has not yet been really adopted. *Aktivering*, the original programme launched in Denmark in the early 1990s displayed distinctive features while the international discourse was soon talking about “activation”, a very vague notion indeed. Especially from 2006 to 2007, “*flexicurity*” was hailed by the EU’s DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities: while transnational exchange on the matter was very active, real and tough issues were finally collectively addressed within national borders. Many other concepts drawn from labour market analysis could be taken as further examples of potential Europeanization: for instance, *précarité de l’emploi* (“employment precariousness”) was invented in France back in the late 1970’s but, outside the Latin countries of Europe, other countries which did not understand the concept have finally been aware of new phenomena concerning “atypical” jobs; so-called “make work pay programmes” suddenly mushroomed all across Europe in the mid-1990’s, as “work-first” ones. It is difficult to know whether all these fuzzy notions have an actual influence on developments at the national level. To say the least, the dissemination of an international English discourse by European organizations is certainly not enough to documenting a common trend of evolution.

In the present article, we will concentrate on “activation” and “flexicurity” as two emblematic examples. These show that Europeanization has not yet bitten very deeply into the national systems. However, to understand the superficiality of influence, one has to build one’s comparative method carefully, and use in-depth investigating, including understanding languages other than mainstream English. After establishing a common comparative framework, we will first look into the history of “activation” to learn whether the concept refers to a truly “Europeanized” phenomenon and to what extent it has demonstrated the formation of similar systems of social protection. We will then turn to investigating the conceptual story of “flexicurity” in order to see whether the promotion of the concept at the EU-level, with the help of certain actors in certain countries, has resulted or not into the creation of a European hybrid of labour market.

1. Comparing European labour markets and systems of social protection

For quite a number of reasons, it is interesting to understand whether *national* labour markets and *national* systems of social protection in Europe are increasingly functioning similarly (even sometimes to the point of “converging”) or if they keep their initial idiosyncrasies. Actually, they may be transformed under influence coming from abroad: one such influence comes from “Europe” and leads to “Europeanization” of some sort. Many conceptions of “Europe” and “Europeanization” coexist in the literature: one of the most quoted definitions is

Radaelli's, who suggested to focus on the "domestic impact"² of the "EU policy process" (Radaelli 2003:30).

Here, our approach will be different. We shall consider "Europeanization" as the process by which national (and local/regional) politics, policies, polities, but also political cultures, discourses, ideologies, governance and government practices tend to lose their distinct national characteristics to new hybridized (=European) equivalents (politics, policies, etc.). This includes the impact of the EU policy process but goes beyond. In the domain of labour markets and social protection, the process of Europeanization tends to make these similar, resulting in the gradual construction of a « Europeanized » *new common type*. The counterfactuals of the new hybrid in construction lie in the existing national variety, a variety that has been commonly classified into "welfare", or "labour market" "regimes", or "varieties" (Esping-Andersen 1990; Hall & Soskice 2001). Because cross-influences among countries are enormously pregnant in Europe, and not only coming from "the EU policy process", the assumption can be tested according to which these multiple cross-influences are gradually producing a new composite breed of policies, practices, values, norms and institutions. If this assumption was true, labour markets and systems of social protection would be more and more losing their distinctive institutional features acquired in history since the late 19th century.

Documenting such an assumption is a very exacting task, however, for many reasons: a comprehensive view of the systems is certainly not acquired easily. As is common in social science, one strategy is choosing a certain level on a ladder of abstraction (Sartori 1991a; 1991b; 1970). At a certain level of abstraction, obviously, all labour markets and systems of social protection in Europe are similar, if we compare them, for instance, to the inexistence of modern labour markets and social protection systems in Africa. But if we focus on Europe, the problem is different: we are bound to hesitate between a "big picture" strategy (aggregation strategy), that privileges common features at a very high level of abstraction, and a qualitative and precise inquiry into national – or even sub-national – empirical realities (specification strategy), which are all differing to a certain extent. Both strategies are perfectly acceptable and yield different findings that may not be incompatible, on one essential condition. This condition requires that the comparative method used in each type of strategy is convincingly argued and that one actively avoids the many traps of comparison (Barbier and Letablier 2005), and the various mistakes that Sartori identified a long time ago, namely "parochialism",

² He defines Europeanization as "Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies".

“misclassification”, “degreeism”, and “concept stretching”. Nevertheless, with the hindsight of an extraordinary quantitative increase of comparative research over the last 20 years, especially in the context of more or less generous funding by the European Union (Barbier 2005)³, one gains the impression that a great part of this comparative research still displays the limits that Sartori identified in his seminal contribution about comparative politics (1991a:26)⁴.

At the same time, the comparative corpus of literature in sociology and political science keeps being enriched by new contributions covering the systematic and in-depth comparison of many countries (Schmidt 2006; Scharpf & Schmidt 2000; Crouch 1999; Goul Andersen *et al.* 2005, to name but a few, or two-countries comparisons, focussed on similar programmes (Knuth and Larsen 2009; Barbier & Fargion 2005; Giraud and Lechevalier 2010; van den Berg 2009) or in-depth monographs that analyze one country over a certain period, but from a comparative angle (Zimmerman 2001; Jørgensen 2002, to name but two). These in-depth comparisons share many distinctive features, among which two stand out: they combine detailed empirical field work conducted with adequate methods and build on an explicit and robust comparative framework. On the opposite, another strand of comparative literature in political science and sociology, because it is produced in the context of large-scale comparative projects funded by the European Commission – an institution that mainly looks for simplified and standardized “policy lessons” – and because it is conducted in uncontrolled for inter-disciplinary situations, tends to eschew the difficult double task of achieving the construction of a consistent comparative research design and of doing consistent and sufficient empirical field work.

As of principle, two main comparative strategies are available in mainstream international research situations. The first one, I would call “quick-fix”, combines three essential elements: (1) the juxtaposition of national cases into a vague comparative framework, where the object of research is defined fuzzily; (2) the use of vague concepts, or notions, that are not clearly delineated and separately defined from the mainstream political discourse of international organizations (like the OECD, the World Bank, and the EU); and (3) last but not least, the uncritical use of international English for the half-baked translation of superficial and decontextualized descriptive accounts of national phenomena bundled together. The consequence of this method is that potential variety cannot be observed, and that every national or sub-national object, because of the “surface comparison”, tends to

³ A greater and greater part of research in social sciences now happens in “international research situations”, implying the collective work of many researchers assembled for answering “policy questions” raised by the European Commission, without little attention to the distinct theoretical basis of disciplines.

⁴ “il settore ditto “politica comparata” è ormai densamento popolato da studiosi che non hanno mai paragonato nulla a nulla, che non hanno nessun interesse a paragonare” (p. 26).

fit into a common, artificially produced picture: instead of separating cats and dogs, as Sartori wanted us to do, we get “cat-dogs” and even worse, “grey cows”. A typical case of such “first aid comparison” is often to be found in the OECD and the EU production, or in documents emanating from economic think-tanks. Europeanization, in this case, far from being a question to be explored, is rather an in-built consequence of the method used. Actually, it might also be sometimes a product of normative politics. I showed (Barbier 2006:10-11) for instance that in the early 2000s, the OECD, which explicitly fought for the acceptance of so-called “make-work pay” programmes by its members, designed studies in order to show that countries were already adopting such strategies, which, incidentally, authors refrained from defining otherwise as vaguely (Duncan et al. 2003). Self-fulfilling prophecy was their strategy. On the opposite, a strategy of in-depth comparison (Barbier 2005) entails (1) the construction of a consistent comparative framework of labour markets and systems of social protection; (2) the use of analytical concepts, strictly defined vis-à-vis political notions, and (3) the careful understanding and consideration of categories expressed in their original language, before being potentially translated, if it is possible, or if not, explained in context.

Of course, intermediate strategies of comparison exist, where competing explanations oppose different scholars, among whom discussion is possible. For instance, a rich strand of such literature is published, that concentrate mainly on the identification of broad common trends: its findings may always be challenged inasmuch as its methods leave detailed documentation of specific traits in countries outside their scope. Sometimes, research is openly biased because it starts from the point of view that one system – the researcher’s system – is the template, the model or even the future, for every possible system: a case in point here is N. Gilbert’s universalistic stance, when he contended that, because of “the triumph of capitalism”, a general movement was “evident” towards what he termed (2002:5) “work-oriented policies, privatization of social welfare, increased targeting of benefits and the shift from an emphasis on the social rights of citizenship to the civic duties of community members”. In a book the same author edited, Barbier and Théret (2003) demonstrated that it was not the case, at least for France. On a more specific level, the seminal work published by Lødemel and Trickey (2000) addressing a question that would later fall under the common label of “activation”, addressed a phenomenon inadequately defined as “workfare”, abstaining from constructing of a comparative concept⁵. The literature on “dualization” is similar in this respect, inasmuch as it systematically endeavours to find “dualism” (with a rather elastic definition and an uncertain situation in history) in what it calls “Bismarckian” countries with simplified features (Palier & Thelen 2010; Clegg 2007). Our intention is not to discuss this literature comprehensively but to show,

⁵ They defined what they called “workfare” in minimalist terms (“programmes and schemes that require people to work in return for social assistance” (2000:6).

on two examples, that the use of notions and concepts that are apparently comparative may be very misleading and deceptive, because too superficial findings are collected with their help. To be more explicit, we contend that the scientific answer to the question whether all European countries are “Europeanized” because they make some use of “activation” (as the common parlance goes), or whether they are “Europeanized” because they implement some form of “flexicurity”, will never be really found, because both concepts are inconsistent and vague.

