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K-QUASICONVEXITY REDUCES TO QUASICONVEXITY

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Abstract. The relation between quasiconvexity and $k$-quasiconvexity, $k \geq 2$, is investigated. It is shown that every smooth strictly $k$-quasiconvex integrand with $p$-growth at infinity, $p > 1$, is the restriction to $k$-th order symmetric tensors of a quasiconvex function with the same growth. When the smoothness condition is dropped, it is possible to prove an approximation result. As a consequence, lower semicontinuity results for $k$-th order variational problems are deduced as corollaries of well-known first order theorems. This generalizes a previous work by Dal Maso, Fonseca, Leoni and Morini, in which the case $k = 2$ was treated.

Keywords: quasiconvexity, higher order variational problems.

1. Introduction

We consider higher order variational problems, in which the energy functional has the expression

$$u \mapsto -\int_{\Omega} f(x, u, \nabla u, \ldots, \nabla^k u) \, dx,$$

where $\Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^N$ is open and bounded, $N, k \geq 2$ are integer, and $f$ is a scalar function satisfying suitable growth conditions. Although our treatment can be extended to the vectorial case, to keep the formulation as simple as possible we will treat the case of scalar functions $u : \Omega \to \mathbb{R}$.

Functionals of this type appear in the study of elastic materials of grade $k$ (see [23]), in the theory of second order structured deformations (see [21]), in the Blake-Zisserman model for image segmentation in computer vision (see [5]), in gradient theories of phase transitions within elasticity regimes (see [7], [15], [20]), and in the description of equilibria of micromagnetic materials (see [9], [6], [20], [22]). In order to study lower semicontinuity of functionals of this type, Meyers introduced in [18] the notion of $k$-quasiconvexity (see also [3] and [13]), extending the definition of quasiconvexity given by Morrey in [19].

Let $E_k \subset \mathbb{R}^{N \times \ldots \times N} = \mathbb{R}^{N \times \ldots \times N}$ be the set of $k$-th order tensors of $\mathbb{R}^N$ that are symmetric with respect to all permutations of indices. In particular, $E_2$ coincides with the set of the symmetric $N \times N$ matrices. A function $f \in L^1_{loc}(E_k)$ is said to be $k$-quasiconvex if

$$\int_Q [f(A + \nabla^k \phi) - f(A)] \, dx \geq 0$$

for every $A \in E_k$ and every $\phi \in C^k_c(Q)$, where $Q = (0,1)^N$ is the open unit cube in $\mathbb{R}^N$, and $C^k_c(Q)$ is the set of functions of class $C^k$ with compact support in $Q$. We recall that a function $F \in L^1_{loc}(\mathbb{R}^{N^k})$ is said to be 1-quasiconvex (or simply quasiconvex) if

$$\int_Q [F(A + \nabla \varphi) - F(A)] \, dx \geq 0$$

for every $A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k}$ and every $\varphi \in C^1_c(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^k-1})$. In [18], the author proved that $k$-quasiconvexity is a necessary and sufficient condition for sequential lower semicontinuity of (1.1) with respect to weak convergence in the Sobolev space $W^{k,p}(\Omega)$, under appropriate $p$-growth and continuity conditions on the integrand $f$. This result has been later extended to the case where $f$ is a Carathéodory integrand by Fusco (see [13]) and by Guidorzi and Poggiolini (see [14]), for $p = 1$ and $p > 1$ respectively.
The aim of this paper is to investigate the relation between $k$-quasiconvexity and quasiconvexity. When $k = 2$ this problem has been studied by Dal Maso, Fonseca, Leoni and Morini. In [8], they prove that every strictly 2-quasiconvex function (see condition (a) below) of class $C^1$, whose gradient is locally Lipschitz continuous, is the restriction to symmetric matrices of a 1-quasiconvex function. We extend here this result to the case $k > 2$.

**Theorem 1.1.** Let $k \in \mathbb{N}$, $k \geq 2$. Let $f \in C^1(E_k)$, and let $1 < p < \infty$, $\mu \geq 0$, $L > 0$, $\nu > 0$. Assume that

(a) (strict $k$-quasiconvexity)

$$
\int_Q [f(A + \nabla^k \phi) - f(A)] \, dx \geq \nu \int_Q (\mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^k \phi|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^k \phi|^2 \, dx
$$

for every $A \in E_k$ and every $\phi \in C^k_c(Q)$;

(b) (Lipschitz condition for gradients)

$$
|\nabla f(A + B) - \nabla f(A)| \leq L (\mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |B|
$$

(1.2)

for every $A, B \in E_k$.

Then there exists a 1-quasiconvex function $F : \mathbb{R}^{n^k} \to \mathbb{R}$ such that

$$
F(A) = f(A), \quad \forall A \in E_k,
$$

(1.3)

$$
|F(A)| \leq c_f (1 + |A|^p), \quad \forall A \in \mathbb{R}^{n^k},
$$

(1.4)

for a suitable constant $c_f$ depending on $f$.

Notice that the above conditions (a) and (b) together imply $L \geq \nu$ (see Proposition 2.8). When $p \geq 2$, we also give an explicit expression for the function $F$ (see formula (3.9)). The proof of Theorem 1.1 (see Section 3) is obtained by iterating $k - 1$ times a refined version of [8, Theorem 1] (see Lemma 3.1 for the case $1 < p < 2$ and Lemma 3.2 for the case $p \geq 2$).

It is not clear whether Theorem 1.1 still holds true by weakening condition (1.2). However, if we substitute (1.2) with the milder (see Proposition 2.9) condition (1.5), we obtain an approximation result for the function $f$. More precisely, we show that a strictly $k$-quasiconvex function with $p$-growth at infinity can be obtained as pointwise limit of a sequence of 1-quasiconvex functions with the same growth (see [8, Theorem 2] for the case $k = 2$).

**Theorem 1.2.** Let $k \in \mathbb{N}$, $k \geq 2$. Let $1 < p < \infty$, $\mu \geq 0$, $\nu > 0$, $M > 0$, and let $f : E_k \to \mathbb{R}$ be a measurable function such that

(a) (strict $k$-quasiconvexity)

$$
\int_Q [f(A + \nabla^k \phi) - f(A)] \, dx \geq \nu \int_Q (\mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^k \phi|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^k \phi|^2 \, dx
$$

for every $A \in E_k$ and every $\phi \in C^k_c(Q)$;

(b) ($p$-growth condition)

$$
|f(A)| \leq M (1 + |A|^p)
$$

(1.5)

for every $A \in E_k$.

Then there exists an increasing sequence $\{F_i\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}}$ of 1-quasiconvex functions $F_i : \mathbb{R}^{n^k} \to \mathbb{R}$, such that

$$
\lim_{i \to +\infty} F_i(A) = f(A), \quad \forall A \in E_k,
$$

(1.6)

$$
|F_i(A)| \leq M_i (1 + |A|^p), \quad \forall A \in \mathbb{R}^{n^k}, \quad \forall i \in \mathbb{N},
$$

(1.7)

where $\{M_i\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}}$ is a sequence of positive constants depending only on $i$ and on the constants $p, \mu, \nu, M$, but not on the specific function $f$. 

To show this, we use the property that every \( k \)-quasiconvex function with \( p \)-growth is locally Lipschitz. We give here a proof of this fact (see Proposition 2.7), that was already known in the cases \( k = 1 \) (see [17]) and \( k = 2 \) (see [14]). Thanks to Theorem 1.2, the study of lower semicontinuity of (1.1) reduces to a first order problem. Thus, when \( f \) is a \( k \)-quasiconvex normal integrand (see assumption (a) below) we can prove the following result (see [8, Theorem 3] for the case \( k = 2 \)). Here we use the notation

\[
E_k := \mathbb{R}^N, \quad E_{[k-1]} := \mathbb{R} \times E_1 \times \ldots \times E_{k-1},
\]

and

\[
SBH^{(k)}(\Omega) := \{ u \in W^{k-1,1}(\Omega) : \nabla^{k-1}u \in SBV(\Omega; E_{k-1}) \}.
\]

**Theorem 1.3.** Let \( k \in \mathbb{N}, k \geq 2 \). Let \( \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^N \) be a bounded open set and let

\[
f : \Omega \times E_{[k-1]} \times E_k \to [0, +\infty)
\]

be a measurable function such that:

(a) \( f(x, \cdot, \cdot) \) is lower semicontinuous on \( E_{[k-1]} \times E_k \) for \( \mathcal{L}^N \)-a.e. \( x \in \Omega \);

(b) \( f(x, \cdot, \cdot) \) is \( k \)-quasiconvex on \( E_1 \) for \( \mathcal{L}^N \)-a.e. \( x \in \Omega \) and every \( v \in E_{[k-1]} \);

(c) there exist a locally bounded function \( a : \Omega \times E_{[k-1]} \to [0, +\infty) \) and a constant \( p > 1 \) such that

\[
0 \leq f(x, v, A) \leq a(x, v)(1 + |A|^p)
\]

for \( \mathcal{L}^N \)-a.e. \( x \in \Omega \) and every \( (v, A) \in E_{[k-1]} \times E_k \).

Then

\[
\int_{\Omega} f(x, u, \nabla u, \ldots, \nabla^k u) \, dx \leq \liminf_{j \to +\infty} \int_{\Omega} f(x, u_j, \nabla u_j, \ldots, \nabla^k u_j) \, dx
\]

for every \( u \in SBH^{(k)}(\Omega) \) and any sequence \( \{u_j\} \subset SBH^{(k)}(\Omega) \) converging to \( u \) in \( W^{k-1,1}(\Omega) \) and such that

\[
\sup_j \left( \|\nabla^k u_j\|_{L^p(\Omega)} + \int_{S(\nabla^k u_j)} \theta(||\nabla^{k-1} u_j||) \, d\mathcal{H}^{N-1} \right) < +\infty,
\]

where \( \theta : [0, +\infty) \to [0, +\infty) \) is a concave, nondecreasing function such that

\[
\lim_{t \to +\infty} \frac{\theta(t)}{t} = +\infty,
\]

\( \nabla^k u \) is the density of the absolutely continuous part of \( D(\nabla^{k-1} u) \) with respect to the \( N \)-dimensional Lebesgue measure, and \( [\nabla^{k-1}u_j]\) denotes the jump of \( \nabla^{k-1} u_j \) on the jump set \( S(\nabla^{k-1} u_j) \).

