

FROM THREE PRIORITIES TO SIX AMBITIONS – THE (UN)SUSTAINABLE SUSTAINABILITY POLICIES OF EU COMMISSION IN THE COVID ERA

Radka MacGregor Pelikánová¹

Abstract

The Europe 2020 Strategy with its three priorities – smart, sustainable and inclusive growth- has been only partially successful and ended in 2020. The new European Commission of Ursula von der Leyen launched six new policy ambitions aka priorities for 2019-2024 and then the devastating COVID-19 pandemic hit the EU. Arguably, these six new ambitions continue the trio of previous priorities and effectively and efficiently remain unchanged regardless of COVID-19. Is this true and correct? In order to address these two burning questions, firstly the original three priorities and six new ambitions need to be identified and compared, and secondly the six new ambitions need to be assessed in the light of the current two key commands – sustainability and managing COVID-19. A holistic description and critical comparison along with Meta-Analysis with glossing and Socratic questioning offers a new perspective regarding the European Commission endeavours and perhaps even regarding the future of the EU.

Keywords

COVID-19, EU Policies, EU Priorities, Sustainability

I. Introduction

Over seventy years ago, modern European integration was launched following the Schuman Declaration based on three treaties creating three European Communities in the 1950's and establishing the internal European integration tandem, the European Commission and the European Court of Justice ("ECJ", newly "CJ EU") (MacGregor Pelikánová et al, 2017). The motivation for such an integration included market, agricultural self-sufficiency, peace and welfare concerns (MacGregor Pelikánová & MacGregor, 2021). A number of further treaties followed and currently the quasi-constitutional aka primary EU law framework includes a triad: the Treaty on EU ("TEU"), the Treaty on the Functioning of EU ("TFEU") and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights ("Charter"). The secondary EU law, typically Regulations and Directives, as well as supplementary EU law, i.e. the case law of the CJ EU, needs to be in compliance with the primary EU law (MacGregor Pelikánová & MacGregor, 2020). The EU law is an inherent product and reflection of EU policies, especially mid-term and long-term policies, see the Europe 2020 Strategy (MacGregor Pelikánová, 2019). Hence the common denominator for both the EU and EU policies, is the concept of sustainability and its projection in the engagement of businesses via their Corporate Social Responsibility ("CSR") (MacGregor Pelikánová et al, 2021). However, it must be emphasized that the concept of sustainability has millennial continental law roots and for the last century has been predominantly shaped by the United Nations (MacGregor Pelikánová et al, 2021). As a matter of fact, currently the most relevant international law instrument in this sphere is the Resolution made during a historic UN Summit in September 2015 and entitled 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development' ("UN Agenda 2030"), which brought with it 17 Sustainable Development Goals ("SDGs") and 169 associated targets and was adopted by world leaders (MacGregor Pelikánová & MacGregor, 2021). The last set of three priorities of the EU, embedded in the Europe 2020 Strategy of the Barroso and Juncker Commissions, as well as the new set of six ambitions of the EU, embedded in the Political Guidelines of the von der Leyen Commission do carry on the 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs. According to the European Commission, the emergence of COVID-19 and the battle against it, plus the recovery thereafter, have not impaired it, instead in contrast, it has further

¹ Metropolitan University Prague, Dubečská 900/10, 100 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic. E-mail: radkamacgregor@yahoo.com.

magnified the current six ambitions. Hence, these new six ambitions should firmly continue with the three previous priorities and remain unchanged, regardless of COVID-19, while maintaining effectiveness and efficiency. Is this true and correct? In order to address these two burning questions, after a proper introduction (I.) relevant data needs to be found and processed in a methodologically acceptable manner (II.). Firstly, the original three priorities and six new ambitions are to be identified from conventional EU sources, such as the Internet website of the European Commission and the EurLex databases, and descriptively presented in a summary, in a critical and comparative manner (III.). Secondly, the six new ambitions are to be assessed via a critical comparison along with Meta-Analysis with glossing and Socratic questioning, while focussing on two pivotal phenomena - sustainability and COVID-19 and addressing indices about their effectiveness and efficiency (IV.). This leads to a new perspective regarding recent and current European Commission endeavours and perhaps even regarding the future of the EU.