As many others –the notion of “make work pay” just quoted, for instance – both “activation” and “flexicurity” have common characteristics: (1) they were initially coined (when not explicitly commissioned⁶) by politicians in a specific situation, which is generally identifiable, at a certain point in time and in a certain language which was not always English; quite often, social scientists and academics helped in the process and this is one of the reasons why the concepts created subsequently travelled to the academic field; (2) because of the prevailing “international research situations”, the word in question then spread to a wider, international academic community, and international organizations were very active at disseminating these concepts; by the same token, the concepts generally took on board a definite normative content; the distinction between political strategies and analytical tools then became inevitably blurred. In the process, analytical precision was lost and it was impossible to identify whether national situations (labour markets, systems of social protection) change and to what degree, because, from the start, it was postulated that their institutions and practices did fit into the new categories created (Barbier 2014).

Hence, to understand whether the systems of social protection are now “activated”, and to what extent this alleged “activation” makes sense in sociological terms, one has to build analytical tools and to distance oneself from the prevailing administrative and political discourse: in the process, one finds that, beyond the inevitably loosely defined meaning of political notions, it might be possible to ascribe sound analytical substance to well-defined concepts. This is what we did for the notion of “activation of social protection” (Barbier 2002; 2003; 2004b; 2008b), an analysis that we will allude to in the following section. Similarly, far from restricting ourselves to a close comment of the political declarations and analyses produced by the European Commission, for instance, in the case of “flexicurity”, we will show, with more detail, that the concept is, in sociological terms, essentially inconsistent, and has purely remained at the level of rhetoric. Incidentally, this certainly did not prevent its extensive and practical use by a great variety of actors.

In both cases, we will try and follow similar steps: the first leads to identifying where the concept was born and its initial conditions of meaning, always historically

⁶ It was the case for instance for R. Nixon who asked the journalist William Safire to coin a new term for depreciating American assistance (the AFDC programme), and Safire came with the extraordinarily successful term “workfare” (Barbier 2007).

and geographically situated, in a specific context and generally one particular political culture. At a second stage, identifiable actors with their own agenda use and disseminate the notion in certain countries. Finally, during the transnational social process of construction, notions tend to be considered as concepts with actual flesh and become universally known by specialized academics and internationalized politicians; at this stage, they become catchwords. It is then possible that politicians and some academics conclude, *bona fide*, that countries of Europe are “Europeanized” through these trends. Even, some think that they become gradually homogenized, and the eventual strategy of “activation” is seen as a European hybridization of all similar efforts undertaken, here and there, in Germany, France and Denmark for that matter. Similarly, the “Europeanization” of labour markets and social protection systems is often inferred, by the same persons, from superficial comparison and the conclusions of “flexicurity studies” (most often than not commissioned by the European Commission): elements of “flexicurity” are deemed to be present here and there, in the United Kingdom and Poland, or Rumania for that matter. Although it is not possible within the space devoted to this paper to substantiate our claim in comprehensive empirical detail, our contention is exactly at the opposite: whereas, using a precise comparative research design leads to identifying clear common trends (a surface form of “Europeanization”), the main conclusion of in-depth empirical inquiries (conducted for the last 20 years, Barbier 2008a; 2008b) shows that national markets and national systems keep their specific traits and resist more profound “Europeanization”. One of the reasons for this resilience of things national, typically well exemplified in the so-called “Greek crisis” at the beginning of 2010, has been and will be, for the known future, the presence of deeply embedded political cultures, a point that we have studied elsewhere (Barbier 2008a). Suffice it to say here that the main political compromises and decisions about “activation” and “flexicurity” have been, and will be made and taken at the national level, just for want of an alternative other credible level where to make them.

2. The “activation” of what?

The fame of what was going to be labelled “activation” (with no other complement, and an implicitly metonymical usage) started in Denmark in 1992, under the label of *aktivering*, the Danish equivalent of “activating” (from the verb *aktivere*). This referred to programmes introduced for the young people by the Social Democrat government. Because the programmes appeared to be very effective, the success was noticed by many quarters, especially by the OECD, happy to disseminate the good news in their publications, as a “best practice”. Gradually the phrase came to be used across Europe by academics and politicians, although rarely before the general public. The smallest common denominator for its substance was the contention that it was fair and efficient to impose new obligations to the unemployed and the assisted persons. A veritable industry of “activation” studies then flourished and rather quickly replaced the emerging comparative research focussed on

“workfare”. Yet, “activation” was unfortunately often not more precisely defined than “workfare”: it was cut from its precise historical and contextual roots, and applied loosely to every form of employment and unemployment reforms. Nevertheless, as we will see, it was possible to use the concept of “activation of social protection” (and not the catchword “activation” only) to show that the transformation systems were submitted to had an economic rationale, and certainly did not limit to the mere imposition – most often than not seen as “punitive” – of obligations upon the unemployed, and an alleged “re-commodification” of “welfare”. Using Pierson’s categories of “welfare state restructuring” (2001), the new trend of “activation of social protection” took many forms, so that the Europeanization it brought with it remained limited to a general, functional, trend.

Origins: immediate source

It is true that *aktivering* had a close predecessor in Norway, under another label: in this country, *arbejdslinjen* (the work rule or line) was advocated in important reform documents in 1992. The meaning was slightly different, implying nevertheless the same content as existed in Danish *aktivering* for the young. Priority was to be given to find work for the assisted persons (Dahl and Drøpping 2001: 270; Hvinden 1999). At about the same time, a Danish scholar analyzed the emerging reform in terms of Danish “workfare” (Torfing 1999) and he showed that the latter was quite different from the American: while Danish ‘*aktivering*’ programmes did fit well with the tradition of an overall high level of labour market participation (especially for women), they introduced a real turn in Danish policy, because they reduced the length of access to benefits and imposed work requirements in a country where a quasi-unconditional basic income existed at the time. This did not however amount to adopting a “supply side”-oriented OECD doctrine, nor to the reduction of unemployment benefits to low flat-rate levels as in the UK (Jørgensen 2002). Later the programmes were extended to the entire population of the unemployed and, in 1998, to the persons eligible to assistance in the communes.

Internationalization begins and the word is spread all around

The internationalization of “activation” came later, in two parallel steps, through the combined influence of the OECD and the European Commission, both organizations, by the way, being in constant rivalry at the time, just before the European Employment Strategy (EES) eventually completed its preparations (Barbier 2004a). After the publication of the 1994 OECD “Jobs Study”, in the subsequent yearly *Employment Outlook* reports, OECD experts kept praising labour market reforms which decreased eligibility and coverage of unemployment insurance or assistance. They particularly praised the Danish introduction of an

“*individual handlingsplan*” (“action plan”) in its early labour market reform⁷, to “activate” the unemployed (Jørgensen 2002). Actually the Danish example of *aktivering* was used abroad to exemplify a virtuous type of reform, and a departure from presumed old style “passive” policies. The subject thus entered national debates in many countries that were contemplating some form of reform of unemployment insurance. Moreover, from 1994, a key OECD benchmark was the “activation of labour market policies”, in the wider context of *structural labour market reforms* and the connected idea of “welfare reform”. At the time, the OECD sharply criticised policies in countries like France and the Latin countries. There was also a constant contrasting of the allegedly high performance of the USA’s labour market with supposedly poor outcomes in continental countries.

At the very same time, with the important influence of Allan Larsson, a former Swedish minister (Barbier 2004a), the European Commission was busy preparing the launch of an innovative initiative that would become the EES in 1997. At the time, the word “activation” was not yet used widely as it is now, without any complement. It was rather linked to the Swedish legacy of “active labour market policies” (see next section). This goal featured high on the European Union’s agenda, more visibly from the Essen summit (1994) onwards, but the 1993 White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment also contained explicit recommendations for the activation of labour market policies (ALMPs)⁸. It is only later that the notion of “activation” found its place, with the help of the Danish legacy, and, at the same time, leading to a significant substitution for the notion of ALMPs. Meanings of “activation” and “active” were not fixed, but travelled, as ministers and officials were busy coining messages they definitely wanted to be new and innovative.