This extends to the \( k \)-th order setting a lower semicontinuity property of \( 1 \)-quasiconvex functions in \( SBV(\Omega; \mathbb{R}^d) \) due to Ambrosio (see [2]) and later generalized by Kristensen (see [16]), and a lower semicontinuity theorem for \( 2 \)-quasiconvex integrands in \( SBV(\Omega; \mathbb{R}^d) \) proven by Dal Maso, Fonseca, Leoni and Morini (see [8]). As a corollary, we recover [14, Theorem 7.1].

**Corollary 1.4.** Let \( \Omega, f, k \) and \( p \) be as in Theorem 1.3. Then

\[
\int_{\Omega} f(x, u, \nabla u, \ldots, \nabla^k u) \, dx \leq \liminf_{j \to +\infty} \int_{\Omega} f(x, u_j, \nabla u_j, \ldots, \nabla^k u_j) \, dx
\]

for every \( u \in W^{k,p}(\Omega) \) and any sequence \( \{u_j\} \subset W^{k,p}(\Omega) \) weakly converging to \( u \) in \( W^{k,p}(\Omega) \).

We remark that in [14] Guidorzi and Poggiolini require the function \( f \) to be locally Lipschitz continuous with respect to the last variable. As already mentioned, we do not need this hypothesis, since we prove here that this is a direct consequence of \( k \)-quasiconvexity and \( p \)-growth.

Finally, we mention that it remains still an open problem to prove the analogue of Theorem 1.3 for the case \( p = 1 \), even when \( k = 2 \), unless very special functions \( f \) are considered (see [11]). This will probably require new and original ideas. Indeed, we think that for \( p = 1 \) the fundamental Korn-type inequalities (see Lemma 2.13 and Lemma 2.14) used in the proofs of Theorem 1.1 and Theorem 1.2 fail, although we do not have any explicit counterexample.

The plan of the paper is as follows. In Section 2 we give the setting of the problem. Section 3 contains the proof of Theorem 1.1, while Theorem 1.2 and Theorem 1.3 are proved in Section...
2. Setting

Throughout the paper \( N \) and \( k \) are fixed integer numbers, with \( N, k \geq 2 \). For this reason, we will often omit to indicate the explicit dependence on \( N \) and \( k \). Also, \( \Omega \subset \mathbb{R}^N \) is an open bounded set, and \( Q = (0,1)^N \) denotes the open unit cube of \( \mathbb{R}^N \). Since \( N \) and \( k \) are fixed,

**Definition 2.1.** Let \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \). We say that \( A \) is a \( k \)-th order tensor in \( \mathbb{R}^N \).

The components of a tensor \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \) will be denoted with the symbols

\[
A_{i_1...i_k} \quad i_1, \ldots, i_k = 1, \ldots, N.
\]

Moreover, the scalar product of two tensors \( A, B \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \) is given by

\[
A \cdot B := \sum_{i_1, \ldots, i_k=1}^N A_{i_1...i_k} B_{i_1...i_k}.
\]

Accordingly, the norm of a \( k \)-th order tensor \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \) is

\[
|A| := \left[ \sum_{i_1, \ldots, i_k=1}^N |A_{i_1...i_k}|^2 \right]^{\frac{1}{2}}.
\]

Let now \( s \in \{1, \ldots, k-1\} \) be fixed. For any \( \zeta \in C^s(Q;\mathbb{R}^{N_{k-s}}) \), we can regard the \( s \)-th order gradient \( \nabla^s \zeta \) of \( \zeta \) as a \( k \)-th order tensor in \( \mathbb{R}^N \), by setting

\[
(\nabla^s \zeta)_{i_1...i_k} := \frac{\partial^s \zeta_{i_1...i_k}}{\partial x_{i_{s+1}} \cdots \partial x_{i_k}} \quad i_1, \ldots, i_k = 1, \ldots, N.
\]

Notice also that \( \nabla^s \zeta \) is symmetric with respect to every permutation of the last \( s \) indices. To take account of this property, we introduce some additional notation.

**Definition 2.2.** Let \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \) be a \( k \)-th order tensor in \( \mathbb{R}^N \), and let \( j, r \in \{1, \ldots, k\} \). The \((j, r)\)-transpose of \( A \) is the element \( A^{T_j T_r} \) of \( \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \) such that (assuming, for instance, \( j \leq r \))

\[
(A^{T_j T_r})_{i_1...i_k} = A_{i_1...i_{j-1}r+1,i_{j+1}...i_{r-1}i_{r+1}...i_k} \quad i_1, \ldots, i_k = 1, \ldots, N.
\]

We then set

\[
E_k^{N_{k-s}} := \{ A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k} : A = A^{T_j T_r} \text{ for every } r, j = k-s+1, \ldots, k \}.
\]

In particular, we will make the identification \( E_k^{N_{k-1}} = \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \). In this way, for every \( \zeta \in C^s(Q;\mathbb{R}^{N_{k-s}}) \) we have

\[
\nabla^s \zeta \in E_k^{N_{k-s}}.
\]

To include the case \( s = k \), we define

\[
E_k^1 := \{ A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k} : A = A^{T_j} \text{ for every } r, j = 1, \ldots, k \}.
\]

Very often we will simply write \( E_k \) instead of \( E_k^1 \). Hence, we have that

\[
\nabla^k \phi \in E_k
\]

for every \( \phi \in C^k(Q) \), using the notation

\[
(\nabla^k \phi)_{i_1...i_k} := \frac{\partial^k \phi}{\partial x_{i_1} \cdots \partial x_{i_k}} \quad i_1, \ldots, i_k = 1, \ldots, N.
\]

We are now going to define the symmetric part of an element of \( E_k^{N_{k-s}} \).
We will say that $S$ is the symmetric part of $A$.

The subscript $s + 1$ denotes the fact that the tensor $S_{s+1}$ is symmetric in the last $s + 1$ entries.

Definition 2.4. Accordingly, we define the antisymmetric part of a tensor $A \in E_{s}^{N^{k-s}}$ as the tensor $A_{s+1} \in E_{s}^{N^{k-s}}$ given by

$$A_{s+1} := A - S_{s+1}A = \frac{sA - (A_{s}^{k-1} + \cdots + A_{k}^{1})}{s + 1},$$

We will use the notation

$$A_{s+1}E_{s}^{N^{k-s}} := \{A_{s+1} : A \in E_{s}^{N^{k-s}}\} \subset E_{s}^{N^{k-s}}.$$

Next proposition generalizes the well-known fact that symmetric and antisymmetric matrices define orthogonal spaces. For the convenience of the reader, the proof is in the Appendix.

Proposition 2.5. There holds

$$A \cdot B = 0$$

for every $A \in E_{s}^{N^{k-s}}$ and for every $B \in A_{s+1}E_{s}^{N^{k-s}}$.

We give now the definition of (higher order) quasiconvexity.

Definition 2.6. Let $j \in \{1, \ldots, k\}$. A function $f \in L^{1}_{\text{loc}}(E_{s}^{N^{k-j}})$ is said to be $j$-quasiconvex if

$$\int_{Q} [f(A + \nabla j \phi) - f(A)] \, dx \geq 0$$

for every $A \in E_{s}^{N^{k-j}}$ and for every $\phi \in C^{1}_{c}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}})$.

It is very well-known that every convex function is locally Lipschitz. This property still holds true for $j$-quasiconvex functions with $p$-growth. We give here a proof of this fact, that is in general explicitly stated only for the case $j = 2$ (see [14]).

Proposition 2.7. Let $j \in \{2, \ldots, k\}$, and let $f \in L^{1}_{\text{loc}}(E_{s}^{N^{k-j}})$ be $j$-quasiconvex. Assume, in addition, that

$$|f(A)| \leq M(1 + |A|^{p})$$

for every $A \in E_{s}^{N^{k-j}}$, (2.1)

for some $M > 0$ and $1 < p < \infty$. Then, there exists a constant $L = L(N, M, k, j, p) > 0$ such that

$$|f(A + B) - f(A)| \leq L \left(1 + |A|^{p-1} + |B|^{p-1}\right)|B|$$

for every $A, B \in E_{s}^{N^{k-j}}$.

Proof. Let us set

$$X := \{b \otimes \cdots \otimes w : b \in \mathbb{R}^{N_{k-j}}, w \in S^{N-1}\} \subset E_{s}^{N^{k-j}}, \quad m = m(N, k, j) := \dim E_{s}^{N^{k-j}}.$$ 

Here, for every $b \in \mathbb{R}^{N_{k-j}}$ and $w \in S^{N-1}$ the symbol $b \otimes \cdots \otimes w$ denotes the element of $\mathbb{R}^{N}$ such that

$$(b \otimes \cdots \otimes w)_{i_{1}, \ldots, i_{k}} = b_{i_{1} \ldots i_{k-j}}w_{i_{k-j+1}} \cdots w_{i_{k}}, \quad i_{1}, \ldots, i_{k} = 1, \ldots, N.$$

It can be proven that the orthogonal complement of $X$ in $E_{s}^{N^{k-j}}$ is zero, so that

$$\text{span } X = E_{s}^{N^{k-j}}.$$
Let now \{ω₁, ..., ωₘ\} ⊂ X be a (not necessarily orthonormal) basis for \(E_k^{N-1}\), with |ωᵢ| = 1 for \(i = 1, ..., m\), and let \(c₁, ..., cₘ \in \mathbb{R}\) be such that \(B = \sum_{i=1}^{m} cᵢωᵢ\). We have
\[
|f(A + B) - f(A)| = |f\left(A + \sum_{i=1}^{m} cᵢωᵢ\right) - f(A)| ≤ |f\left(A + \sum_{i=1}^{m} cᵢωᵢ\right) - f\left(A + \sum_{i=1}^{m-1} cᵢωᵢ\right)| + \cdots + |f(A + c₁ω₁) - f(A)|.
\]
It will be enough to prove that there exists \(C = C(N, M, k, j, p)\) such that for every \(l = 1, ..., m\)
\[
|f\left(cᵢωᵢ + A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ\right) - f\left(A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ\right)| = C(1 + |A|^{p-1} + |B|^{p-1})|B|,
\]
where we set \(c₀ := 0\) and \(ω₀ := 0\). Then, the conclusion will follow by defining \(L := mC\).

