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The EU Political Framework for SDGs 2030 and its Implications to Greece in Political CSR and Development Activities¹

Evangelos Taliouris² & Nikolaos Trihas³

Abstract

Business innovation, job creation, environmental sustainability and good governance are fundamental issues for sustainable development (SD) in European Union (EU). SD and policy making in EU is vital for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fulfillment by 2030, especially if we take into account the asymmetries and the need of cohesion among member states including Greece. The lack of cohesion and the asymmetries indicate the necessity of a horizontal harmonization. Despite the fact that is not a policy topic such as defense or foreign policy which are quite high at national policy agendas, it is a topic that can bring member states together and increase cohesion, according to nonfunctional perspectives. Moreover, the fact that SDGs are based on 17 Goals and numerous indicators provides a significant opportunity for hybrid policy instruments and realms that associated with poverty, good governance and corporate citizenship. What is also interesting is that EU has a policy plan since 2016 as well member states and regions. The aim of this paper is to further examine the European policy framework for SDGs 2030 with a special reference to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policy making process in Greece. In particular, this paper has a special emphasis on sectors such as tourism, in order to seek the relationship between CSR and SD in policy planning by 2030 (e.g. European Regional Development Fund). Tourism as a policy field is based on a twofold analysis from state initiatives towards development (protocols, infrastructures, regulations) and private sector responsible entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is an interesting field of political analysis because it tests the state's adaptation in international challenges (e.g. climate change, unemployment, poverty, COVID-19), whilst at the same time is linked with business sector activities and development planning.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; Sustainable Development Goals 2030; Corporate Social Responsibility; Governance; Tourism Policy; European Union; Greece.

Introduction

Sustainable Development (SD) is an interdisciplinary policy field for international affairs, with particular implications for governance issues in countries and regions. The definition of SD in 1987 in the Buntlant Report "Our Common Future" (WCED, 1987) was an important step in order a framework to be set in this political discourse. In 2000, the formulation of the eight (8) Millennium Development Goals was a universal measurable attempt to deal with poverty and SD challenges, and

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within this context, United Nations (UN) in 2015 set the framework for SD Agenda 2030 in parallel with seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2015). In 2016, the European Union (EU) set the policy framework and suggestions for SDGs 2030 (EC, 2016), while the Member States (MS) are responsible for their SD national strategy (for instance Greece published it in July 2018).

Different approaches for SD exist in academic literature, practice and international politics (e.g. strong or weak sustainability) (Castro, 2004, Baker et al., 2005), especially in policy topics such as climate change or business and economy adaptation to sustainability (e.g. rules for environmental design). The institutional setting and the administration has a crucial role also to play in to the viability of SD policy, whilst the USA example for climate change adaptation is interesting. EU has a long-term tradition in policies regarding SD and environment, despite the fact that is not as institutionally homogenous as USA. In Paris in 1972, the Council for Environmental Policies met and EU set the framework for policy harmonization of domestic environmental regulation with international circumstances as well as local institutional features at member states level (Doussis, 2016). The connection of environmental standards through directives with other policy topics such as industry, infrastructures, rural sector in 90s and 21st century, was a significant step. Hence, the environmental policy and its harmonization with regional development and its adaptation in production line and development sectors (e.g. industry, tourism etc.) is not a linear process because of member states' different development characteristics and institutional traditions. However, EU is characterized as a “model of environmental governance at the regional level” (Doussis, 2016: 401).

In this context, this paper aims to analyze the EU policy framework for SDGs 2030 and its implications to member states like Greece in policy tools and topics. Moreover, this paper will elaborate the political dimension of responsible entrepreneurship as a policy field with a reference to SDGs and in association with development activities (e.g. tourism). Summing up, this paper will analyze the process of an international policy to European and national policy measures, via literature review, archive research (e.g. national documents) and evidence based policy analysis.

EU policy for responsible entrepreneurship and SDGs 2030

EU harmonization with international standards and policies for SD was under the Summits (Rio, Johannesburg), which then turn into strategies and directions that linked global with regional and local over time. One of the main challenges during these processes was both the member states political capability to develop such policy measures domestically and at the same time to be attached to development activities, such as infrastructure, education and entrepreneurship (responsible

entrepreneurship). The latter was essential for European business sector not only for the number of its operational fields (e.g. industry, transport, tourism, etc.), but also for its share to employment and economic growth. Since 2001 and 2003, the concept of responsible entrepreneurship indicated the European political approach for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and its linkage with SD (Taliouris, 2018, 2019; Taliouris & Trihas, 2017).

More specifically, the SD Strategy for 2001 (Commission of the European Communities, 2001b), the Green Paper of 2001 (Commission of the European Communities, 2001a) and the Commission's position in 2002 (Commission of the European Communities, 2002) underline that CSR and responsible entrepreneurship is not a solely business case but a political too, that member states have the opportunity and responsibility to respond politically and set up institutions and policy measures. In 2009, the EU revised SD Strategy, as well as the political content of CSR, which further enriched politically via the Europe 2020 Strategy and the revised CSR Strategy 2011-2014 (Commission of the European Communities, 2010, 2011). The latter was essential because defines up till now the political CSR perspective in EU and explains the business contribution to SDGs 2030 fulfillment in EU SD Strategy in 2016 (Commission of the European Communities, 2016).