The European Employment Strategy

At the European Council in Essen in 1994, where a precursor of the EES was agreed, “activation” and “active measures” were among the priorities adopted. They were introduced in the first version of the EES with its four pillars agreed at the Luxembourg summit of 1997, particularly in the first one (“increasing employability”). But gradually the notion (added in 1999) that the “tax and benefit systems” had to be reformed in order to increase employment and incentives to take jobs, featured more and more prominently on the agenda (Barbier 2004a). It was another form of “activation”, as we will see, because the goal was to increase labour market participation and to foster the creation of more jobs. Finally, “activation”

⁷ See for instance the report of the reform in the 1995 edition of *Employment Outlook* (p.125, French edition). The 1995 OECD report on the implementation of the Jobs Strategy also mentioned the introduction of individual plans in Denmark as a progress (p. 32, French edition).

⁸ So-called “passive policies” were also sharply criticized in the 1993 EU White Paper.

became both a dimension of the EU economic recommendations (the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines – the BEPG) and of the EES Guidelines. It was deemed to apply to individuals in the working age population, whether they were active or inactive (for instance the disabled); it applied to women and lone parents, to the ‘socially excluded’ persons, but also to early retirees and to pensioners. The mainstream recommendation was for policies fostering the overall increase of employment rates, with specific targets for older people and women. But “activation” also applied, if less directly, to benefit programmes, to policies, to the whole array of instruments described as “tax and benefits” systems. In the policy orthodoxy, not only individuals were to be “activated”, but also systems deemed too “passive” and inefficient, particularly adverse to job creation and to labour market flexibility. This was the general message and it has been with us till today, in 2014. Indicators were devised to calculate “rates of activation”. Ironically, Denmark, the very nation where *aktivering* was invented, had difficulties to appear as having the “best” activation rates in the “benchmarking exercise” organized by the European Commission.

By then, the initial meaning and context of *aktivering* was lost, and academics kept adding new interpretations, divided between those who were strongly against “activation” and “workfare” (Wacquant 1999) and those in favour of it (Gilbert 2000), mostly for ideological reasons; multiple meanings were discussed (Serrano 2007). The notion became increasingly used (Gilbert and Van Voorhis 2001; Esping Andersen *et al.* 2001; Goul Andersen *et al.* 2005). It essentially focused on programmes aiming at transferring “welfare” recipients to the labour market (“welfare-to-work strategies”). And this is probably the mainstream meaning the concept has now taken on board, as “activation” as such, without complements, is the codeword for making benefit recipients work, more or less forcefully. In 2002, van Berkel and Møller showed that these programmes could be normatively justified in many ways (2002: 51-56). The mechanisms anticipated and their normative justifications were in fact all but homogeneous, ranging from the traditional American conservative approach of “rights and responsibilities” aimed at fighting “welfare dependency”, to the unconditional and universal access in Scandinavian “activation programmes”. Despite these efforts to take distance from a rather restricted meaning, as well as interpretation of the reform as a much wider “activation of social protection” (Barbier 2002; 2004b), the restricted meaning has prevailed, simplified for instance by scholars adopting a German perspective after the Hartz reform: “the core element of activation is the removal of options for labour market exit and unconditional benefit receipt by members of the working-age population” (Eichhorst *et al.* 2008:5).

A broader perspective is needed

If one took for granted, as many scholars unfortunately did, that the truth about “activation” lay in Eichhorst’s definition, a great part of the current restructuring of social protection, if not the essential part, would be lost to analysis. The reforms

studied from the early 1990s, those starting in Denmark and Norway, had first to be placed in a historical perspective. “Activation” was not suddenly and utterly new. Secondly, “activation” had to be explained in political economy terms, and had to be seen as one of many reforms affecting the wider spectrum of social protection programmes. If one did so, new insights were to come to the front, and, taking distance with the mainstream international fascination of “rights and obligations”, the question whether “activation” was a form of Europeanization of systems of social protection could be solved empirically.

Building a comprehensive comparative framework either to compare a great number of countries, or to make in-depth comparison of two cases (Barbier and Fargion 2004; Barbier and Knuth 2010), one learnt essential elements that remained lost to those scholars that were focussing on the introduction of welfare-to-work as a supposed return to the old spirit of the workhouse. Indeed, a first element to take on board was that “activation” was not entirely new. The essential link of social protection systems to the labour market should never have been forgotten, as Kvist (2002) rightly remarked: even in very “de-commodified” systems, commodification was high. Hence, it was besides the point to analyze only “activation” as a “re-commodification” mechanism. “Activation” had certainly been the order of the day all along, in unemployment insurance and assistance, except for certain categories of persons. When history was taken into account in the comparative framework, one had to recall that the invention of “active labour market policies” was a key element that neither appeared in Norway nor with the Danish *aktivering* programmes for the young in 1992. Very simply, three important stages can be identified in this respect. The first is related to the historical “Swedish model”, as far back as the 40s. The model was gradually implemented in the 50s and 60s and reached full gear in the 70s – although with features which did not exactly fit the ideas of its inventors, G. Rehn and R. Meidner. With a prudent fiscal policy and selective expansionary instruments (to contain inflation - different in this respect from mainstream Keynesianism) the model combined a centrally bargained and solidaristic wage policy with *active* labour market policies. There, activation referred mainly to the necessity of tackling labour market adjustment problems through a variety of programmes fostering mobility, reallocation of the workforce, training, etc. “Activation” in this sense was aimed at increasing the flexibility of the labour market in a safe and egalitarian environment for workers. The stress was on *activation* of the market and of policy, which was normatively preferred to the traditional provision of unemployment compensation (Milner and Wadensjö 2001; Van den Berg 2009). A high level of public employment was also a distinctive feature of the “model” (including extensive temporary public employment). The “model” eventually was completely transformed, although it actually retained its ALMP element, a Swedish tradition later extended to other Nordic countries. At a second stage, in 1964, the OECD adopted a recommendation to promote an “active

labour market policy”⁹, in a period where Keynesianism was still the mainstream economic policy reference. At the time, the OECD assessed the combination of policies implemented in Sweden positively. It is only after the neo-liberal turn, in a third stage during the 1980s, in the context of increasing separation of macro-economic and social policies, that the notion of ALMPs took on its present content, i.e. the focussing on structural and supply-side labour market reforms. OECD reports have consolidated and emphasised this notion, while particularly criticising member states with a high commitment to what they labelled “passive policies”, (chiefly unemployment compensation and early retirement programmes). The contemporary meaning of “activation” (without complement) was, *implicitly*, grafted on the legacy of ALMPs, and with the political claim that entirely new mechanisms were invented in the 1990s, an empirically flawed claim indeed.

Broadening the historical perspective, and accepting to look earlier than the 1992 introduction of *aktivering* also led to remark that back in 1988, both the Family Act in the United States and the *Revenu minimum d’insertion* (RMI) Act in France, made contributions to the rationale of “activation”, but very differently: the first promoted the development of welfare-to work, i. e. in American terms of the time, “workfare”, while the second, on that same year, promoted “Republican” *insertion* (integration in society) (Barbier and Théret 2003). New French policies, which started from the introduction of schemes for the disabled in 1975, were widely extended afterwards, and were based on a rationale akin to Scandinavian inspiration, but with a distinct Republican solidaristic flavour. They had their originality: “social integration” was not meant primarily or solely in terms of constraining people to take jobs on the market. This amounted to a very different brand of “activation” indeed. If one wants to understand what the “activation reforms” are today, this historical legacy, here just hinted at, should definitely be taken into account. Moreover, “activation reforms” never happened by chance because, from the start, an economic rationale underpinned them in a wider macro-economic context. It is true that “activation” took on a new aspect and scope once the ‘Fordist’ regime compromises proved inefficient in the late 1970s and full employment policies were discarded. The new requirements for flexibility of work, as well as the change of paradigm in economic policy imposed new constraints upon national systems, now increasingly exposed to the impact of international monetary rules (Barbier and Nadel 2000). National actors (the state, social partners, ‘civil society’) involved in the design and management of social protection systems actively addressed this challenge: this resulted in the diverse re-design of these systems within a common thrust. The eventual compromises reached during the reform of social protection were certainly not exempt from contradictions of interest

⁹ « *Recommandation du Conseil sur la politique de la main d’œuvre, instrument de la croissance économique* ». It is no coincidence that Gøsta Rehn was head of the Employment and social affairs secretariat at the OECD from 1962 to 1973.

and power struggles, which could be very sharp and explode into wide-scale social protest, as was shown in recent years¹⁰.