Thanks to [12, Proposition 3.4 and Example 3.10 (d)], for every \(R ∈ E_k^{N-1}\) and every \(ω ∈ X\) the function
\[
t → f(tω + R)
\]
is convex in \(\mathbb{R}\). Hence, defining \(G(t) := f\left(t cᵢωᵢ + A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ\right)\) and using (2.1), for every \(t ≥ 1\) we have
\[
|f\left(cᵢωᵢ + A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ\right) - f\left(A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ\right)| = G(1) - G(0) ≤ \frac{G(t) - G(0)}{t}
\]
\[
= \frac{t}{t} \left(2 + \left|cᵢωᵢ + A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ\right|^p + \left|A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ\right|^p\right)
\]
\[
≤ \frac{M}{t} \left(2 + 2^{p-1}t|cᵢ|^p + (2^{p-1} + 1)|A + \sum_{i=0}^{l-1} cᵢωᵢ|^p\right)
\]
\[
≤ \frac{M}{t} \left(2 + 2^{p-1}t|B|^p + 2^{p-1}(2^{p-1} + 1)|A|^p + 2^{p-1}(2^{p-1} + 1)m \frac{2}{3} |B|^p\right),
\]
where we set \(\|B\| := \left(\sum_{i=0}^{m} cᵢ^2\right)^{\frac{1}{2}}\).

Let us now choose
\[
t = \left(\frac{(|A|^{p-1} + \|B\|^{p-1})}{\|B\|}\right)^{\frac{1}{p-1}} ≥ 1.
\]
Noticing that
\[
t^{p-1}\|B\|^p = (|A|^{p-1} + \|B\|^{p-1})\|B\|, \quad \frac{|A|^p}{t} ≤ |A|^{p-1}\|B\|, \quad \frac{\|B\|^p}{t} ≤ \|B\|^p,
\]
and using the fact that \(\|\cdot\|\) and \(|\cdot|\) are equivalent norms, we obtain (2.2). \(\square\)

Next proposition shows that conditions (a) and (b) of Theorem 1.1 necessarily imply \(L ≥ ν\).

**Proposition 2.8.** Let \(f ∈ C¹(E_k)\) satisfy conditions (a) and (b) of Theorem 1.1 for some constants \(μ ≥ 0, L, ν > 0\) and \(1 < p < ∞\). Then \(L ≥ ν\).

**Proof.** Let \(A ∈ E_k, φ ∈ C₀^∞(Q)\), and let \(x ∈ Q\). By the Mean Value Theorem,
\[
f(A + ∇^kφ(x)) - f(A) = [∇f(A + t ∇^kφ(x)) - ∇f(A)] \cdot ∇^kφ(x) + ∇f(A) \cdot ∇^kφ(x),
\]
for some \( t \in [0,1] \). Integrating last equality, since \( \phi \in C^k_b(Q) \), we get
\[
\int_Q \left[ f(A + \nabla^k \phi(x)) - f(A) \right] dx = \int_Q \left[ \nabla f(A + t \nabla^k \phi(x)) - \nabla f(A) \right] \cdot \nabla^k \phi(x) dx.
\]
Hence, using property (b)
\[
\int_Q \left[ f(A + \nabla^k \phi(x)) - f(A) \right] dx \leq L \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + t^2 |\nabla^k \phi(x)|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} t |\nabla^k \phi(x)|^2 dx
\]
\[
\leq L \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^k \phi(x)|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^k \phi(x)|^2 dx,
\]
since the function \( t \mapsto (\mu^2 + |A|^2 + t^2 |\nabla^k \phi(x)|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} t |\nabla^k \phi(x)|^2 \) is increasing. Comparing last relation and condition (a) we conclude that \( L \geq \nu \). □

We prove now that condition (1.2) is stronger than (1.5).

**Proposition 2.9.** Let \( j \in \{2, \ldots, k\} \), let \( L > 0, \mu \geq 0, 1 < p < \infty \), and let \( f \in C^1(E_k^{N-k-j}) \) be such that
\[
|\nabla f(A + B) - \nabla f(A)| \leq L (\mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |B|
\]
for every \( A, B \in E_k^{N-k-j} \). Then, there exists a positive constant \( c_f \), depending on \( f \), such that
\[
|f(A)| \leq c_f (1 + |A|^p)
\]
\[
\forall A \in E_k^{N-k-j}.
\]

**Proof.** Let \( C \in E_k^{N-k-j} \setminus \{0\} \) be fixed. Then, by the Mean Value Theorem for every \( A \in E_k^{N-k-j} \) we have
\[
f(A) = f(C) + \left[ \nabla f(C + t(A - C)) - \nabla f(C) \right] \cdot (A - C) + \nabla f(C) \cdot (A - C),
\]
for some \( t \in [0,1] \). Thanks to (2.3)
\[
|f(A)| \leq |f(C)| + L (\mu^2 + |C|^2 + t^2 |A - C|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} t |A - C|^2 + |\nabla f(C)||A - C|
\]
\[
\leq |f(C)| + L (\mu^2 + |C|^2 + |A - C|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A - C|^2 + |\nabla f(C)||A - C|,
\]

since the function \( t \mapsto (\mu^2 + |C|^2 + t^2 |A - C|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} t |A - C|^2 \) is increasing. Concerning the last term, using Young’s inequality we have
\[
|\nabla f(C)||A - C| \leq \frac{|\nabla f(C)|^p r'}{p'} + \frac{|A - C|^p}{p'} \leq \frac{|\nabla f(C)|^p r'}{p'} + \frac{2^{p-1} p}{p'} (|A|^p + |C|^p),
\]
where \( p' = \frac{p}{p-1} \). Since the function \( r \mapsto (\mu^2 + |C|^2 + r)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} r \) is increasing in \( \mathbb{R} \), using inequality
\[
|A - C|^2 \leq 2|A|^2 + 2|C|^2,
\]
we have
\[
(\mu^2 + |C|^2 + |A - C|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A - C|^2 \leq 2 (\mu^2 + 3|C|^2 + 2|A|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} (|A|^2 + |C|^2)
\]
\[
\leq 2 \max\{1, |C|^2\} (\mu^2 + 3|C|^2 + 2|A|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} (1 + |A|^2)
\]
\[
\leq 2 K^{\frac{p-2}{2}} \max\{1, |C|^2\} (1 + |A|^2)^{\frac{p}{2}},
\]
where
\[
K = \begin{cases} 
\min\{\mu^2 + 3|C|^2, 2\} & \text{if } 1 < p < 2, \\
\max\{\mu^2 + 3|C|^2, 2\} & \text{if } p \geq 2.
\end{cases}
\]
Thus, since
\[
(1 + |A|^2)^{\frac{p}{2}} \leq C_p (1 + |A|^p),
\]
for some positive constant \( C_p \) depending only on \( p \), we have
\[
L (\mu^2 + |C|^2 + |A - C|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A - C|^2 \leq 2 L C_p K^{\frac{p-2}{2}} \max\{1, |C|^2\} (1 + |A|^p).
\]
Combining (2.4), (2.5) and (2.6) the conclusion follows. □
We now state some important results concerning periodic functions.

**Definition 2.10.** A function $w : \mathbb{R}^N \to \mathbb{R}^{N^k}$ is said to be $Q$-periodic if $w(x + e_i) = w(x)$ for a.e. $x \in \mathbb{R}^N$ and every $i = 1, \ldots, N$, where $\{e_1, \ldots, e_N\}$ is the canonical basis of $\mathbb{R}^N$.

Let $d, r \in \mathbb{N}$. We will denote with $C^\infty_{per}(\mathbb{R}^N; \mathbb{R}^d)$ the space of $Q$-periodic functions of $C^\infty(\mathbb{R}^N; \mathbb{R}^d)$. Moreover, we will use the notation $C^r_Q(\mathbb{R}^d)$ for the space of functions of class $C^r$ from $Q$ to $\mathbb{R}^d$ with compact support in $Q$. Next lemma will be extensively used in the paper.

**Lemma 2.11.** (Helmholtz Decomposition). For every $\varphi \in C^\infty_{per}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-s}})$ there exist two functions $\phi \in C^\infty_{per}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-s-1}})$ and $\psi \in C^\infty_{per}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-s}})$ such that

$$\varphi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}} = (\nabla \phi)_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}} + \psi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}$$

for $i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s} = 1, \ldots, N$, with

$$\sum_{i_b = 1}^N \frac{\partial \psi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}}{\partial x_{i_b}} = 0 \quad \text{for every } b \in \{1, \ldots, k-s\}. \quad (2.7)$$

**Proof.** By applying the usual Helmholtz Decomposition Lemma (see [8, Lemma 1]) to each component $\varphi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}$ of the function $\varphi$, the lemma follows. \qed

Before stating next lemma, we need the following definition.

**Definition 2.12.** The $s$-divergence is the operator $s$-div : $C^s(Q; \mathbb{R}^N) \to C(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-s}})$ defined by

$$(s$-div $\xi)_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}} := \sum_{i_{k-s+1}, \ldots, i_N = 1}^N \frac{\partial \xi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}}{\partial x_{i_{k-s+1}} \ldots \partial x_{i_N}}$$

for every $\xi \in C^s(Q; \mathbb{R}^N)$. The definition is analogous when $\xi$ is a Sobolev function.