II. Data and Methods

The employed data and methods are logically implied by two research questions which are set in order to achieve a deeper understanding of recent and current priorities set by and embedded in EU policies. Namely, the employed data and methods deal with research and analysis in relation to the prior three priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy, aka smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, and the current six ambitions in the context of the COVID-19.

The first hypothesis embraces the EU Commission's statements pursuant to which these six new ambitions continue on with the trio of previous priorities (H1). In order to confirm or reject H1, holistically the original three priorities and six new ambitions are to be identified from conventional internal sources and descriptively presented in a summary, in a critical and comparative manner. The sources are twofold – the Internet website of the European Commission, in particular the webpage Strategies – Priorities 2019-2024, and the EU database EurLex aka EUR-Lex, which is the online gateway to EU Law run by the Publications Office of the EU. Based on a holistic approach, content analysis (Vourvachis & Woodward, 2015) and via teleological interpretation (Prakken, 2002) these sources are explored and the three old and six new ambitions extracted and put in a comparative table. Consequently, it takes advantage of a visual persuasion (Miller, 2007) and visual synthesis (Finke & Slayton, 1988). Further, critical glossing (Huang & Lin, 2014) and Socratic questioning (Areeda, 1996) are involved to bring complementary points.

The second hypothesis embraces the EU Commission's statements pursuant to which these six new ambitions effectively and efficiently remain unchanged regardless of COVID19 (H2). In order to confirm or reject H2, a deeper Meta-Analysis of the setting and delivery of the six new ambitions is to be performed (Glass, 1976; Schmidt & Hunter, 2014) while paying particular attention to the dynamics of correct goals (effectiveness) and correct ways to them (efficiency) (Cooper et al, 2019). The effectiveness as correctness is assessed by juxtaposing the foundation and legitimacy of the six new ambitions with the sustainability and COVID-19 demands. The efficiency is to be done by considering and visualizing the data from the European Commission brochure labelled “State of play in spring 2021.” Similar to H1, even regarding H2, visualization with a comparative table is used (Finke & Slayton, 1988; Miller, 2007) and the content analysis (Vourvachis & Woodward, 2015) is enriched by critical glossing (Huang & Lin, 2014) and Socratic questioning (Areeda, 1996).

III. (In)direct pathway from three priorities to six ambitions

The concept of sustainability and CSR have been intimately linked to the EU policies. Sustainability means meeting current needs without compromising the satisfaction of future needs, namely balancing available resources with the increasing world population (Meadows et al, 1972). This is feasible only if all stakeholders, including businesses, are responsible towards each other and the entire society and they do what is morally and/or legally right or at least expected, see economic (Sroka & Szanto, 2018), and law requirements along with ethical expectations and philanthropic desires (Carroll, 2016). Responsibility means that someone has to answer for the effects caused by

him to an authority and this authority evaluates its damages (Schüz, 2012). Liability is a sub-category of responsibility which is legally enforceable and the ultimate authority is the judge (MacGregor Pelikánová & MacGregor, 2020). The UN Agenda 2030 calls for the engagement and commitment by International law subjects, such as the EU, in this respect. Although the EU does not face the issue of an exponentially growing population, the respect of all three sustainability pillars (environment, economic and social) is critical for the EU and is even embedded in its primary law, see e.g. Art. 3 TEU, Art. 11 TFEU and Art. 37 Charter. Indeed, the EU has been pro-actively reacting to it, and this *prima facie* via pro-sustainability policies and more recently via the employment of a multi-stakeholder model and cross-sector partnership (Van Tulder et al, 2016; Van Tulder & Keen, 2018). These instruments belong rather to the sphere of the soft law and it is up to businesses to “privately enact” these commandments, see e.g. their Codes of Ethics (Balcerzak & MacGregor Pelikánová, 2020).