An analytical concept: activation with complements

So far, we have essentially used the term “activation” in inverted commas systematically, to point to the mainstream expression it takes in the literature, and to refer, at the same time, to the political image that captures the minds of actors. However, in sociological terms, the term is entirely devoid of any meaning if one does not say what or who is or should be activated. Secondly, the word is a typical piece of jargon: it has been used only by experts and politicians, especially in an international comparison context (in a tremendously heterogeneous way). Empirical investigations show, for instance, that local actors only use the term when their programmes are explicitly labelled in such a way (a case in point was *aktivering* in Danish). To take only the examples of France and Germany (Barbier and Knuth 2010), after more than 20 years of “activation strategies” in France, the word is practically not used by local actors and practitioners, who still prefer “*insertion*”. In Germany, the term recurring in legal texts is “*Eingliederung*” (integration, incorporation [into employment]); “*Aktivierung*” as a term has also entered legal vocabulary, with the idea of the “client’s obligation of active co-operation”¹¹ but “activation” is not used for naming programmes by officials. Beyond the rhetoric of political/administrative discourses, the ambiguity of terms does not however prevent the fact that one of the main reforms of national social protection systems in the last twenty years has certainly been the gradual introduction of “activation of social protection” across *an increasing number of policy fields* in Europe (pensions, unemployment insurance, social assistance, family benefits, etc.). To understand this, we need an actual comparative concept, one that is not limited by the meaning used by politicians, i.e. the ideologically-laden view that unemployed people should be more active. “Activating people” in all sorts of individual ways has certainly meant encouraging – and sometimes constraining them – to work more or to engage in various sorts of work-related activities, but this was never the only pertinent aspect of reform strategies. At the same time, when researchers only focussed on this part of the reforms, they forgot that all sorts of complementary reforms were happening, and that a wider understanding should be achieved.

What is “activation of social protection” in analytical terms?: it is a tendency, one among many dimensions of the restructuring affecting all systems, with varying incidence according to countries, to groups of countries or ‘welfare regimes’, but

¹⁰ In 2001-2002, see for instance the mass refusal of the unemployment reform in Spain, the PARE controversy in France, the strikes in Italy.

¹¹ See: „*Der erwerbsfähige Hilfebedürftige muss aktiv an allen Maßnahmen zu seiner Eingliederung in Arbeit mitwirken*“ – § 2 SGB II.

also to specific areas of social protection. A macro-concept of “activation of social protection” is apt at bundling together a considerable array of reforms which have a clear feature in common, i.e. the introduction (or the re-activation/reinforcement) of an explicit linking between access to social protection and labour market participation (*activité professionnelle, Erwerbsfähigkeit*). For the last decade, this dynamics has implied the redesigning of previous income support, of assistance, but also the transformation of “tax and benefit” policies, that authorities wanted to make more “employment-friendly”. Many studies have tried to capture stylised versions of “activation”, under the form of ideal-types: most contrast a “liberal” type with a “universalistic”, “generous”, “social-democratic”, “social-activation” one (Lødemel 2004). I have shown elsewhere in more detail that this entailed the construction of ideal types of “activation of social protection”: two, of “Beveridgean” style, were rather easy to design; however, a “Bismarckian” ideal-type was always difficult to construct (Barbier 2002; 2004b; 2008b). Nevertheless, in France and Germany, reforms have also happened; as in other countries, de-specialization of programmes (and policies) is an empirically documented fact¹², when one compares the strict ‘sectoral’ specialization of the 60’s with the situation today. Reform is, in this conception, *a trend applying to the entire social protection (or welfare) systems*, a reform trend similar to those P. Pierson (2001) documented under the labels of cost-containment, recalibration and re-commodification. For us, this trend of reform, contrary to an analysis where it is posited besides cost-containment, recalibration and re-commodification (Clegg 2007:600-601), is part of these larger trends, and can take various forms in different countries. Such diversity is empirically shown with the precise comparison of the reform strategies implemented in France and Germany (Barbier and Knuth 2010); not to mention earlier research showing that both countries, and social insurance countries more generally, harboured institutions and an institutional history that were alien to the mere principle of “activation of social protection”, while it was rather easily implemented in countries as different as the United Kingdom and Denmark (Clasen and Clegg 2006). Because of persistently different empirical hard facts though, it would be far-fetched to speak of tendencies supposedly common to “Bismarckian” countries¹³ including the Netherlands and Belgium (Clegg 2007).

¹² Interestingly one can note, in passing, that the processes of the Open methods of coordination (OMCs) at the EU level contributed to this de-specialization, because they have influenced the intellectual framing of policies, their cognitive base. Of this phenomenon, many empirical facts testify. The very fact that the European Employment strategy was always supposed to coordinate “employment policies” is one of them. Interestingly, the Treaty of Lisbon in German hesitates between *Beschäftigungs-* and *Arbeitsmarktpolitik* (articles 145 and following).

¹³ ‘Bismarckianism’ in the sense we use here means four institutional features that have cultural counterparts (Barbier 2008a) (eligible persons are wage-earners with their families;

The activation of social protection and Europeanization

Finally, in the passage from the introduction of a new political notion in 1992 in Denmark to its subsequent extensive use, what one learned was that there was more to “activation” than simply reinforcing the obligations of the unemployed and the assisted. A much wider stake and greater challenges for reformers have been present. It should then come as no surprise that the objectification of a common trend, “activation of social protection” (and not “activation” tout-court) takes many empirical forms. Even with the short-sighted meaning of “activation” as the imposition of new obligations on the unemployed and the assisted, realizations here and there vary widely. As a consequence, we can state that the Europeanization of national systems of Europe has remained, in a way, on the surface. True, Europeans, and most of all Europeanized elites in Brussels’ arenas and forums, have invented a common (European English) vocabulary to talk about reforms happening in their countries; however the actual reforms have remained shaped by the traditional explaining variables of diversity used in the literature: institutions, the role of powerful actors, political cultures, and history – sometimes envisaged as path-dependency. Unlike in conventional ‘sweeping’ comparisons (which tend to sweep out national idiosyncrasies), we have to pay due attention to empirical developments, rather than making them synonymous by translation¹⁴.

social insurance principle with funding by social contributions; benefits proportional to incomes; social insurance funds are managed by social partners). While we share the overall judgement that France and Germany are clearly comparable, with regard to their common principles, and, what’s more, to some common elements in their political cultures, we are very cautious in the use of such overall qualifiers. From the beginning, the German system was never Bismarckian, in the sense that Bismarck’s political goals were not accepted. From its beginning, and despite cross-research and cross-travelling by elites between France and Germany, the French system was both influenced by Britain and Germany, their predecessors; Bismarck came to France to study existing private pensions; Beveridge travelled to Germany; P. Laroque took inspiration in both countries for his post-Second war project (Barbier 2008a). The classic reference to principles of ‘Bismarckianism’ should be taken with a pinch of salt, because both countries, rather earlier than in other ones, have displayed the signs of being hybrids.

¹⁴ Writing in English rather than in either of the national languages concerned helps doing so – as long as one defies the temptation to submerge differences in the Eurospeak dialect.

3. “Flexicurity”: “wish list” or concept able to catch Europeanization features¹⁵?

The expression “flexicurity” was used from the mid-90s to describe the outcome of a negotiated reform in the Netherlands. Wilthagen (1998) was the first to tell this story in detail¹⁶. The same author later noted: “the concept of flexicurity is increasingly being taken up in other countries” (Wilthagen and Tros 2003: 12). Indeed, towards the late 90s, the term was used by diverse actors (especially Danish scholars and, later, politicians) to describe the Danish situation. It is certainly through the example of what has often been called the “Danish model” in the media that “flexicurity” crossed the boundaries of social policy and labour market forums and networks, from the early years 2000 (Barbier, Colomb and Madsen, 2009). The OECD explicitly concurred in that result, along with the European Commission (Barbier 2014). With the 2008 crisis, the fate of “flexicurity” came very much in jeopardy: this was all the truer than a new Commission with a new agenda was put in place in 2010, on which “social” questions were definitely sidelined.

Dutch origins: politicians working with advisers

An important Dutch law, enforced from the beginning of 1999, was precisely termed: *Wet Flexibiliteit en Zekerheid* (Flexibility and Security Act). It profoundly reformed part-time work, agency work and their associated social protection in this country. Wilthagen (1998) has attributed the invention of the term in the Dutch context to a senior sociologist and policy adviser of the then government¹⁷. Wilthagen and his colleagues were among the main actors to contribute to the confirmation of the word as a common notion in the Dutch policy forums. In a later formulation, the same author defined “flexicurity” as a “nexus” (Wilthagen 2002: 29) but it was not clear what a nexus exactly was for him, which he compared to “the labour-capital nexus”. Later, with his colleague Tros (Wilthagen and Tros 2003: 4) they presented “flexicurity” as a “policy strategy”. The Dutch reforms they reviewed were identified as starting from 1995, explicitly under the banner of flexibility and security – where a ministerial memorandum was issued under the very label under the rule of the Labour Party. But Wilthagen showed that this had older roots in the past negotiation between government and social partners, in a

¹⁵ This section of the paper draws on Barbier (2007).

¹⁶ He was later nominated as a member of the “Expert group on flexicurity” by the DG Employment and Social Affairs, along with six other experts.