We are now ready to state a fundamental Korn-type estimate.

**Lemma 2.13.** For every $p > 1$ there exists a constant $\gamma = \gamma(N, p, s) \geq 1$ such that

$$\int_Q |\nabla^s \psi|^p dx \leq \gamma \int_Q |A_{s+1} \nabla^s \psi|^p dx$$

for every $Q$-periodic function $\psi : \mathbb{R}^N \to \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-s}}$ of class $C^\infty$ satisfying condition (2.7).

**Proof.** Notice that, for every $r = k-s+1, \ldots, k$, we have

$$\sum_{i_r = 1}^N \frac{\partial}{\partial x_{i_r}} \left[ (\nabla^s \psi)^{T_{k-s}}_{i_1 i_r \ldots i_k} \right]_{i_r = i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}} = \sum_{i_r = 1}^N \frac{\partial}{\partial x_{i_r}} \left[ \frac{\partial \psi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}}{\partial x_{i_{k-s+1}} \ldots \partial x_{i_{k-r+1}} \partial x_{i_{k-r}} \partial x_{i_r+1} \ldots \partial x_{i_k}} \right]$$

Thus,

$$(s+1) \left[ s$-div $\left( A_{s+1} \nabla^s \psi \right) \right]_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}$$

$$= \sum_{i_{k-s+1}, \ldots, i_k = 1}^N \frac{\partial}{\partial x_{i_{k-s+1}} \ldots \partial x_{i_k}} \left[ s \nabla^s \psi - \left( (\nabla^s \psi)^{T_{k-s+1}}_{i_1 i_2 \ldots i_k} + \ldots + (\nabla^s \psi)^{T_{k-s}}_{i_1 \ldots i_k} \right) \right]_{i_1 \ldots i_{k-s}}$$

$$= s \sum_{i_{k-s+1}, \ldots, i_k = 1}^N \frac{\partial}{\partial x_{i_{k-s+1}} \ldots \partial x_{i_k}} (\nabla^s \psi)_{i_1 i_2 \ldots i_k}$$

$$= s \sum_{i_{k-s+1}, \ldots, i_k = 1}^N \frac{\partial}{\partial x_{i_{k-s+1}} \ldots \partial x_{i_k}} \left[ \frac{\partial \psi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}}{\partial x_{i_{k-s+1}} \ldots \partial x_{i_k}} \right] = s \Delta^s \psi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}}.$$
where with $\Delta^s$ we denoted the $s$-th power of the Laplace operator. Hence,

$$\Delta^s \psi_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}} = \frac{s+1}{s} [s \text{-div} \left( A_{s+1} \nabla^s \psi \right)]_{i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}, i_1, \ldots, i_{k-s}} = 1, \ldots, N.$$ 

The conclusion follows applying [1, Theorem 10.5 and following remark].

We will also need the following generalization of Lemma 2.13.

**Lemma 2.14.** For every $p > 1$ there exists a constant $\tau = \tau(N, p, s) \geq 1$ such that

$$\int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |\nabla^s \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^s \psi|^2 dx \leq \tau \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_{s+1} \nabla^s \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_{s+1} \nabla^s \psi|^2 dx$$

for every constant $\mu \geq 0$ and every $Q$-periodic function $\psi : \mathbb{R}^N \to \mathbb{R}^{N^k-s}$ of class $C^\infty$ satisfying condition (2.7).

**Proof.** The proof simply follows by adapting the proof of [8, Lemma 11] and using Lemma 2.13. □

We conclude this section giving some definitions of higher order $BV$ spaces. We set

$$BH^{(k)}(\Omega) := \{ u \in W^{k-1,1}(\Omega) : D^k u \text{ is a finite Radon measure} \}$$

$$= \{ u \in W^{k-1,1}(\Omega) : \nabla^{k-1} u \in BV(\Omega; E_{k-1}) \},$$

where $D^k u$ stands for the $k$-th order distributional gradient of $u$, and

$$SBH^{(k)}(\Omega) := \{ u \in BH^{(k)}(\Omega) : \nabla^{k-1} u \in SBV(\Omega; E_{k-1}) \}$$

$$= \{ u \in W^{k-1,1}(\Omega) : \nabla^{k-1} u \in SBV(\Omega; E_{k-1}) \} \subset BH^{(k)}(\Omega).$$

3. **Proof of Theorem 1.1**

To prove Theorem 1.1 we will first show that, for every $j = 2, \ldots, k$, every strictly $j$-quasiconvex function of class $C^1$ can be extended to a strictly $(j-1)$-quasiconvex function, provided we require the gradient to be Lipschitz continuous. In the case $1 < p < 2$, that we present below, we actually have to consider a “perturbed” strict $j$-quasiconvexity.

**Lemma 3.1.** Let $j \in \{2, \ldots, k\}$, $1 < p \leq 2$, $\mu \geq 0$, and let $M^{(j)}, \nu^{(j)}$, and $\varepsilon$ be positive constants.

Let $f^{(j)} \in C^1(E_k^{N^{k-j}})$ satisfy the following conditions:

(a) (strict $j$-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)

$$\int_Q \left[ f^{(j)}(A + \nabla^j \phi) - f^{(j)}(A) \right] dx \geq -\varepsilon h^{(j)}(A)$$

$$+ \nu^{(j)} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 dx$$

for every $A \in E_k^{N^{k-j}}$ and every $\phi \in C^1_c(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}})$, where $h^{(j)} : E_k^{N^{k-j}} \to [0, +\infty);$.

(b) (Lipschitz condition for gradients)

$$|\nabla f^{(j)}(A + B) - \nabla f^{(j)}(A)| \leq M^{(j)} \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |B|$$

for every $A, B \in E_k^{N^{k-j}}$.

Then there exists a function $F^{(j)} \in C^1(E_k^{N^{k-j+1}}, \mathbb{R})$, and a positive constant $L^{(j)} = L^{(j)}(\mu, M^{(j)}, \nu^{(j)}, j)$, such that

(a') (strict $(j-1)$-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)

$$\int_Q \left[ F^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F^{(j)}(A) \right] dx \geq \frac{\mu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 dx$$

$$- \varepsilon \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A|^2 - \varepsilon h^{(j)}(S, A)$$

for every $A \in E_k^{N^{k-j+1}}$ and every $\varphi \in C^1_c(\mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j+1}});$.

 Notice that

\[ |\nabla F^{(j)}(A + B) - \nabla F^{(j)}(A)| \leq L^{(j)} \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{\kappa - 2}{2}} |B| \]

for every \( A, B \in E_k^{N^k-j+1} \).

(c) \( F^{(j)} \) extends \( f^{(j)} \)

\[ F^{(j)}(A) = f^{(j)}(A) \quad \forall A \in E_k^{N^k-j}. \]

Proof. Let \( \beta > 0 \) be a constant to be chosen at the end of the proof and define \( F^{(j)} : E_k^{N^k-j+1} \to \mathbb{R} \) as

\[ F^{(j)}(A) := f^{(j)}(S_j A) + \beta \left[ \left( \mu^2 + |A_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{\kappa}{2}} - \mu^p \right] = f^{(j)}(S_j A) + \beta \left[ g(A_j A) - \mu^p \right], \]

where \( g \) is given by relation (5.2) with \( X = E_k^{N^k-j+1} \).

Relation (c) is clearly satisfied. Let us show that condition (a') holds true for a good choice of \( \beta \). Let \( \varphi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^k-j+1}) \). By Lemma 2.11 we can write

\[ \varphi = \nabla \psi + \psi, \]

where \( \psi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; R^{N^{k-j+1}}) \) satisfies condition (2.7) with \( s = j - 1 \), and \( \phi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}}) \). By differentiating \( j-1 \) times the previous relation we get

\[ \nabla^{j-1} \varphi = \nabla^{j-1} \phi + \nabla^{j-1} \psi, \]

with \( \nabla^{j-1} \varphi, \nabla^{j-1} \psi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; E_k^{N^k-j+1}) \), and \( \nabla^{j-1} \phi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; E_k^{N^k-j}) \). We have

\[
\begin{align*}
\int_Q \left[ F^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F^{(j)}(A) \right] dx \\
= \int_Q \left[ f^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^{j-1} \phi + S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi) - f^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^{j-1} \phi) \right] dx \\
+ \int_Q \left[ f^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^{j-1} \phi) - f^{(j)}(S_j A) \right] dx \\
+ \beta \int_Q \left[ g(A_j A + A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi) - g(A_j A) \right] dx \\
=: I_1 + I_2 + I_3.
\end{align*}
\]

Notice that \( \nabla f^{(j)}(S_j A) \in E_k^{N^k-j} \). Then, thanks to Proposition 2.5 and using the fact that \( \psi \) is \( Q \)-periodic

\[ \int_Q \nabla f^{(j)}(S_j A) \cdot S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi dx = \int_Q \nabla f^{(j)}(S_j A) \cdot \nabla^{j-1} \psi dx = 0. \]

Hence

\[ I_1 = \int_Q \left[ f^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^{j-1} \phi + S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi) - f^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^{j-1} \phi) - \nabla f^{(j)}(S_j A) \cdot S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi \right] dx. \]

Applying Lemma 5.6 with \( \varepsilon = \nu^{(j)}/2 \) there exists a positive constant \( c_1 = c_1(\nu^{(j)}, p, M^{(j)}) > 0 \) such that

\[
\begin{align*}
I_1 &\geq -\frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A_j|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\kappa-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \phi|^2 dx \\
&\quad - c_1 \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\kappa-2}{2}} |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 dx \\
&\geq -\frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A_j|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\kappa-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \phi|^2 dx \\
&\quad - \tau c_1 \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\kappa-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 dx,
\end{align*}
\]
where \( \tau = \tau(N, p, j - 1) \) is given by Lemma 2.14. The perturbed strict \( j \)-quasiconvexity of \( f^{(j)} \) gives

\[
I_2 \geq \nu^{(j)} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx - \varepsilon h^{(j)}(S_jA),
\]

so that

\[
I_1 + I_2 \geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx - \varepsilon h^{(j)}(S_jA)
- \tau c_1 \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx.
\]