The business sector responsibility and conduct to SDGs 2030 is an important step towards the Sustainable Development Agenda, not only internationally but in EU too. This fact is justifiable because European business sector has a significant responsibility due to its share and impact in international transactions and trade. EU in the official document "Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030" (Commission of the European Communities, 2016) stresses the importance of business sector in sustainability issues via the form of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the practices of responsible entrepreneurship at chapter "3.2.3 Responsible business conduct, corporate social responsibility and new business models" (p. 26-27) (EC, 2003). The European CSR and responsible entrepreneurship approach focuses on topics such as sustainable international supply chains, linkages with social economy, sustainable consumption etc. As mentioned above, political CSR perspective exists in EU since 90s, via an implicit and silent CSR way both in business practices and policy making (e.g. environmental and labor legislation) (Taliouris, 2018, 2019). Hence, the fact that CSR is linked explicitly with SDGs 2030 is nothing but the continuation of an existing political process, which became more explicit in 2001 by the first European definition for CSR.

In 2007, the programs "Small, Clean and Competitive" and "Opportunity and Responsibility" were introduced (Commission of the European Communities, 2007; EC, 2007b), which focused on CSR practices and policy making for SMEs. In 2007, 2011 and 2014, CSR became a policy topic in EU (EC, 2007a, 2011, 2014), that concluded in the National Public Policies reports. The main CSR policy

instruments and topics are presented in these EU reports incorporated also its member states practices, while SMEs are a unique CSR policy topic. This is plausible because SMEs are the backbone of EU development sectors, they contribute significantly to domestic production line and they hold a significant position in supply chain at international and domestic level. Hence, SMEs special characteristics towards CSR and sustainable development are significant and they were also mentioned in EU renewed CSR Strategy 2011-2014 and in the “Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030” policy document (Commission of the European Communities, 2011, 2016). In conclusion, the link of CSR policies and SDGs 2030 with the use of Structural Funds (European Investment Bank, European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund) was useful in 2014-2020 programming period (e.g. social inclusion- 9iv, vocational training- 8v-8iii, entrepreneurship- 3a-3c), the new programming period 2021-2027 and Smart Specialization Strategies at regional level in Europe.

The CSR policy in Greece and the political discourse for tourism development

The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2015, 2017) has linked tourism activities with the implementation of SDGs 2030 and in particular with SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 12 (sustainable production and consumption), and SDG 14 (life below water). In parallel, the EU targeting (EC, 2016) had set an overall target of 20% and 25% of public expenditures related to climate change adaptation, during programming periods 2014-2020 and 2021-2027. At the same time, Commission proposed to double financial resources for social pillar and sustainable infrastructure, due to the fact that SD public spend funding must go hand in hand with the gradual decline for unsustainable environmental infrastructure. Consequently, the new programming period 2021-2027 correlation with 17 SDGs is useful, especially with responsible entrepreneurship actions in sectors such as tourism. This is also reflected in the European Green Deal (Commission of the European Communities, 2019), both in the field of non-financial reporting and in sectors such as industry, transport and services that related with tourism sector.

Tourism is a vital sector for the Greek economy, as in 2019 it contributed 20.8% of the country's GDP, generated revenue of 17.7 billion Euros, as well as 946,200 jobs (21.7% of total employment) (SETE, 2020). On the other hand, Greek tourism is characterized by development asymmetries because of the overconcentration of tourism development in few regions (mainly island or coastal) as well as the one-dimensional model of mass tourism. Unfortunately, these characteristics conclude to tourism sector seasonality, its vulnerability to crises (e.g. COVID-19, economic downturn), its weak infrastructures especially in islands and coastal areas. Moreover, the high dependence on tour

operators, the continuous decrease of average tourist consumption and the illegal constructions underline an unsustainable investment environment both economically and environmentally. Therefore, these weaknesses jeopardize the political will for a sustainable tourism development, which has been declared by Ministry of Tourism in recent years⁴. Natural capital is the basis on which the tourism as a sector must be based on and related with public policy planning and entrepreneurship that combines elements of sustainability and CSR in tourism destination management, climate change infrastructures, rural tourism, etc.

Conclusions

European Union since its foundation has been based on common policies in a number of fields such as the economy, trade, etc. A basic assumption, however, is that political cohesion is not simple and linear as a process. In particular, CSR and responsible entrepreneurship are policy fields that many debates among states and non-state actors lasted since 2000 (e.g. non-financial reporting Directive was completed in 2014). Moreover, there are different policy tools and approaches to CSR, which affects other policy areas and tourism as well. The Commission has issued CSR policy reports (“National Public Policies for CSR”) in 2007, 2011 and 2014. From literature review process, these policy models for CSR (Albareda, Lozano, & Ysa, 2007; Albareda et al., 2009; Letica, 2010; Taliouris, 2018) are elaborated further and grouped in geographical terms (Nordic, Rhineland, Anglo-Saxon etc.) and institutional traditions for CSR (Greece is part of the Mediterranean “Agora Model” together with member states such as Italy, Spain and Portugal).

The European policy framework for CSR in relation to SDGs 2030, is important to be linked from one hand with business innovation but also to analyze in depth the postmodern governance issues regarding the role of the state. Stakeholders’ synergies and good governance are mentioned in SDG 17. The traditional role of states has been changed in that globalization terms from international institutions but also non-state actors. Hence, the achievement of SDGs 2030 is not an easy policy task for member states like Greece, while tourism sector potentials are being questioned if we take into account the risks and the challenges that must be addressed. The tourism overconcentration in specific regions, the issue of insularity, the absence of sustainable infrastructures in parallel with the tourism impact in national economy and employment growth indicate responsible entrepreneurship in that development sector as a challenge for sustainable development policy design and implementation.

⁴ Tourism National Development Strategy 2014-2020; National Strategy 2021-2030 in 2019; CSR National Strategy in 2017; National Strategy for SD Agenda 2030 in 2018.

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