¹⁷ Hans Adriaansens was an adviser to the socialist Ad Melkert. They were inspired by a report published in 1990, which was exploring ways of increasing labour market participation (report by the WRR – Dutch Scientific Advisory Council for the Government – *Een werkend perspectief, arbeidsparticipatie in de jaren '90*).

particular form of what he termed the Dutch “corporatist system”. In a way “flexicurity” emerged as an “unanticipated process” (1998: 10) of the actions and initiatives of the Dutch government and social partners. Given this empirical review and other research (see for instance, Van Oorschot 2001), the reforms that can be grouped under a strategy of “flexicurity” in the Netherlands pertain to a long-term process of reducing the inequalities of social protection rights in the 90s between “atypical” and “regular” employees. During this process, the regulation of fixed-term and temporary agency work was reformed, leading to fostering enhanced access to open-ended contracts; the dismissal procedures were also reviewed during the period (Wilthagen 2002: 14).

*Flexicurity travels to Denmark*¹⁸

Doing in-depth comparative research in Denmark (Barbier 2006), we tried to identify the essential steps of the dissemination of the idea and the formulation of “flexicurity”, in the administrative and political forums on the one hand and in the academic ones on the other. The first formulation of what was later to be called “flexicurity” in this country is linked to the designing of a “golden triangle” by officials in the ministry of employment (Jørgensen et Pedersen 2004¹⁹). As Per K. Madsen has observed, they first popularised the chart in a report published by the ministry in 1999²⁰, though they did not mention “flexicurity” at the time. Moreover, they insisted that the virtuous combination of the relationships (between labour legislation, unemployment insurance, employment creation and active labour market policies) that they combined in their “triangle” were linked to a *specific Danish social context* (id.:93-94²¹). The now famous triangle eventually found its way into the 2004 issue of OECD’s *Employment Outlook* (page 97).

At about the same time, researchers and academics (especially Danes, but not only) were beginning to use the term “flexicurity” to describe the Danish system. Per Kongshøj Madsen was the first to make a consistent reference to it from 1999, but, he only explicitly used the term ‘flexicurity’ for describing the ‘Danish model’

¹⁸ For the reconstruction of this short story, I am heavily indebted to the people I interviewed and who were as kind as indicating me sources in Danish, which they sometimes helped me translating, when my rudimentary Danish was insufficient. Prominent among them are my colleagues of Carma, the University of Aalborg. Thanking them warmly, I am aware that I will have to account for my own mistakes in the eventual interpretation I give here.

¹⁹ The 2004 edition I quote is the 7th edition of the well-known textbook in Denmark.

²⁰ « Arbejdsreformerne – en status », 1999, København (Arbejdsministeriet).

²¹ “*Særligt ved sammenligning med continental-europæiske lande og de øvrige nordiske lande et det nærliggende at understrege sammenhængen mellem ansættelsesforhold og indretningen af dagpengesystemet og aktiveringsindsatsen i Danmark*”.

from 2003²². P.K. Madsen provided a list of specific characteristics pertaining to this “model” (2003: 4-5): a flexible labour market with a high level of external flexibility that is permitted by a low level of employment protection; a generous income replacement for the unemployed; and active labour market policies that allow for enhancing training and qualifications. Later (Madsen 2006: 349-352), in his list of features for the Danish “flexicurity” system, he distinguished between “basic traits” and “specific developments in the 1990s”, implying that some long-term features had been playing a role in the present situation. Moreover, adding that the “macroeconomic environment” played a role, he also included an item termed “political environment” that encompassed not only the role of social partners, corporatist structures (“small-state democratic corporatism”) and political support in society for reforms. He described an “implicit social contract concerning balance between flexibility and security”. Other analyses converged and attributed to “flexicurity” an even more encompassing meaning: it seems that for some Danish researchers, “flexicurity” could mean a global social consensus that encompassed extremely comprehensive, complex and far-reaching dimensions because it had lasted for the last 75 years (Kristensen 2006: 300) or because it was intimately linked to the nature of the Danish legal system (Rasmussen 2006: 242-243). Danish politicians also claimed the term as their own. The former Social Democrat Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen commented about the policies he himself implemented (1993-2001), as an instance of the realisation of “flexicurity”, in the following terms: « *the combination of flexible labour markets and individual social security – of the Northern countries is [...] based on a) strong social security and broad welfare provisions ; b) active labour market and educational policies ; and c) a highly mobile labour market, where the social partners (trade unions and employers’ associations) are key actors with a high degree of responsibility for competitiveness and social sustainability*» (2005: 51). It should be noted that his description precisely did not limit itself to presenting a mechanism, because he stressed the role of actors and their “high degree of responsibility”. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the following conservative Prime minister, for his part, implied, but only in front of domestic audiences, that he was the inventor of the term²³. From what we learned, the claim was certainly far-fetched.

²² Madsen quoted the « golden triangle » from the 1999 Danish report (Madsen 2003: 101) when he contributed to an ILO comparative study.

²³ He did it on the 21st of November, 2004, at his party’s congress, pretending that he innovated in putting both terms together. “*Vi havde EU topmøde forleden. Der havde jeg lejlighed til at fortælle lidt om det. Den drøftelse forgik jo på engelsk. Jeg kombinerede de to ord og sagde, at vi har ’flexibility’ og ’security’, og så kaldte jeg den danske model for ’flexicurity’. Det er godt, for på fransk hedder det ’flexicurité’*”. [the other day, we had a European summit. There I had the opportunity to tell a little about it. The discussion was held in English. I combined the two words and said that we have “flexibility” and “security”,

Anything to compare between the Netherlands and Denmark?

Following G. Sartori's lesson, after this (very) brief description of the meanings of "flexicurity" in Denmark and in the Netherlands, we can ask: are they comparable, and with respect to which properties (1991b:245-246)? What is obvious is that, from the limited information compared, both employment *regimes* stand widely apart. Compared to the Danish, the Dutch is heavily gender-biased: whereas a system of interactions (the "triangle") seems to apply rather universally in Denmark, the "flexicurity" impact mainly concerns women in the Netherlands²⁴. If we single out three elements from this first empirical approach, table 1 displays considerable differences between the two countries, even when we leave aside long-term implications of specific social compromises. Two common elements stand out: both countries have a mix of collective agreements and labour laws, but this mix – however deeply embedded in their respective forms of corporatism – is substantially different, which gives ambiguous outcomes as to whether labour law should be considered "flexible" evenly across both countries.

Table 1. Comparing Denmark's and the Netherlands' "flexicurity"

Flexicurity	Denmark	The Netherlands
Gender dimension	Universalistic	Gendered
Social embeddedness	corporatist	corporatist
Labour law and collective agreements	Mixed, combining high protection from collective dismissals with corporatism	Mixed, combining high protection for open-ended contracts with corporatism

Hence, that leaves open the question as to whether "flexicurity" is a "cat-dog" or a real dog. To a certain extent, it can act as a concept *inductively* drawn from empirical facts collected in Denmark and the Netherlands. But if one takes the gender dimension as essential, then clearly the same notion cannot adequately describe both countries. Incidentally, the fact that the same word is used in them has strictly nothing to do with any form of Europeanization, *bar the travelling of the word*. What was initially seen as specific to Denmark (see our Danish quotation) was

and called the Danish model "flexicurity". It is good because in French they say "flexicurity" – our translation].

²⁴ It is not surprising that "combination security" ("the security of a worker of being able to combine his or her job with other – notably private – responsibilities and commitments than paid work" – one of the dimensions identified as part of the "flexicurity matrix") (Wilthagen and Tros 2003: 6) was first particularly stressed in the Dutch context, with its gender-biased feature.

finally grafted into a word adopted from the Netherlands. It is now necessary to go beyond this observation and try and see whether a more generalized sociological approach is possible to understand “flexicurity” independently of its historical roots in Denmark and the Netherlands.

The adventures of “flexicurity” at the EU-level: an opportune adoption

The comprehensive story of the idea of “flexicurity” at the EU-level remains to be written: one will have to take into account the role of many actors in many countries (Barbier 2014). Suffice it to say, at this stage, that the European Commission, in 2005-2006, was still relatively new and that social policies at the EU level had just been profoundly revised. In the late 1990’s, the open methods of coordination (OMCs) that the Commission introduced were seen as part of a political exchange, as the political construction of what was presented as a ‘balance between the economic and the social’. However, these days were long past and since 2004, with the integration of 12 new members, the failed referendums in the Netherlands, France and Ireland, what was left of ‘Social Europe’ was certainly no motive for officials to become sanguine. The Commission was extremely keen on finding a new field of action and it invested “flexicurity” as such, with the active help of Danish and Dutch politicians and scholars. Freed from its Dutch origin, the definition of “flexicurity” as a “strategy” thus seemed to have won the day in various international publications (European Commission 2006b: 77).