We apply now Lemma 5.3 to the first integral of the last expression with \( \tilde{\mu} = \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 \), \( x = \nabla^j \phi \), and \( y = \nabla^{j-1} \psi \). Recalling that \( \nabla^j \phi + \nabla^{j-1} \psi = \nabla^{j-1} \varphi \) we get

\[
I_1 + I_2 \geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx - \varepsilon h^{(j)}(S_jA)
- \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx
- \tau c_1 \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx.
\]

Using the fact that \( 1 < p < 2 \) and Lemma 2.14

\[
- \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx
\geq - \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx
\geq - \frac{\tau \nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx.
\]

Hence, collecting (3.1) and (3.2)

\[
I_1 + I_2 \geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx - \varepsilon h^{(j)}(S_jA)
- \tau \left( c_1 + \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \right) \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx
\geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx - \varepsilon h^{(j)}(S_jA)
- \tau \left( c_1 + \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \right) \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx,
\]

where we used once again the fact that \( 1 < p < 2 \). Since \( \nabla g(A_jA) \in A_j E_k^{N_k-j+i+1} \) and \( \psi \) is \( Q \)-periodic,

\[
\int_Q \nabla g(A_jA) \cdot A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi \, dx = \int_Q \nabla g(A_jA) \cdot \nabla^{j-1} \psi \, dx = 0,
\]

so that

\[
I_3 = \beta \int_Q \left[ g(A_jA + A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi) - g(A_jA) - \nabla g(A_jA) \cdot A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi \right] \, dx.
\]
Let $0 < \delta < 1$ to be chosen at the end of the proof. Thanks to Lemma 5.1
\[
I_3 \geq \beta \theta_p \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx \\
\geq \beta \theta_p \delta^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx \\
- \beta \theta_p \delta \left( \mu^2 + |A_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |A_j A|^2,
\]
where in the second inequality we used Lemma 5.3 with $X = E_k^{N^{k-j}+1}$, $\bar{\mu} = \mu$, $x = A_j A$ and $y = A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi$. Choosing $\beta = \beta(j) > 0$ and $\delta = \delta(j) \in (0, 1)$ such that
\[
\beta(j) \theta_p (\delta(j))^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} \geq \tau \left( c_1 + \frac{\nu(j)}{2} \right), \quad \beta(j) \theta_p (\delta(j) \leq \varepsilon,
\]
we obtain
\[
I_1 + I_2 + I_3 \geq \frac{\nu(j)}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |\nabla^{j-1} \phi|^2 \, dx \\
- \varepsilon h(j)(S_j A) - \varepsilon \left( \mu^2 + |A_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |A_j A|^2,
\]
so that (a') holds. To check condition (b'), we observe that the function $g$ satisfies the hypotheses of Lemma 5.5. Then, for every $A, B \in E_k^{N^{k-j}+1}$
\[
|\nabla g(A + B) - \nabla g(A)| \leq C_p \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |B|,
\]
where $C_p$ is a positive constant depending only on $p$. Using last relation, (b), and the fact that $\beta(j)$ depends on $\nu(j), \tau$ and $c_1$, we conclude that (b') holds for some positive constant $L^{(j)} = L(j)(p, \mu, M^{(j)}, \nu^{(j)}, j)$.

We pass now to the case $p \geq 2$.

**Lemma 3.2.** Let $j \in \{2, \ldots, k\}$, $p \geq 2$, $\mu \geq 0$, $M^{(j)} > 0$, $\nu^{(j)} > 0$, and let $\theta_p$ and $\Theta_p$ be given by Lemma 5.1. Let $f^{(j)} \in C^1(E_k^{N^{k-j}})$ satisfy the following conditions:

(a) (strict $j$-quasiconvexity)
\[
\int_Q \left[ f^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j} \phi) - f^{(j)}(A) \right] \, dx \geq \nu^{(j)} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j} \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |\nabla^{j} \phi|^2 \, dx
\]
for every $A \in E_k^{N^{k-j}}$ and every $\phi \in C^1_c(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}})$;

(b) (Lipschitz condition for gradients)
\[
|\nabla f^{(j)}(A + B) - \nabla f^{(j)}(A)| \leq M^{(j)} \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |B|
\]
for every $A, B \in E_k^{N^{k-j}}$.

Then there exists a function $F^{(j)} \in C^1(E_k^{N^{k-j}+1})$, and a positive constant $L^{(j)} = L(j)(p, \mu, M^{(j)}, \nu^{(j)}, j)$, such that

(a') (strict $(j-1)$-quasiconvexity)
\[
\int_Q \left[ F^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F^{(j)}(A) \right] \, dx \geq \nu^{(j)} \frac{\theta_p}{4 \Theta_p} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{\nu(j)}{4}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx
\]
for every $A \in E_k^{N^{k-j}+1}$ and every $\varphi \in C^1_{-1}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}+1})$;
Concerning the second integral, since by periodicity

\[ |\nabla F^{(j)}(A + B) - \nabla F^{(j)}(A)| \leq L^{(j)} \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2 \right) \frac{\theta^2}{2} |B| \]

for every \( A, B \in E_{k}^{N^{k-j}+1} \).

(c) \( F^{(j)} \) extends \( f^{(j)} \).

\[ F^{(j)}(A) = f^{(j)}(A) \quad \forall A \in E_{k}^{N^{k-j}}. \]

Proof. Let \( \lambda \in (0, \nu^{(j)}/\Theta_{p}) \) and \( \beta > 0 \) be two constants to be determined at the end of the proof. We define \( F^{(j)} : E_{k}^{N^{k-j}+1} \rightarrow \mathbb{R} \) as

\[ F^{(j)}(A) := f^{(j)}(S_{j}A) - \lambda \left( \mu^2 + |S_{j}A|^2 \right)^{\frac{\theta^2}{2}} + \lambda \left( \mu^2 + |S_{j}A|^2 + \beta^2 |A_{j}A|^2 \right)^{\frac{\theta^2}{2}}. \]

Let \( g \) and \( g_{\beta} \) be defined by (5.2) and (5.3) respectively, with \( X = E_{k}^{N^{k-j}} \) and \( Y = A_{j}E_{k}^{N^{k-j}+1} \).

Setting for every \( B \in E_{k}^{N^{k-j}} \)

\[ f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(B) := f^{(j)}(B) - \lambda g(B), \]

we have

\[ F^{(j)}(A) = f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A) + \lambda g_{\beta}(S_{j}A, A_{j}A). \]

Condition (c) is clear from the definition of \( F^{(j)} \). In order to check (a'), let \( \varphi \in C_{\text{per}}^{\infty}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}+1}) \).

By repeating the argument of the previous proof, we can write

\[ \nabla^{j-1} \varphi = \nabla^{j} \phi + \nabla^{j-1} \psi, \]

with \( \nabla^{j-1} \varphi, \nabla^{j-1} \psi \in C_{\text{per}}^{\infty}(Q; E_{k}^{N^{k-j}+1}) \), and \( \nabla^{j} \phi \in C_{\text{per}}^{\infty}(Q; E_{k}^{N^{k-j}}) \), where \( \psi \in C_{\text{per}}^{\infty}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}+1}) \) satisfies condition (2.7) with \( s = j - 1 \). Hence,

\[
\int_{Q} \left[ F^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F^{(j)}(A) \right] dx \\
= \int_{Q} \left[ f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A + S_{j} \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A + S_{j} \nabla^{j-1} \varphi - S_{j} \nabla^{j-1} \psi) \right] dx \\
+ \int_{Q} \left[ f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A + \nabla^{j} \phi) - f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A) \right] dx \\
+ \lambda \int_{Q} \left[ g_{\beta}(S_{j}A + S_{j} \nabla^{j-1} \varphi, A_{j}A + A_{j} \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - g_{\beta}(S_{j}A, A_{j}A) \right] dx \\
=: I_{1} + I_{2} + I_{3}.
\]

Concerning the second integral, since by periodicity

\[ \int_{Q} \nabla g(S_{j}A) \cdot \nabla^{j} \phi dx = 0, \]

using condition (a) and Lemma 5.1 we have

\[
I_{2} = \int_{Q} \left[ f(S_{j}A + \nabla^{j} \phi) - f(S_{j}A) \right] dx - \lambda \int_{Q} \left[ g(S_{j}A + \nabla^{j} \phi) - g(S_{j}A) \right] dx \\
= \int_{Q} \left[ f(S_{j}A + \nabla^{j} \phi) - f(S_{j}A) \right] dx - \lambda \int_{Q} \left[ g(S_{j}A + \nabla^{j} \phi) - g(S_{j}A) + \nabla g(S_{j}A) \cdot \nabla^{j} \phi \right] dx \\
\geq \left( \nu^{(j)} - \lambda \Theta_{p} \right) \int_{Q} \left( \mu^{2} + |S_{j}A|^{2} + |\nabla^{j} \phi|^{2} \right) \frac{\theta^{2}}{2} |\nabla^{j} \phi|^{2} dx \geq 0. \tag{3.3}
\]

Let us pass to the first integral. Noticing that \( \nabla f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A) \in E_{k}^{N^{k-j}} \), thanks to Proposition 2.5 and using the fact that \( \psi \) is \( Q \)-periodic,

\[ \int_{Q} \nabla f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A) \cdot S_{j} \nabla^{j-1} \psi dx = \int_{Q} \nabla f_{\lambda}^{(j)}(S_{j}A) \cdot \nabla^{j-1} \psi dx = 0. \]
Hence,

\[ I_1 = -\int_Q \left[ f_\lambda^{(j)}(S_j A + S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi - S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi) - f_\lambda^{(j)}(S_j A + S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) \right] \nabla f_\lambda^{(j)}(S_j A) \cdot S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi \, dx. \]