In 2010, the EU faced not only a set of economic, financial, real estate, employment and other crises (Tvrdoň, 2016) but also recognized that, without a general support across the entire society, the concept of sustainability is a chimera. To address both of these issues, the European Commission, under the presidency of José Manuel Barroso, issued the Com(2010) 2020 final Communication Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth aka Europe 2020 Strategy. Undoubtedly, the Europe 2020 Strategy was the key EU policy instrument regarding competition and sustainability between 2010 and 2020 (MacGregor Pelikánová, 2019). The three priorities of Europe 2020 – smart (P1), sustainable (P2) and inclusive (P3) growth – were projected in five main targets – T1 to raise the employment rate to 75%, T2 to invest 3% of the GDP in R&D, T3 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, T4 to increase the share of the population with a tertiary education to 40% and T5 to reduce the number of Europeans who are living at or below the poverty level by 25%. i.e. lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion. The Europe 2020 Strategy focuses on the single internal market where smart, sustainable and inclusive growth takes place and where technological potential (Dima et al 2018, Balcerzak 2016, Želazny & Pietrucha, 2017) and fair competition should develop (MacGregor Pelikánová, 2019). The European Commission declared that the EU, under auspices of the Europe 2020 Strategy, would achieve world trade leadership (Stec & Grzebyk, 2017). However, even at the beginning of its launching in 2010, there were very sceptical voices objecting to the very foundation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, the (lack of) competency and legitimacy as well as the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the entire Europe 2020 Strategy as well as of its individual aspects and instruments (Erixon, 2010). Undoubtedly, the Europe 2020 Strategy was aimed to support the European competitiveness and to induce all Europeans to act toward the economic, social and environmental sustainability (Polcyn et al, 2019). Excellent or at least good results were accompanied by deficiencies and especially the total failure of meeting the target to invest 3% of the GDP in R&D seriously undermined both the effectiveness and efficiency of the EU sustainability and pro-competitiveness policies. Not only the EU’s desire to be the top economic power and global leader remained a pipedream, but the last year of the Europe 2020 Strategy was marked by the emergence of COVID-19. Indeed, 2020-2021 is the era of a crisis severely testing EU policies, including the concept of sustainability (Derevianko, 2019). Allegedly, Albert Einstein stated: “... it is crisis that brings progress. It is in crisis that inventiveness, discovery and great strategy are born” (D’Adamo & Lupi, 2021). Well, this test, and possible inventiveness, discovery and great strategy, needs to be performed. However, not (only) with respect to the Europe 2020 Strategy, because its decade-long time expired in 2020 and exactly in 2020 a new set of strategic policies were launched by the new European Commission.

The Europe 2020 Strategy was a product of the Barroso European Commission, which in 2014 inherited the Juncker Commission. In 2019, the five year term of the Juncker Commission expired and was replaced by a new European Commission under the presidency of Ursula von der Leyen. Although this new European Commission took office in December 2019, it is critical to explore the Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024, presented by the candidate for president, Ursula von der Leyen, in July 2017 (“Political Guidelines 2019-2024”) (European

Commission, 2019). The European Parliament voted for Ursula von der Leyen based on these Political Guidelines, which form an outline of her policies and legislative programme. The backbone of these Political Guidelines 2019-2024 are the following six priorities aka six headline ambitions: A1 A European Green Deal; A2 An economy that works for people; A3 A Europe fit for the digital age, (iv) Protecting our European way of life; A5 A stronger Europe in the world and A6 A new push for European democracy. Ursula von der Leyen promised via these Political Guidelines 2019-2024 to always stick to the stated priorities, regardless of challenges and opportunities and specifically stated *“I see the next five years as an opportunity for Europe – to strive for more at home in order to lead in the world.”* (European Commission, 2019).

Only a few months later, COVID-19 struck, and, after remaining rather silent in the Spring of 2020, the European Commission became vocal again, and this especially regarding the European Green Deal. A summary reaction came in October of 2020, when the European Commission issued COM(2020) 690 final Communication – Commission Work Programme 2021 – A Union of vitality in the world of fragility (*“Work Programme 2021”*). Due to the context, especially COVID-19, the NextGenerationEU is pushed and the investment needs to match the pre-existing vision and ambition. Indeed, the Work Programme 2021 states the *“shift from strategy to delivery with an emphasis on next legislative initiatives and revisions of existing legislation, following up to the plans outlines across all six of headline ambitions in the last year.”* It needs to be emphasized that the European Commission via Work Programme 2021 not only confirmed its six ambitions, but in addition it confirmed as well the commitment to the UN Agenda 2030 with 17 SDGs and the Paris Agreement.