However, it should not be forgotten that, when the word “flexicurity” was not yet used, the joint reference to flexibility *and* to security had been present for a long time in the various prescriptive frameworks produced by EU institutions since the Delors White Paper adopted by the European Council in 1993. Vague references were already present in the 1994 Essen priorities and the normative necessity of a “balance” *between flexibility and security* appeared in the first Amsterdam European Employment Strategy guidelines in Autumn 1997. But suddenly, “flexicurity” featured higher and higher on the Commission’s agenda, at the end of 2006: a symptom of the new interest was to be found in the addition of a special item to the Eurobarometer survey. The way it was done, we think, shed an interesting light upon EU-level politics. In its Eurobarometer October 2006 survey (:14-15), the Commission inserted a section labelled “Europeans’ approval of the concept of flexicurity” and concluded it by saying that “a large majority of citizens agree with all the proposals and thus indirectly agree with the concept of ‘flexicurity’ (between 72% and 88%)”. The proposals interviewees were deemed to agree with were presented them one by one, yet within the frame of a single question²⁵. To say the least, the interpretation along which the survey demonstrated

²⁵ These were: « regular training improves one’s job opportunities »; « life time jobs with the same employer are a thing of the past »; « Being able to change easily

an “indirect” support for “flexicurity” is extremely difficult indeed to accept from a sociological point of view. However, when seen from the point of view of politics, this statement appears as a classical exercise of “political communication”. After the double failure of the referendums in France and the Netherlands over the project for a constitutional treaty in 2005, the Commission decided to step up its communication policy. The Spring summit conclusions are worth quoting at some length: “*Last but not least, with only a few exceptions, public ownership²⁶ of the Lisbon growth and jobs strategy falls short. Media coverage has also been fairly limited. We cannot yet say, therefore, that broad sections of the population have been made aware, let alone taken ownership, of the strategy. This points to the need for a dedicated communication strategy, making full use of economic analysis and showing how action will bring real benefits for individual citizens. Similarly, social partners, who have an important role to play both as participants in the process and as message multipliers, should become more actively involved in the governance process.*” (European Commission 2006a:7). In other words, the Commission attributed European citizens’ indifference or hostility to the Lisbon strategy to their insufficient information. Implicitly, this argument, at least as a partial one, was also used to account for the failure of the referendums in the Netherlands and in France in 2005. It was all the more important for the Commission to come forward with a new, positive message, in the absence of any new social policies at the EU level (Barbier 2008a): “flexicurity” was to play this role, because it brought with it the promise of reconciling the basic contradictions of capitalist systems in Europe, a “wish-list” as van den Berg has justly remarked (2009). Additionally, the linguistic innovation, (i.e. adopting the word “*flexicurity*”), it must be noted, did not occur by chance and at any moment. It was supported by governments from countries like Denmark (happy to “sell” their “model” abroad) and, less obviously, the Netherlands, all active in what can be seen as a “war between social models” at the EU level between Member States. It happened at a moment when the Commission – destabilised by the consequences of the Dutch and French referendums – has been trying with much difficulty to counter its decrease of power and (especially for the actors in the DG social affairs within the Commission) to fight against the relative depreciation of the OMC processes in the social domain. In other countries, similar terms were adopted, but not without

from one job to another is a useful asset to help people find a job nowadays »; « Work contracts should become more flexible to encourage job creation »; « In [OUR COUNTRY] many people retire too early » (QC 18: please tell me, for each of the following statements to what extent you agree or disagree with it).

²⁶ It is also at the same date that the reference to “ownership” (*appropriation*, in French, *Identifizierung*, in German) started to feature systematically in the Commission’s documents.

controversies, which were, as the French case clearly demonstrated, a symptom that there was no such thing as a “substantive common agenda” of flexicurity²⁷.

As a result, within the European Commission, the term “flexicurity” without other specification was widely circulated. It also became a catchword in academia and in international political and expert circles, but also at national level for specialists, in a similar manner as “activation” did. At this stage, no particular link – other than very remote, was maintained with the original situation of countries where the term was coined. What was already, at its origins, a vaguely designed political notion became a combination of many dimensions that had only in common the fact that they could please member states and their social partners in one way or another: flexibility for employers, standardization of non-standard employment contracts, formalisation of informal sector employment, access to learning and good job transitions for all, support for the unemployed in finding their way to high-quality jobs, etc. (van den Berg, 2009: 7). The Commission was keen to “depoliticize” an issue that, in the Netherlands and in Denmark, (where the expression took its meaning and its social validity), was always directly and *essentially politicized* (parties and social partners being crucial participants in the compromises leading to any form of “flexicurity”)²⁸. The very special balance Danes had achieved, obviously, over a long period of their history (perhaps since their “September Compromise” of 1899), has social roots in their particular coherence of institutions, values and adaptive ability to economic changes. In any country, in France and the Netherlands for that matter, the balance between what is acceptable and desirable in terms of flexibility of labour and employment on one side, and what is seen as “necessary” (normally expected) security on the other, very much depends on social coherences (political cultures) built over years within polities: such preferences are obviously reinforced by institutions and their success in the regulation of societies. Hence, “flexicurity”, in principle, should *de facto* be seen as a primarily *national* question.

Trying to give “flexicurity” sociological sense

Just as we saw for the expression “activation”, the dissemination of a word within transnational political arenas and forums does not prevent ascribing it sound and robust signification; yet for this, one needs the help of analysis and concept

²⁷ For the struggle about definitions and the choice of words in France (*flexisécurité* against *flexicurity*, etc., see Barbier *et al.* (2009).

²⁸ *Inter alia*, the gap between the apparently de-politicized framing and wording of the “flexicurity” question found in EU documents appears very clearly when one compares them with the substance of debates held in the European Parliament specialised commissions. For instance, the Greek representative of the GUE/NGL group (which groups, *inter alia*, communist MEPs) thought that “flexicurity” was akin to “flexploitation”.

formation, a process that was never achieved eventually in the case of “flexicurity”. When all the sophisticated exercises of “benchmarking” were made with the help of indicators used by the Commission, combining a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) with a clustering of countries (2006b: 75-118)²⁹, and, remarkably, omitting “social dialogue” as an indicator, this exercise left the question of the definition of “flexicurity” completely unsolved. True, countries were “clustered” with reference to the indicators chosen, but no one ever knew what “flexicurity” really was, except in terms of the *vague political promise to reconcile contradictions between employers’ and employees’ expectations, powers and interests*. We nevertheless tried sociological analysis to help sorting out possible rigorous definitions (table 2). In this table³⁰ we tried to map out some definitions that could be used for a sociological concept of “flexicurity”: the area of sociology and social science is in grey in the table, whereas the area occupied by politics and policy consultancy, or normative analysis (as in economics) was left in white.

What we arrived at is rather simple (our findings are more extensively presented elsewhere, Barbier, 2007b). Reviewing usages of the term leads to distinguishing *two main possible sociological definitions*, which are not exclusive from one another: (a) “flexicurity” can be a policy/strategy and (b) “flexicurity” can be a system of components. In the first case, the policy explicitly states that it pursues the goal of reconciling flexibility on the one hand, and security on the other. In the second, it is a system³¹ embedded in a given society, that is designed for provoking the reconciling of flexibility and security (implicitly or explicitly, for certain actors). Sociological policy analysis distinguishes between ideational dimensions of policies, as opposed to their material elements (roughly: there exist (a1) political discourses and (a2) programmes and actors). Discourses can take many aspects: while they convey cognitive messages, they are also instrumental (conflicts of power), normative and sometimes manipulative (in the case of political communication). For instance, discussing in the European Parliament actors oppose one another about the sheer possibility of “flexicurity”’s existence: some see it as a chimera,

²⁹ They mainly used four indicators: the ‘strictness of employment protection legislation’; expenditure on labour market policies; the share of participants in life-long programmes and the average tax-wedge, and their analysis ends up in a grouping of countries into “five flexicurity/labour market systems” (European Commission 2006b: 102-109)

³⁰ In the table, we distinguish between research tasks and other activities directly linked to politics. Social science research figures on the upper left of the table (analytical-positive goals) while normative activities appear on the right side; some activities are in-between (analytical and normative: this is the case of benchmarking but, more broadly, of many economic studies.)

³¹ Actually, a sub-system centred on the labour market (Barbier 2007a). Wilthagen and Tros (2003: 5) also write: “flexicurity could not merely be seen as a species of labour market policy/strategy but also a certain “state” or condition of the labour market”.

some as an interesting strategy or a plausible theory of action for a programme. Of course many interrogations arise as to what “components” of flexibility and security should be considered. It is also essential to recall that the notion came to be discussed in a definite context, i.e., the present flexibilization of markets, a trend driven by globalisation. The ultimate basic rationale for flexibility lies indeed in the contemporary transformation of international monetary norms and in labour costs competition; as empirical data amply demonstrated in Europe, the gradual flexibilization of jobs has entailed the degradation of conditions of work and protection for a significant part of the population, especially those with lower qualifications. It is then highly improbable that, against this common and powerful economic background, institutional arrangements would be easily built to marry flexibility and security, unless equally strong social conditions for negotiations, compromises and the redistribution of resources were met. The economic constraint is one of *labour flexibility* – labour as a factor of production, for reasons of cost competition – which can be disconnected from *employment flexibility* (Barbier and Nadel 2000). Post-2008 developments of the economic crisis of the EU have amply confirmed and even worsened this constraint. Of course, once a definite list of components of a “system of flexicurity” are identified (and possibly, some interactions), the essential task remains, i.e. *objectifying and explaining their aggregate functioning*, as a complex web of interactions, complementarities, etc.. between various sub-systems within a particular society. For instance, in one country, it is possible that “flexicurity policies” were implemented, and that they failed, whereas in another country, a “flexicurity policy” was implemented and contributed to making its twin objectives compatible, also because the history of the country and its institutions allowed for doing the right choices at the right moment. Both political discourses and the implementation of specific programmes participate in the achievement of the goal of “flexicurity” as a system.