As observed in the previous proof the function \( g \) satisfies condition (5.6), and so by Lemma 5.5 condition (b) still holds for the function \( f_\lambda \) for a suitable constant \( \tilde{M} = M(p, M^{(j)}, \lambda) \) in place of \( M^{(j)} \). Thus, applying Lemma 5.6 with \( \varepsilon = \lambda \theta_p/2 \), there exists a positive constant \( \sigma = \sigma(p, M^{(j)}, \lambda) \) such that

\[ I_1 \geq -\frac{\lambda \theta_p}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{p-2}} |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \]

\[ - \sigma \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{p-2}} \int_Q |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx - \sigma \int_Q |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^p \, dx. \]

Thanks to Lemma 2.13 and using (3.3) we get

\[ I_1 + I_2 \geq \frac{-\lambda \theta_p}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{p-2}} |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \]

\[ - \sigma \gamma(N, 2, j-1) \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{p-2}} \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx - \sigma \gamma(N, p, j-1) \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^p \, dx. \]

Since \( \varphi \) is \( Q \)-periodic,

\[ 0 = \int_Q \nabla g_\beta(S_j A, A_j A) \cdot \nabla^{j-1} \varphi \, dx \]

\[ = \int_Q \left[ \nabla_x g_\beta(S_j A, A_j A) \cdot S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi + \nabla_y g_\beta(S_j A, A_j A) \cdot A_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi \right] \, dx, \]

so that

\[ I_3 = \lambda \int_Q \left[ g_\beta(S_j A + S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi, A_j A + A_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - g_\beta(S_j A, A_j A) \right] \]

\[ - \nabla_x g_\beta(S_j A, A_j A) \cdot S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi - \nabla_y g_\beta(S_j A, A_j A) \cdot A_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi \] \, dx. \]

We are now going to split \( I_3 \) into two terms. We will use the first term to compensate the sum \( I_1 + I_2 \), and the remaining one to get the strict \((j-1)\)-quasiconvexity. Relation (5.5) of Lemma 5.2 gives

\[ \frac{I_3}{2} \geq \frac{\lambda \theta_p}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{p-2}} |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \]

\[ + \frac{\lambda \theta_p \beta^2}{4} \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{p-2}} \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx + \frac{\lambda \theta_p \beta^p}{4} \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^p \, dx. \]

If we choose \( \beta = \beta^{(j)} > 0 \) so large that

\[ \frac{\lambda \theta_p (\beta^{(j)})^2}{4} \geq \sigma \gamma(N, 2, j-1) \quad \text{and} \quad \frac{\lambda \theta_p (\beta^{(j)})^p}{4} \geq \sigma \gamma(N, p, j-1), \]

using relations (3.4) and (3.6), we have

\[ I_1 + I_2 + I_3 \geq \frac{I_3}{2}. \]
Let us estimate the last term. Without any loss of generality we can assume $\beta^{(j)} \geq 1$. Then, recalling (3.5) and using inequality (5.4) of Lemma 5.2

$$
\int_Q \left[ F^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j-1}\varphi) - F^{(j)}(A) \right] dx = I_1 + I_2 + I_3
$$

$$
\geq \frac{\lambda \theta_p}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |S_j \nabla^{j-1}\varphi|^2 + (\beta^{(j)})^2 |A_jA|^2 + (\beta^{(j)})^2 |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\varphi|^2 \right) dx
$$

$$
\geq \frac{\lambda \theta_p}{2} \int_Q \left( |S_j \nabla^{j-1}\varphi|^2 + (\beta^{(j)})^2 |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\varphi|^2 \right) dx
$$

$$
= \nu^{(j)} \frac{\theta_p}{4 \Theta_p} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1}\varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1}\varphi|^2 dx,
$$

where we chose

$$
\lambda = \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2 \Theta_p}.
$$

One can show that $F^{(j)}$ satisfies condition (b') as it was done in the proof of Lemma 3.1. □

We can now pass to the proof of Theorem 1.1.

**Proof of Theorem 1.1.**

**Step 1.** Case $1 < p < 2$. To simplify the notation, for every $B \in \mathbb{R}^{Nk}$ we set

$$
P(B) := \left( \mu^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |B|^2, \quad G(B) := \left[ \left( \mu^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{2}} - |B|^p \right].
$$

Let $\varepsilon > 0$ be fixed. We start the proof by applying Lemma 3.1 with $j = k$, $\nu^{(k)} = \nu$, $h^{(k)} \equiv 0$ and $f^{(k)}(A) = f(A)$, for every $A \in E_k$.

Then, we apply again $k - 2$ times Lemma 3.1 with $j = k - 1, k - 2, \ldots, 2$ respectively, with

$$
\nu^{(j)} = \frac{\nu}{4^{k-j}},
$$

and

$$
f^{(j)}(A) = F^{(j+1)}(A), \quad \text{for every } A \in E_k^{N_k-j},
$$

while the functions $h^{(j)} : E_k^{N_k-j} \to [0, +\infty)$ will be chosen as

$$
h^{(k-1)}(A) = P(A_kA), \quad h^{(j)}(A) = P(A_{j+1}A) + \sum_{r=j+2}^{k} P(A_rS_{r-1} \ldots S_{j+1}A) \quad j = k - 2, \ldots, 2.
$$

In this way after the last step, corresponding to $j = 2$, we obtain a function $F^{(2)} : \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \to \mathbb{R}$ given by

$$
F^{(2)}(A) := f(S_kS_{k-1} \ldots S_2) + \beta^{(2)} G(A_2A) + \sum_{r=3}^{k} \beta^{(r)} G(A_rS_{r-1} \ldots S_2A). \quad (3.7)
$$

Here, for every $j = 2, \ldots, k$, the constant $\beta^{(j)}$ is given by the proof of Lemma 3.1 with the correspondent index $j$. $F^{(2)}$ has the following properties:

(a') (strict 1-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)

$$
\int_Q \left[ F^{(2)}(A + \nabla \varphi) - F^{(2)}(A) \right] dx \geq -\varepsilon P(A_2A) - \varepsilon h^{(2)}(S_2A)
$$

$$
+ \frac{\nu}{4^{k-2}} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla \varphi|^2 dx
$$
for every $A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k}$ and every $\varphi \in C^1_c(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N_k})$;

(b') (Lipschitz condition for the gradient)
\[ |\nabla F^{(2)}(A + B) - \nabla F^{(2)}(A)| \leq L \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |B|^2 \right) \frac{p}{p-2} |B|, \]
for every $A, B \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k}$, with $L = L(p, \mu, M, \nu)$;

(c) $(F^{(2)}$ extends $f)$
\[ F^{(2)}(A) = f(A) \quad \forall A \in E_k. \]

Now, let us define
\[ F(A) := \inf \left\{ \int_Q F^{(2)}(A + \nabla \varphi(x)) \, dx : \varphi \in C^\infty_{per}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N_k-1}) \right\} \]
for every $A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k}$. Property (a') implies that for every $A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k}$
\[ F^{(2)}(A) - \varepsilon \mathcal{P}(A_2 A) - \varepsilon h^{(2)}(S_2 A) \leq F(A) \leq F^{(2)}(A). \] (3.8)

Since for every $A \in E_k$
\[ \mathcal{P}(A_2 A) = h^{(2)}(S_2 A) = 0, \]
from property (c) and relation (3.8) equality (1.3) follows. Let us check (1.4). Thanks to Proposition 2.9, from condition (b') we infer that there exists a positive constant $c$, depending on the function $F^{(2)}$ and in turn on $f$, such that
\[ |F^{(2)}(A)| \leq c(1 + |A|^p) \quad \forall A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k}. \]
Recalling the definitions of the functions $\mathcal{P}$ and $h^{(2)}$, last relation and (3.8) give (1.4).

**Step 2. Case** $p \geq 2$. Repeating the strategy used for the case $1 < p < 2$, we first apply Lemma 3.2 with $j = k$, $\nu(k) = \nu$ and
\[ f^{(k)}(A) = f(A), \quad \text{for every} \ A \in E_k. \]

Then, we apply again $k - 2$ times Lemma 3.2 with $j = k - 1, k - 2, \ldots, 2$ respectively, with
\[ \nu(j) = \nu \left( \frac{\theta_p}{4\Theta_p} \right)^{k-j+1}, \]
and
\[ f^{(j)}(A) = F^{(j+1)}(A), \quad \text{for every} \ A \in E^{N_k-j}_k. \]

Finally, when $j = 2$ we obtain a function $F^{(2)} : \mathbb{R}^{N_k} \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ given by
\[ F^{(2)}(A) = f(S_k \ldots S_2 A) + L^{(2)}(S_2 A, A_2 A) + \sum_{r=3}^{k} L^{(r)}(S_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_2 A, A_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_2 A), \] (3.9)
where we set
\[ L^{(r)}(A, B) := -\frac{\nu^{(r)}}{2\Theta_p} \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 \right)^{\frac{r}{2}} + \frac{\nu^{(r)}}{2\Theta_p} \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + (\beta^{(r)})^2 |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{r}{2}}, \quad r = 2, \ldots, k, \]
and for every $j = 2, \ldots, k$, the constant $\beta^{(j)}$ is given by the proof of Lemma 3.2 with the corresponding index $j$. The function $F^{(2)}$ just defined is such that

(a') (strict 1-quasiconvexity)
\[ \int_Q \left[ F^{(2)}(A + \nabla \varphi) - F^{(2)}(A) \right] \, dx \geq \frac{\nu}{4} \left( \frac{\theta_p}{\Theta_p} \right)^k \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla \varphi|^2 \, dx \]
for every $A \in \mathbb{R}^{N_k}$ and every $\varphi \in C^1_c(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N_k-1})$;
Proof. Let \( M > 0 \) be a sequence of positive constants. Let \( \{f_i^j\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) be a sequence of functions \( f_i^j : E_k^{Nk-1} \to \mathbb{R} \) satisfying the following conditions:

(a) (strict \( j \)-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)
\[
\int_Q \left[ f_i^j (A + \nabla^j \phi) - f_i^j (A) \right] \, dx \geq - h_i^j (A) + \nu (j) \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{2}{\mu+1}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx
\]
for every \( A \in E_k^{Nk-1} \), for every \( \phi \in C_0^1 (Q; \mathbb{R}^{Nk}) \), and for every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \), where \( \{h_i^j\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) is a sequence of functions \( h_i^j : E_k^{Nk-1} \to [0, +\infty) \);

(b) (\( p \)-growth condition)
\[
|f_i^j (A)| \leq M_i^j (1 + |A|^p) \quad \forall A \in E_k^{Nk-1}, \quad \forall i \in \mathbb{N}.
\]

Then there exists an increasing sequence \( \{F_i^j\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) of functions \( F_i^j : E_k^{Nk-j+1} \to \mathbb{R} \), and two sequences \( \{L_i^j\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) and \( \{\lambda_i^j\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) of positive numbers, depending on \( \nu (j), M_i^j, j, p, \mu \), such that

(a') (strict \((j-1)\)-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)
\[
\int_Q \left[ F_i^j (A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F_i^j (A) \right] \, dx \geq - \frac{\nu (j)}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{2}{\mu+2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx
\]
for every \( A \in E_k^{Nk-j+1} \), for every \( \varphi \in C_0^{j-1} (Q; \mathbb{R}^{Nk-j}) \), and for every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \);

(b') (\( p \)-growth condition)
\[
|F_i^j (A)| \leq L_i^j (1 + |A|^p) \quad \forall A \in E_k^{Nk-j+1}, \quad \forall i \in \mathbb{N};
\]

(c) \( (F_i^j) \) extends \( f_i^j \)
\[
F_i^j (A) = f_i^j (A) \quad \forall A \in E_k^{Nk-j}, \quad \forall i \in \mathbb{N}.
\]

Proof. First we observe that, thanks to Proposition 2.7, there exists a positive constant \( L = L(M_i^j, j, p) \) (we do not stress here the dependence on \( N \) and \( k \)), such that
\[
|f_i^j (A + B) - f_i^j (A)| \leq L (1 + |A|^{p-1} + |B|^{p-1}) |B|
\]
for every \( A, B \in E_k^{Nk-j} \). Let \( \beta > 0 \) be a constant to be chosen at the end of the proof. For every \( A \in E_k^{Nk-j+1} \), we define
\[
F_i^j (A) := f_i^j (S_j A) + \beta |A_j A|^p.
\]
Condition (c) is clearly satisfied. In order to show (a'), let us consider a function $\varphi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N-k+j+1})$. We can write
\[ \nabla^{j-1}\varphi = \nabla^j\phi + \nabla^{j-1}\psi, \]
with $\nabla^{j-1}\varphi, \nabla^{j-1}\psi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; E_k^{N-k+j+1})$, and $\nabla^j\phi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; E_k^{N-k})$, where $\psi \in C^\infty_{\text{per}}(Q; R^{N-k+j+1})$ satisfies condition (2.7) with $s = j - 1$. Hence,
\[
\int_Q \left[ F_i^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j-1}\varphi) - F_i^{(j)}(A) \right] \, dx
= \int_Q \left[ f_i^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^j\phi + S_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi) - f_i^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^j\phi) \right] \, dx
+ \int_Q \left[ f_i^{(j)}(S_j A + \nabla^j\phi) - f_i^{(j)}(S_j A) \right] \, dx
+ \beta \int_Q \left[ |A_j A + A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^p - |A_j A|^p \right] \, dx
=: I_1 + I_2 + I_3.
\]
By (4.1) and Young’s inequality, for every $\delta > 0$ there exists a constant $C = C(M_1^{(j)}, j, p, \delta)$ such that
\[
I_1 \geq -L \int_Q \left( 1 + |S_j A + \nabla^j\phi|^{p-1} + |S_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^{p-1} \right) |S_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi| \, dx
\geq -\delta - \delta |S_j A|^p - \delta \int_Q |\nabla^j\phi|^p \, dx - C \int_Q |S_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^p \, dx.
\]
Using Lemma 2.13
\[
I_1 \geq -\delta - \delta |S_j A|^p - \delta \int_Q |\nabla^j\phi|^p \, dx - C \gamma \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^p \, dx.
\] (4.3)
Thanks to Lemma 5.4, for every $0 < \varepsilon < 1$
\[
I_1 \geq -\delta(1 + \varepsilon \mu^p) - \delta(1 + \varepsilon) |S_j A|^p - C \gamma \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^p \, dx
- 8 \delta \varepsilon \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \right) \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \, dx.
\]
Then, applying Lemma 5.3 with $\tilde{\mu} = 0$, $x = A_j A$, and $y = A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi$,
\[
I_1 \geq -\delta(1 + \varepsilon \mu^p) - \delta(1 + \varepsilon) |S_j A|^p - C \gamma \varepsilon^2 |A_j A|^p
- C \gamma \varepsilon \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} \int_Q \left( |A_j A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^2 \right) \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^2 \, dx
- 8 \delta \varepsilon \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \right) \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \, dx.
\]
Thus, there exists a sequence of positive numbers $\{\lambda^{(j)}_i\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}}$, such that for every $i \in \mathbb{N}$
\[
I_1 \geq -\frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \right) \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \, dx
- \lambda^{(j)}_i \int_Q \left( |A_j A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^2 \right) \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} |A_j \nabla^{j-1}\psi|^2 \, dx
- \frac{1}{i} |S_j A|^p - \lambda^{(j)}_i |A_j A|^p.
\]
Here, for every fixed $i \in \mathbb{N}$, $\lambda^{(j)}_i = \lambda^{(j)}_i(\nu^{(j)}, M_1^{(j)}, j, p, \mu)$. By condition (a)
\[
I_2 \geq \nu^{(j)} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \right) \frac{\varepsilon^2}{\gamma} |\nabla^j\phi|^2 \, dx - h_i^{(j)}(S_j A),
\]
so that

\[ I_1 + I_2 \geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx \\
- \lambda^{(j)}(\mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx \\
- \frac{1}{t} - \frac{1}{t} |S_j A|^p - \lambda^{(j)} |A_j A|^p - h^{(j)}(S_j A), \]

(4.4)

We focus now on the first term of last expression. Applying Lemma 5.3 with \( \tilde{x} = \phi \) and \( y = \nabla^{j-1} \psi \), and recalling that \( \nabla^j \phi + \nabla^{j-1} \psi = \nabla^{j-1} \varphi \) we get

\[ \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx \\
\geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
- \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx \\
- \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( |A_j A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx, \]

(4.5)

again exploiting that \( 1 < p < 2 \). By Lemma 2.14 last inequality becomes

\[ \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx \\
\geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
- \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx \\
\]

again exploiting that \( 1 < p < 2 \). Collecting (4.4) and (4.5) we have

\[ I_1 + I_2 \geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
- \left( \lambda^{(j)} + \frac{\nu^{(j)} \tau}{2} \right) \int_Q \left( |A_j A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx \\
- \frac{1}{t} - \frac{1}{t} |S_j A|^p - \lambda^{(j)} |A_j A|^p - h^{(j)}(S_j A). \]

(4.6)

Concerning \( I_3 \), using the periodicity of \( \psi \) and thanks to Lemma 5.1 with \( \mu = 0 \)

\[ I_3 = \beta \int_Q \left[ |A_j A + A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^p - |A_j A|^p - p |A_j A|^p - |A_j A \cdot A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi| \right] \, dx \\
\geq \beta \theta_p \int_Q \left( |A_j A|^2 + |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi|^2 \, dx. \]

(4.7)

Choosing \( \beta = \beta^{(j)} > 0 \) such that

\[ \beta^{(j)} \theta_p \geq \lambda^{(j)} + \frac{\nu^{(j)} \tau}{2}, \]
from (4.6) and (4.7) we obtain
\[ I_1 + I_2 + I_3 \geq \frac{\nu^{(j)}}{4} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{s-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
- \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_j A|^p - \lambda^{(j)} \cdot |A_j A|^p - h^{(j)} (S_j A), \]
so that (a') holds. From (4.2) condition (b') follows. \( \square \)

The second lemma addresses the case \( p \geq 2 \).