In April 2021, the European Commission issued a semi-progress report, The six policy priorities of the von der Leyen Commission – State of play in spring 2021 (*“State of play 2021”*) (European Commission, 2021a). This is an in-depth analysis about the ongoing (or lack of) progress regarding the six stated priorities, which the European Commission decided neither to abandon nor change due to COVID-19. Instead, the European Commission has added de facto a seventh priority – fight COVID-19 and promote economic recovery from it. Specifically, the European Commission declared in the State of play 2021 that *“it sees the coronavirus crisis as reconfirming the relevance of its existing (six) priorities, rather than eclipsing or recasting them. It also sees the crisis as offering an opportunity to move further and faster in certain fields, talking about “the great acceleration of change” which the crisis unleashed and “the great opportunity it (has) paradoxically presented.”* In particular, two of the six priorities should “benefit” by the acceleration effect of the COVID-19: A1 A European Green Deal and A3 A Europe fit for the digital age.

Further in April 2021, the EU issued *“Facts and Figures of MMF 2021-2027 and NextGenerationEU”*, which are especially related to the seventh priority – Recovery plan (European Commission, 2021b). Pursuant to it, the stimulus package of the EU reaches EUR 2.018 trillion in current prices and it consists of the EU’s long term budget for 2021 to 2027 of EUR 1.211 trillion topped up by EUR 806.9 billion through the NextGenerationEU fund, a temporary instrument to empower the recovery after COVID-19 pandemic.

In order to address H1, the most relevant of these four strategic documents is Political Guidelines 2019-2024, which brings the six new priorities along with their basic conceptual explanations. Therefore, the visualization regarding H1 is to be done by juxtaposing information from the Europe 2020 Strategy regarding the prior three priorities and from the Political Guidelines 2019-2024 regarding current priorities, see Table 1.

Table 1 Prior three priorities from Europe 2020 Strategy and current six ambitions from Political Guidelines 2019-2024

| Europe 2020 Strategy | | Political Guidelines 2019-2024 | | |
|------------------------|---|---|--|---------------------------------|
| 3 Priorities | 5 Target | 6 Ambitions (Priorities) | Details | Continuing Europe 2020 Strategy |
| P3 inclusive | T1 to raise the employment rate to 75 | A1 A European Green Deal | Europe = 1st climate neutral continent | P2 sustainable |
| P1 smart | T2 to invest 3% of the GDP in R&D | A2 An economy that works for people | Supporting SMEs and social dimension | P3 inclusive |
| P2 sustainable | T3 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20% | A3 A Europe fit for the digital age | Technological sovereignty | P1 smart |
| P1 smart, P3 inclusive | T4 to increase the share of the population with the tertiary education to 40% and | A4 Protecting our European way of life; | Immigration and sustainability | P2 sustainable |
| P3 inclusive | T5 to reduce the number of Europeans who are living at or below the poverty level by 25%. i.e. lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty or social exclusion. | A5 A stronger Europe in the world | Responsible global leadership | P2 sustainable |
| - | - | | Rules-based global order | P3 inclusive |
| | | | Free and fair trade | |
| | | | Partnership with European Parliament | |
| | | A6 A new push for European democracy | Spitzenkandidaten more transparent | |

Source: Author’s own processing based on information from Internet site of the European Commission and EurLex.

The comparative Table 1 reveals that the 1st priority from the Europe 2020 Strategy (P1 – smart growth) was reflected by two targets (T2 investment in R&D and T4 increase of tertiary education). The smart command was reflected by 3rd ambition of the Political Guidelines 2019-2024 (A3 A Europe fit for digital age – technology and digitalization). There is not a mechanic overlap between P1 and A3, instead one can detect an organic evolution from investment and education to delivery and results, i.e. spending money and educating people leads to more technological sovereignty. Hence, we can speak about a progressive continuation.