Some of the implications of the distinction (strategy versus system) will be clearer if we contrast the French and the Danish situations in the years 2005-2006. France is a country characterised by a high level of union fragmentation and a low union density, where a relatively high level of social conflict accompanies the implementation of reforms, with high uncertainty about eventual outcomes. In this country, labour law overwhelmingly prevails over collective agreements. Often, as was the case in 2005-2006, with Prime Minister de Villepin, the government tries and passes Bills in Parliament to reform either social protection or labour law, without really consulting with social partners or unions. This often leads to reforms being controversial and provides legitimate motives for open street demonstrations, a quite common habit in this country³². In 2005-2006, the government was proud of

³² During the 90s, apart from a period of intense demonstrations triggered by Prime minister Balladur’s attitude in 1994 over a government proposal to create a special contract with a lower minimum wage for the young, two main significant social movements took

his success in introducing a new employment contract (*contrat nouvelle embauche*, August 2005) with shorter notice periods, for firms with less than 20 staff, and it thought the introduction of an additional one of a similar type for the young was going to be easy in early 2006. Very typically, the de Villepin government always claimed that this was a policy initiative due to its learning from Denmark (Barbier 2007a). But the reform for the new contract for the young was eventually defeated in the streets. When presenting his “social testament”, de Villepin nevertheless concluded that, at all costs, France would have to find a “*flexicurité à la française*”³³. The French case illustrates the fact that a strategy was attempted to introduce various reforms that might *at first sight* pass for a “flexicurity strategy”. Because of the failure of the government to really implement it, the French situation of the labour market remained for a great part unchanged (which led to the renegotiation of a national agreement later, in 2007-2008). By contrast, in Denmark, politicians and academics adopted the term “flexicurity” for policies that, in the first place, were not conceived of as “flexicurity” strategies, the term coming only later to Danish forums. These policies have amply shown that the present Danish situation fitted reasonably well in Wilthagen and Tros’s definition: moreover, Danish scholars tended to think that the elements of the “flexicurity” system in Denmark had roots in past history that was key to understanding today’s performances (Madsen 2006; Kristensen 2006). Last but not least, the elements which Danish scholars tended to associate with features of the Danish “flexicurity system” were hardly if at all heard of, or documented, in the French case: for instance, the French system of unemployment assistance and insurance was very ungenerous when compared to the Danish, and the system of active labour market programmes in France much less effective than the Danish. Moreover, the contrast was maybe at its highest for the support for reform in both countries and for the widely diverging systems of industrial relations, not to mention the basic rules of the French polity (Barbier, Colomb, Madsen 2009).

place. The first one (winter 1995) was organised over pensions in the public sector and the healthcare insurance reform; the second (winter 1997-98), over the situation of the unemployed, was organised by NGOs supporting the unemployed. A fourth moment was the reform of the unemployment insurance. Although it did not spark off demonstrations in any way comparable to the 1994, 1995 and 1997 waves, it did indeed provoke very active and fierce debate. On a smaller scale, recurrent debate and strikes supported by the unions have also accompanied the series of the most significant (and media reported) waves of redundancies.

³³ Prime Minister’s speech at the *Conseil économique et Social*, February, 26, 2007 where he told there were three main axes for this future “*flexicurité à la française*”: reforming labour law; reforming vocational training, and reforming the Public employment service.

To sum up our findings so far, it has unfortunately remained impossible to find a common base for studying the interaction of standardized elements in many countries for a concept of “flexicurity” to be defined rigorously. By induction, superficial similarities between the recent histories in the Netherlands and in Denmark can be observed. However the literature never went further. The story, nevertheless, cannot be concluded like that: more research is perhaps needed. Even in the case where we would make the assumption that a similar, if not “common” system of interactions existed in the two countries, we would still be left anyhow with the task of explaining the functioning of these “complementarities”. What to do of the features deeply embedded in Danish society, among the explanatory causes or variables for accounting for the present success, as Madsen (2006) and Kristensen (2006) suggest? Seen in this light, the “Danish flexicurity” *system* is a complex web of interactions, of collective action and of individual adaptation to societal norms and rules, which is in a way unique. Hence, one is bound to analyse a “flexibility outcome” (or “degree” or performance level) as the “product” of a system, a societal combination of sub-systems, placed in their historical development and path-dependence, with a considerable interplay of factors. Here, Amable’s (2003) approach to “institutional complementarities” is useful. In sociology, establishing genuine causal links between present policies and a holistic “outcome” or “state” that characterizes a particular society has always been tricky³⁴. It seems quite logical however to try and find bases for theorizing “flexicurity” among disciplinary approaches that pay central attention to corporatism and to the role played by social compromises. In the political science and sociological tradition, as well as in institutional economics, approaches which immediately come to the mind centre on the question of ‘regulation’ of society (in the sense of *régulation* in French and *Regelung* in German). In this perspective, apart from Mayntz and Scharpf’s “actor-centred institutionalism” we also find very useful support in Jobert’s approach (1998) and Boyer’s (1986). From a Jobertian perspective, the question of “flexicurity” boils down to the organisation of power relations between actors which are constructed into a “political order” and “flexicurity” is a political *référentiel* (cognitive frame) that can be used by certain actors to change the existing social relationships. The French “regulation” school, with Boyer, has emphasised the key role played by “institutionalised compromises”, which emerge from social conflicts and political processes (Boyer 2006).

Finally, if “flexicurity” ever deserves to be constructed as a concept, it would have to find its place at some crossing-point in the wider ‘wage-labour nexus’

³⁴ Hence the everlasting discussion about the degree of ‘causality’ which is present in Max Weber’s use of the term ‘affinities’, and which can be easily applied to the case of Denmark today (Barbier 2007a).

(*rapport salarial*)³⁵, and in the social protection institutional area³⁶: for “flexicurity” to become a significant feature of the wage-labour nexus, around the trade-offs, complementarities and vicious circles between the various forms of flexibility and security that various actors demand, accept or reject, compromises have to be institutionalized at national level. Hence, quite different from a technical toolbox, “flexicurity” is *throughout* of a *political nature*. Secondly, it is still necessary to analyse more closely the relevant complementarities that are (or were) able to creating the conditions under which potential “flexicurity” institutional compromises could be struck in the future (or have already been). Let’s risk the final assumption here that, by introducing political “regulation” (in the French sense of *régulation*), power relationships and industrial relations systems, one would probably end up with the finding that, if it has any distinctive substantial content, “flexicurity” may only fit *within certain types of capitalism*. Whatever their important differences, both empirical examples studied would certainly confirm the existence of a negotiated national compromise supported by the majority of the population, leading to a *substantive balance* of security and flexibility among individual members of the workforce (and across households) (Barbier 2007a for Denmark), at least over a defined number of years. By contrast, the French situation cannot really be seen as having yielded any new compromise (at the time of writing), when fragmentation (social protection and labour market) and inequality increased, even after the important signing of a national collective agreement in early 2008. In this sense, the invention of a “flexicurity system” had still to emerge in this country, before the financial crisis occurred and transformed the landscape totally. This empirical finding could be easily replicated in many other European countries, and the UK is probably a case in point. Incidentally it is also important to again stress that such arrangements were transitory. With different economic circumstances, and different political compromises and actors, a “Danish

³⁵ In this “institutional area” (or institutional form – for Boyer), Amable (2003: 124-142), uses three indicators: employment protection; industrial relations; employment policy. In the “social-democratic” model, Amable notes that “strong external competitive pressure requires some flexibility of the workforce. But flexibility is not simply achieved through lay-offs and market adjustments; retraining of a highly-skilled workforce plays a crucial role in the adaptability of workers. Protection of specific investments of employees is realized through a mixture of moderate employment protection, a high level of social protection, and easy access to retraining thanks to active labour market policies. A coordinated wage-bargaining system enables solidaristic wage-setting which favours innovation and productivity. A centralized financial system enables firms to develop long-term strategies” (id.: 105-107). In Amable’s typology, the Netherlands belong to the continental European type.