The comparative Table 1 reveals that the 2nd priority from the Europe 2020 Strategy (P2 – sustainable growth) was reflected by one target (T3 to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20%). The sustainable command was reflected by three (!) ambitions of the Political Guidelines 2019-2024 (A1 A European Green Deal, A4 Protecting our European way of life and A5 A stronger Europe in the world). Here is obviously a move from a strictly environmental sustainability to an ambitiously broad sustainability with a political dimension, i.e. P2 is matched by A1 and dramatically expanded by A4 and A5. Such an expansion looks a little bit like megalomania and a stubborn over-confidence, see the “eternal” EU chimera about world leadership.

The comparative Table 1 reveals that the 3rd priority from the Europe 2020 Strategy (P3 – inclusive growth) was reflected by three targets (T1 increasing employment, T4 increasing education and T5 decreasing poverty). The inclusive command was reflected by two ambitions of the Political Guidelines 2019-2024 (A2 An economy that works for people and A5 A stronger Europe in the world). Hence, there can be observed a shift from a focus on European employees and education to general social and global concerns.

The H1 that these new six priorities (ambitions) continue on with the three previous priorities needs to be addressed in a step-by-step approach. Namely, P1 is a foundation for an organic evolution to A3. P2 is dramatically expanded, i.e. followed by A1 and unrealistically diluted in A4 and A5. P3 is the subject of a perhaps unrealistic shift to A2 and A5. The last new priority, A6, deals with the system of political representation and its legitimacy and has no direct relationship to any of the three priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In sum, although it can be confirmed that five of the six new ambitions share foundations with the former three priorities, there is no direct organic continuation link between the policies based on the Europe 2020 Strategy and the policies based on the Political Guidelines 2019-2024. Indeed, the Political Guidelines 2019-2024 are going much more into global and value issues than the prior policies and strategies. Their test results, their trial, came even before anyone could expect – less than one year after launching them, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the EU, challenged many global and value issues and re-opened the chronic discussion about the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of the EU and EU policies.

IV. Assessment of the current six policy ambitions – effective and efficient delivery in the COVID-19 era?

Already during first months of 2020 it had become obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic promulgated a global dimension and the EU would suffer seriously. In October, 2020, the European Commission issued Work Programme 2021, advancing two points. Firstly, the European Commission presented its vision about “*repairing the world of today by shaping the world of tomorrow*” and underlined that the already presented European Green Deal (A1), plan for digital future (A3) and European Pillar of Social Rights are not to be recalled. Instead, the COVID-19 pandemic should be an accelerator of change and a great opportunity for an even faster and stronger green and digital transition. The investment has to match with ambitions and there should be a “*shift from strategy to delivery with an emphasis on new legislative initiatives and revisions of existing legislation ... action will remain guided by the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs both internally and externally as well as by the Paris Agreement.*” Secondly, the delivery of six headline ambitions were explained.

The effectiveness and efficiency of such confirmed, and to delivery moved, six ambitions was tested by an in-depth analysis performed by the European Commission in the Spring of 2021 and incorporated in the State of play 2021 (European Commission, 2021a). The European Commission has repeatedly underlined that it has not decided to abandon the previously stated six ambitions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, instead it wants to use the momentum of events to assert the increased relevance of these six ambitions and to add a seventh ambition – a recovery.

Well, in order to address H2, i.e. to assess whether these six new ambitions effectively and efficiently remain unchanged regardless of the COVID19 (H2), one needs to holistically analyse legislative endeavours of the European Commission between December, 2019 (taking office) and March, 2021 (the most recent date from which updated data is available). The relevancy and correctness of the data is assured by the use of the European Commission’s own progress report, i.e. State of play 2021. The processing is made reader-friendly thanks to the visualization via comparative tables, see Table 2.

Table 2 Current six ambitions from Political Guidelines 2019-2024 and their legislative materialization

| | Proposals submitted, legislation adopted | Proposal submitted, not yet adopted | Proposals submitted and withdrawn | Proposals to be submitted | Total |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------|
| A1 A European Green Deal | 8 | 19 | 4 | 56 | 87 |
| A2 An economy that works for people | 15 | 32 | 0 | 30 | 77 |
| A3 A Europe fit for the digital age | 0 | 34 | 2 | 35 | 71 |
| A4 Protecting our European way of life; | 3 | 29 | 1 | 35 | 68 |
| A5 A stronger Europe in the world | 13 | 23 | 0 | 13 | 49 |
| A6 A new push for European democracy | 4 | 12 | 1 | 28 | 45 |
| Total | 43 | 149 | 8 | 197 | 397 |

Source: Author's own processing based on information from Internet site of the European Commission (European Commission, 2021a)

Effective means being successful, achieving set results aka plainly doing right things. Well, titles of all six ambitions are basically in compliance with the TEU, TFEU and Charter. Indeed, they represent commonly accepted desires and certainly respecting three pillars of sustainability (economic, environment and social), three old priorities (smart, sustainable and inclusive growth) and ultimately being green - economy people-digital – value – leadership – democratic oriented gains approval by the large majority of Europeans. However, these ambitions might be partially contradictory aspirations. Especially in the context of COVID-19 and the 7th ambition about the recovery, there arose the inevitable financial concern. Each and every one of the six ambitions is financially demanding, at least in both the short and mid-term. Nevertheless, the European Commission firmly has been proclaiming that these priorities and ambitions are synergetic and that COVID-19 is an opportunity to achieve (all of) them in an even more pro-active and faster manner. Well, whether these six ambitions are correctly set will be clear only in future years. However, already right now, in the 2nd and 3rd year of the Political Guidelines 2019-2024, we can detect whether these set ambitions are progressing towards delivery, i.e. are materialized by a successful and well-balanced adoption of matching legislation. As shown in Table 2, 200 out of the total of 397 legislative measures were proposed. It is difficult to measure this because COVID-19 has influenced the legislative process in the EU in 2020 and 2021 and, despite the European Commission's rhetoric, in this sense COVID-19 was not a good opportunity, i.e. COVID-19 clearly impaired the legislative process in both 2020 and 2021. Even more importantly, the success rate, aka ratio, and the total number of the adopted legislative measures differs dramatically between these six ambitions. While A2 An economy that works for people and A5 A stronger Europe in the world look very positive (15 and 13), A1 A European Green Deal and A new push for European democracy (8 and 4) both remain behind expectations. Even more disappointing are the results of A4 Protecting our European way of life and especially of A3 A Europe fir for the digital age (3 and 0). Here, we need to pause. It cannot be overemphasized that, from December, 2019 until March, 2021 no one singe legislative act to support modern IS/IT on the EU level was adopted. The European Commission has presented 36 propositions and two of them failed while the remaining 34 are on hold. H2 states that these six new ambitions effectively remain unchanged, regardless of COVID-19, but obviously the success of the perhaps most strategic and pro-competitive oriented ambition does not take place. The European Commission sets goals regarding the Digital future, speaks about the European strategy for data and European data governance along with the EU digital services act package ... but neither Regulations nor Directives were adopted during the period of almost 1.5 years. It can be argued that this effectiveness deficit cannot be offset by good results regarding spending money to (allegedly) support the economy (A2) and to (allegedly) lead to the global leadership (A5). Further, the failure of the effectiveness is sealed by in depth analysis of the content of these six ambitions, see e.g. A4 Protecting our European way of life and its subchapters, Rule of law and Immigration and the perception whether they are good (or not) by France and Germany v. Poland and Hungary.