³⁶ In this “institutional area”, Amable (2003: 149-160) uses a number of indicators related to the structure of social protection.

flexicurity” system or a Dutch one were thoroughly altered (Jørgensen 2012) : in Denmark unemployment benefit eligibility was cut by two years in 2010, prompting the union LO to ask for more “employment protection”. More generally, as an item on the European Commission’s agenda, “flexicurity” quietly receded to a remote place as macroeconomic and financial coordination took over (Barbier 2013).

Table 2. Social science research about ‘flexicurity’: mapping tasks and approaches of concepts

Tasks	Tasks	Social science (analytical-positive)	Analytical and normative: in-between activities (economics)	Normative activities
Describing	Describing “flexicurity”=> its components and the ‘system’ they make -Elements -System of interactions (institutions, rules)	Identifying a – policies (and strategies) 1) discourses (cognitive/normative) 2) actors and their strategies, programmes implemented b – phenomena, institutions and arrangements: elements that are candidates for featuring within an analytical (universal) stylised framework/ <i>system</i> of “flexicurity” - interactions between elements		Political discourse about elements of flexicurity Articulated by actors participating in the promotion/demotion of flexicurity as a political strategy (politicians, experts, academics, etc)
Explaining And understanding	Causal attribution/ ‘affinities’) of effects/situations, etc.. to the impact of the elements/the system of “flexicurity”	- Explaining actors’ strategies - Attributing changes (dependent variables) in certain phenomena to public activities/strategies/institutions and the system they build with actors’ responses, strategies - Assessing potential effects of ideas	Evaluation studies and benchmarking: mainstream economics/correlations, etc. , econometrics	Political discourse about the goals of flexicurity (idem)

Valuing/assessing	Recommendations for policy makers		Economic studies, modeling strategies, based on stylised facts, leading to one or more 'better strategies' => 'policy lessons'	Political communication as legitimization/de-legitimation discourses for strategies
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Flexicurity and Europeanization

At first sight, “flexicurity” would appear as an ideal candidate concept for capturing the traces of Europeanization in the various member states of the EU. The concept was systematically promoted by the European Commission during more than 2 years: all states had to report to the Commission about their “implementation” of “flexicurity pathways” that were proposed to them. Any meeting organized by the DG Employment Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities at the time was explicitly framed as part of “flexicurity”: European social partners negotiated the adoption of a common declaration about it³⁷. A mainstream discourse was powerfully promoted by the Commission, with the support of Dutch and Danish actors, academics and politicians. The discourse travelled even in countries which, at first sight, were deemed to be hostile to it: that is probably *the main achievement of Europeanization*. In countries as different as France and Denmark, with very differing industrial relations systems, actors seized upon the *de-contextualized discourse*, to use it as a resource for bargaining (Barbier, Colomb and Madsen 2009). Sometimes, negotiation was made easier, sometimes, as in Denmark typically, a rather national strong coalition formed itself (at least for a time), to fight for retaining the Danish style of governance of the labour market (Jørgensen 2013). Nevertheless, *the substance* of the Danish style was not more affected for that matter than the French style. Europeanization did not extend *to the substance and content of arrangements*, still very different after the adoption of a common English word. A surface discourse Europeanization has been the main outcome observable in the area of labour market and social protection reform. Moreover, beyond the now fading away fad, the economic crisis taught that tough structural reform was imposed upon countries, without even mentioning “flexicurity” at all.

³⁷ The ETUC nevertheless significantly refused to endorse the document at the end of 2006, although it accepted that a common “taking stock” exercise was conducted with Business Europe, the employers’ organisation.

4. Conclusion: surface and hard Europeanizations

The exercise we practiced here is based on the long-term collection of empirical findings in many countries of Europe, including the UK, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and others (Barbier 2006; 2008a). This collection was essentially completed before the financial crisis broke out in 2008. For lack of space, we have only quoted some of it. Each time with the help of empirical surveys, mostly qualitative and sometimes ethnographic, but also with the crucial help of informers in the countries visited, we have gathered an important bank of comparative data, that, as often as possible, included the effort to understand how political notions – initially crafted in European English – were used by local actors in their own language. At the end of the day, what we arrived at is a *bifurcated conclusion* on both the objects of our research, the “activation of social protection” on the one hand, and “flexicurity” on the other. Both notions have travelled across the member states of the European Union, and even further, for instance in Japan and Mexico. What has travelled was, in each case, a notion, a concept of a very abstract nature. Undeniably, this dissemination is an outcome of Europeanization (namely: the way of talking about the labour market and social protection became more homogenized, *a hybridized discourse was created and cognitive coordination was achieved*). But, mostly such Europeanization was found to remain vague and superficial; moreover, it was very much dependent upon economic circumstances. As the empirics of the present paper were collected before the economic crisis, it is interesting, with hindsight to put the findings in perspective from a 2014 point of view.

In the case of “activation”, the essential meaning conveyed was that of the normative acceptance to impose obligations upon the unemployed, for the sake of morality, fairness and efficiency. Political discourses were sometimes tougher or more generous, but the tune of the day was in favour of “rights and obligations”. The Europeanization of the discourse is here evident, but it always remained at a superficial level, because substantive rights and substantive obligations kept on differing extremely from one country to the other, even after reform (see the cases of Denmark and the United Kingdom as a typical opposition, even in 2013 – see Jørgensen H., 2013) . What was also remarkable was that politicians did only change their discourse of “rights and responsibilities” briefly in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 crisis (especially in France and Germany). They were quickly back to the moralizing and often punitive discourse for one main reason: this “narrative” was consistent with the underlying drive towards the containment of costs of assistance and unemployment compensation (Barbier 2009). This fitted well into the new order of the day, marked by structural reforms the European Commission, and the fiscal coordinators asked for, especially in Greece, Ireland and Portugal.

“Flexicurity”, on the other hand, eventually appeared as a “wish list” of things desirable and desired by social partners and politicians, especially in “Brussels” under the first Barroso Commission. The discourse, here again, was certainly Europeanized, providing but another example of the constant “cognitive”

Europeanization of the national discourses translated in European English. However, the umbrella (or portmanteau) term was used to cover so many different situations that it almost lost any distinctive substance: when real decisions were to be made, they had to be made in national forums and arenas, and, there, the ambiguity of compromises between right and left parties and social partners led to tough bargaining where “flexicurity” was only a distant reference, when it was used at all at that stage³⁸. Using sociological analysis, we proposed the analytical concept of “activation of social protection” as a broad marker of a general trend that we had identified in almost every country we explored, although with very different degrees and very differing types of reform programmes. The sociological concept we proposed was very different from the mainstream political catchword. We were able to identify some form of Europeanization in the dissemination of general ideas, along which it is agreed that systems had to be reformed in the sense of making them more employment-friendly. The rationale, by the way, extended beyond Europe in the USA and Canada, for instance, albeit marginally. When we tried and conceptualize the notion of “flexicurity” with the help of sociology, what we found was that it could mean a category of policies and programmes, but we found there was no particular interest to name them “flexicurity policies”, because there was practically no analytical way to strictly distinguish them from other policies. Once the aim of these was to solve the many contradictions of European capitalism, almost anything could pass as “flexicurity” policy. Secondly, we observed that sophisticated research was still necessary to identify the precise complementarities that would be able to explain the positive outcomes observed in the early 1990s in Denmark and the Netherlands. Here, “flexicurity” could have been a system, before the crisis, over a period of 10 to 20 years, and it displayed the traces of a virtuous association of complementarities. That did not mean however, that a clear, distinctive notion of “flexicurity” as a system, as an achieved state of things, could be applied to both. That certainly did not mean either, that Danish and Dutch experiences could be seen as a source of “best practice” that could be transported to other countries. After the crisis broke out, this picture was to be thoroughly transformed and “flexicurity” quickly disappeared from the core agenda.

Finally, the picture painted here is one that combines the construction of a general Europeanized ideology, a common discourse mainly practiced by political elites, but in which academic elites actively participate in the construction. The “activation of social protection” and “flexicurity” evidently fit well in the current list of common ideas typical of an era of “neo-liberal governance”. However, as Campbell and Pedersen (2001) showed in their in-depth comparison of the “domestication” of neo-liberal doctrines in many countries, the eventual outcome and influence of these “common ideas” finally fail to produce a common European,

³⁸ It was certainly no more used at the stage of negotiation in France for instance in the crucial 2008 round (see Barbier *et al.* 2009).

substantive new model of labour market and social protection. Such conclusions are only observable if we actively try to escape the pitfalls of misclassification, degreeism, parochialism, and concept stretching (Sartori 1991), pitfalls that we hope to have escaped in the present paper.

The management of the crisis by European elites – national and federal alike – also taught the general public that the main force in action for the Europeanization of labour market policies was to be found in macroeconomic and financial agreements from 2008. “Activation” remained on a social agenda that was in any case marginalized and brutally submitted to adjustment policies, especially in Greece, Ireland and Portugal, but also in Spain, and less rigorously in France and Italy. “Flexicurity”, on the other hand was just a token citation of the past. “Hard” Europeanization went as far as violating international labour law (Schömann and Clauwert 2012).

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