Efficient means being well-organized, competent and coherent, i.e. achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted efforts or expense, aka doing things rightly. Regardless of whether these six ambitions are correctly selected and successfully materialized and delivered, their processing can be done rightly or wrongly. So, the question is, whether the EU, especially the European Commission, does a good job pushing proposals through the EU legislative system. Here again, the visualisation by Table 2 speaks for itself. While for the assessment of the effectiveness, the most relevant was the first column “Proposals submitted, legislation adopted”, for the efficiency assessment the most relevant are the second column “Proposal submitted, not yet adopted”, the third column “Proposals submitted and withdrawn and the fourth column “Proposals to be submitted.” Namely, the European Commission itself decided that 397 proposals are to be materialized in order to achieve the six ambitions. Regardless of whether these six ambitions are good, realistic and feasible (especially due to COVID-19), their efficient processing means that, during 2019-2024, they ALL will be submitted and almost all of them will be adopted. Considering the length of the EU legislative process (proposal submission, first reading in Parliament, first reading in Council, second reading in Parliament, second reading in Council, Conciliation, third reading in Parliament and Council), which on the average takes 2-3 years, by 2022 ALL proposals should have been submitted. However, in the Spring of 2021, only one half was submitted, i.e. 200 of 397. Even worse, out of these 200 submitted eight already have totally failed and the European Commission was forced to recognize the failure and withdraw them. For the President of the European Commission, it must be particularly painful that one half of these failures concern her favourite flagship, A1 A European Green Deal. Right now, we do not know and can only speculate about how many of the 149 submitted proposals will be adopted, because the mentioned length of the EU legislative process, i.e. the expected 2-3 year period has not yet expired. So theoretically, the efficiency can be achieved for these 149. At the same time, there emerges a burning question – what about the remaining 197. Why has the European Commission not already finalized these propositions and submitted them? Either they are wrong and so this further supports the suggested ineffectiveness, or they are good but they are not (yet) properly pushed through the process and this is definitely inefficient. Perhaps even worse is the fact that the biggest delay is regarding A1 A European Green Deal (56 proposals to be submitted v. only 31 submitted) and A6 A new push for European democracy (28 to be submitted v. only 17 submitted), so again the flagship of the European Commission – A European Green Deal – is slowing down and taking on the features of the Titanic. Meanwhile, the eternal ongoing proclamation about the EU leadership is merely wishful thinking. In this context, the H2 must be rejected, because these six new ambitions are probably not effective, and certainly not efficient, i.e. the European Commission’s will to push them, unchanged, further, regardless of COVID-19 leads to the ineffectiveness and inefficiency.

V. Conclusion

The pathway to A sustainable and competitive EU should be the pathway for travellers or pilgrims and not FOR wanderers or tramps. Good goals should be set and a proper journey to them should be followed, i.e. THE EU should effectively and efficiently set its policies based on consistent priorities and legitimate ways. This is true during the sunny days of abundance but even more so during the rainy days of crises. In the aftermath of the 2007-2009 crises, the Barosso European Commission formulated in 2010 the Europe 2020 Strategy with three priorities – smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Just before the dawn of a new crisis, COVID-19, the von der Leyen European Commission set in 2019 the Political Guidelines 2019-2024 with six ambitions.

The first hypothesis, that these six new priorities (ambitions) continue with the three previous priorities cannot be, en block, confirmed or rejected. Instead a more nuanced assessment leads to three-fold answers. The first priority, smart growth, has been organically transformed in the third ambition (A Europe fir for the digital age). The second priority, sustainable growth, was dramatically expanded, i.e. followed by the first ambition and unrealistically diluted by the fourth ambition (Protecting our European way of life) and fifth ambition (A stronger Europe in the world). The third

priority, inclusive growth, was unrealistic shifted to second ambition (An economy that works for people) and fifth ambition (A stronger Europe in the world).

The second hypothesis, that these six new ambitions remain effectively and efficiently remain unchanged regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, is to be rejected based on data provided by the European Commission itself, see State of play 2021. This rejection is partially complete, regarding effectiveness, and complete regarding efficiency. As well, quite grim conclusions are extended to two ambitions which are (or at least should) be at the very heart of the European Commission – the first ambition (A European Green Deal) and the third ambition (A Europe fit for digital age). Clearly, the policies and priorities of the EU need to be reconsidered and re-adjusted to increase their effectiveness, efficiency and (especially) legitimacy. Regardless whether six, ten or twenty or more priorities, we want to see a sustainable and competitive EU ... similar to Pippi Longstocking, seventy years ago.

2 x 3 macht 4 - Widdewiddewitt und 3 macht 9e! Ich mach ' mir die Welt - widdewidde wie sie mir gefällt ...Hey - Pippi Langstrumpf hollahi-hollaho-holla-hopsasa

2 times 3 make 4 - Widdewiddewitt and three makes nine - I see the world- Widdewidde the way I want to - Hey Pippi Longstocking - trallari trallahey tralla whoopsie

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