**Lemma 4.2.** Let \( j \in \{2, \ldots, k\} \), \( p \geq 2 \), \( \nu^{(j)} > 0 \), and let \( \{M_i^{(j)}\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) be a sequence of positive constants. Let moreover \( \theta_p \) and \( \Theta_p \) be given by Lemma 5.1, and let \( \{f_i^{(j)}\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) be a sequence of functions \( f_i^{(j)} : E_k^{N^{k-j}} \to \mathbb{R} \) satisfying the following conditions:

(a) (strict \( j \)-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)
\[ \int_Q \left[ f_i^{(j)} (A + \nabla^{j} \phi) - f_i^{(j)} (A) \right] \, dx \geq -h_i^{(j)} (A) \]
\[ + \nu^{(j)} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j} \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{s-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j} \phi|^2 \, dx \]
for every \( A \in E_k^{N^{k-j}} \), for every \( \phi \in C^j_c (Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j}}) \), and for every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \), where \( \{h_i^{(j)}\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) is a sequence of functions \( h_i^{(j)} : E_k^{N^{k-j}} \to [0, +\infty) \);

(b) (\( p \)-growth condition)
\[ |f_i^{(j)} (A)| \leq M_i^{(j)} (1 + |A|^p) \quad \forall A \in E_k^{N^{k-j}}, \quad \forall i \in \mathbb{N}. \]

Then there exists an increasing sequence \( \{F_i^{(j)}\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) of functions \( F_i^{(j)} : E_k^{N^{k-j+1}} \to \mathbb{R} \), and a sequence \( \{L_i^{(j)}\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) of positive numbers, depending on \( \nu^{(j)}, M_i^{(j)}, j, p, \mu \), such that

(a') (strict \( (j-1) \)-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)
\[ \int_Q \left[ F_i^{(j)} (A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F_i^{(j)} (A) \right] \, dx \geq -h_i^{(j)} (S_j A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_j A|^p \]
\[ + \nu^{(j)} \frac{\theta_p}{4 \Theta_p} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{s-2}{2}} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \]
for every \( A \in E_k^{N^{k-j+1}} \), for every \( \varphi \in C^j_c (Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j+1}}) \), and for every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \);

(b') (\( p \)-growth condition)
\[ |F_i^{(j)} (A)| \leq L_i^{(j)} (1 + |A|^p) \quad \forall A \in E_k^{N^{k-j+1}}, \quad \forall i \in \mathbb{N}; \]

(c) \( F_i^{(j)} \) extends \( f_i^{(j)} \)
\[ F_i^{(j)} (A) = f_i^{(j)} (A) \quad \forall A \in E_k^{N^{k-j}}, \quad \forall i \in \mathbb{N}. \]

**Proof.** Let \( \alpha \in (0, \nu^{(j)}/\Theta_p) \) and \( \beta > 0 \) to be determined at the end of the proof. We define
\[ F_i^{(j)} (A) := f_i^{(j)} (S_j A) - \alpha \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{\beta}{2}} + \alpha \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + \beta^2 |A_j A|^2 \right)^{\frac{\beta}{2}}. \quad (4.8) \]

Condition (c) is clearly satisfied. Let now \( \varphi \in C^\infty_\mathrm{per} (Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-j+1}}) \). As usual, we can write
\[ \nabla^{j-1} \varphi = \nabla^{j-1} \psi, \]
with \( \nabla^{j-1} \psi, \nabla^{j-1} \psi \in C^\infty_\mathrm{per} (Q; E_k^{N^{k-j+1}}) \), and \( \nabla^{j} \phi \in C^\infty_\mathrm{per} (Q; E_k^{N^{k-j}}) \), where \( \psi \in C^\infty_\mathrm{per} (Q; R^{N^{k-j+1}}) \) satisfies condition (2.7) with \( s = j - 1 \). Setting
\[ (f_i^{(j)})_\alpha (B) := f_i^{(j)} (B) - \alpha \left( \mu^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{\beta}{2}} \]
for every $B \in E_k^{N^{k+j}}$, we have

$$\int_Q \left[ F_i^{(j)}(A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F_i^{(j)}(A) \right] \, dx$$

$$= \int_Q \left[ (f_i^{(j)})_\alpha(S_jA + \nabla^j \phi + S_j \nabla^{j-1} \psi) - (f_i^{(j)})_\alpha(S_jA + \nabla^j \phi) \right] \, dx$$

$$+ \int_Q \left[ (f_i^{(j)})_\alpha(S_jA + \nabla^j \phi) - (f_i^{(j)})_\alpha(S_jA) \right] \, dx$$

$$+ \alpha \int_Q \left[ g_\beta(S_jA + S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi, A_jA + A_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - g_\beta(S_jA, A_jA) \right] \, dx$$

$$=: I_1 + I_2 + I_3,$$

with $g_\beta$ defined by (5.3), with $X = E_k^{N^{k+j}}$ and $Y = A_jE_k^{N^{k+j+1}}$. By repeating the chain of inequalities (3.3), one can show $(f_i^{(j)})_\alpha$ is $j$-quasiconvex. In addition, applying Lemma 5.5 and Proposition 2.9 to the function

$$B \mapsto \alpha\left( \mu^2 + |B|^2 \right)^{\frac{p}{2}},$$

we have that $(f_i^{(j)})_\alpha$ satisfies condition (b), for some positive constant $\overline{M}_i^{(j)} = \overline{M}_i^{(j)}(\alpha, \mu, M_i^{(j)})$ in place of $M_i^{(j)}$. Thus, by applying Proposition 2.7, we can still conclude that relation (4.1) holds true for the function $(f_i^{(j)})_\alpha$, for a suitable constant $L = L(N, M_i^{(j)}, k, j, p, \alpha)$. By repeating the same argument of the previous proof, we get that for every $\delta > 0$ there exists a positive constant $c = c(M_i^{(j)}, j, p, \alpha, \mu, \delta)$ such that

$$I_1 \geq -\delta - \delta |S_jA|^p - \delta \int_Q |\nabla^j \phi|^p \, dx - c \gamma \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \phi|^p \, dx$$

$$\geq -\delta - \delta |S_jA|^p - \delta \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx$$

$$- c \gamma \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \phi|^p \, dx.$$

Hence, we can find a sequence of positive numbers $\{\lambda_i^{(j)}\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}}$ such that for every $i \in \mathbb{N}$

$$I_1 \geq -\left( \nu^{(j)} - \alpha \Theta_p \right) \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx$$

$$- \lambda_i^{(j)} \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \phi|^p \, dx - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_jA|^p.$$

Here $\lambda_i^{(j)} = \lambda_i^{(j)}(M_i^{(j)}, j, p, \alpha, \mu)$ for every fixed $i \in \mathbb{N}$. Adapting to the present situation inequality (3.3) we get

$$I_2 = \int_Q \left[ (f_i^{(j)})_\alpha(S_jA + \nabla^j \phi) - (f_i^{(j)})_\alpha(S_jA) \right] \, dx \geq -h_i^{(j)}(S_jA)$$

$$+ \left( \nu^{(j)} - \alpha \Theta_p \right) \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_jA|^2 + |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |\nabla^j \phi|^2 \, dx.$$
Moreover, assuming without any loss of generality that \( \beta \geq 1 \),
\[
I_3 \geq \frac{\alpha \theta_p}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right) \frac{p-2}{2} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
+ \frac{\alpha \theta_p}{2} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 + |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right) \frac{p-2}{2} |S_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
+ \frac{\alpha \theta_p \beta^2}{4} \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 \right) \frac{p-2}{2} \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
\geq \frac{\alpha \theta_p \beta^2}{4} \left( \mu^2 + |S_j A|^2 \right) \frac{p-2}{2} \int_Q |A_j \nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx. 
\]

Let us now choose
\[
\alpha = \alpha(j) = \frac{\nu(j)}{2\theta_p},
\]
and \( \beta = \beta(j) > 0 \) such that
\[
\frac{\alpha(j) \theta_p (\beta(j))^2}{4} \geq \lambda_i(j),
\]
we obtain
\[
\int_Q \left[ F^{(j)}_i(A + \nabla^{j-1} \varphi) - F^{(j)}_i(A) \right] \, dx = I_1 + I_2 + I_3 \\
\geq \nu(j) \frac{\theta_p}{4 \theta_p} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \right) \frac{p-2}{2} |\nabla^{j-1} \varphi|^2 \, dx \\
- h^{(j)}_i(S_j A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_j A|^p, 
\]
so that \((a')\) holds. Finally, condition \((b')\) follows by \((4.8)\).

\[\square\]

We are now ready to prove Theorem 1.2.

**Proof of Theorem 1.2.**

**Step 1. Case** \(1 < p < 2\).

We start by applying Lemma 4.1 with \( j = k \), \( \nu^{(k)} = \nu \) and
\[
f^{(k)}_i(A) = f(A), \quad h^{(k)}_i(A) = 0 \quad \text{for every} \ A \in E_k, \ i \in \mathbb{N}.
\]
Then, we apply again \( k - 2 \) times Theorem 4.1 with \( j = k-1, k-2, \ldots, 2 \) respectively, with
\[
\nu(j) = \frac{\nu}{4^{k-j}},
\]
and, for every \( A \in E^{k-j}_k \) and \( i \in \mathbb{N} \),
\[
f^{(j)}_i(A) = F^{(j+1)}_i(A).
\]

Accordingly, the functions \( h^{(j)}_i \) will be chosen as
\[
h^{(k-1)}_i(A) = \frac{1}{i} + \frac{1}{i} |S_k A|^p + \lambda_i^{(k)} |A_k A|^p,
\]
and, for \( j = k-2, \ldots, 2 \),
\[
h^{(j)}_i(A) = \frac{k-j}{i} + \frac{1}{i} \sum_{r=j+1}^k |S_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_{j+1} A|^p + \lambda_i^{(j+1)} |A_{j+1} A|^p \\
+ \sum_{r=j+2}^k \lambda_i^{(r)} |A_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_{j+1} A|^p,
\]
where the sequences \( \{ \lambda_i^{(j)} \}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) are given by Lemma 4.1. In this way after the last step, corresponding to \( j = 2 \), we obtain a sequence \( \{ F_i^{(2)} \}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) of functions \( F_i^{(2)} : \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \to \mathbb{R} \) given by

\[
F_i^{(2)}(A) = f(S_k \ldots S_2 A) + \frac{\lambda_i^{(2)}}{i} |A_2 A|^p + \sum_{r=3}^{k} \frac{\lambda_i^{(r)}}{i} |A_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_2 A|^p.
\]

Here for \( r = 2, \ldots, k \), the sequence \( \{ \lambda_i^{(r)} \}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) is that one given in the proof of Lemma 4.1. The functions \( F_i^{(2)} \) just defined have the following properties:

(a') (strict 1-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)

\[
\int_Q \left[ F_i^{(2)}(A + \nabla \varphi) - F_i^{(2)}(A) \right] dx \geq -h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_2 A|^p
\]

\[
+ \frac{\nu}{4k-1} \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{k-2}{2}} |\nabla \varphi|^2 dx - \lambda_i^{(2)} |A_2 A|^p
\]

\[
\geq -h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_2 A|^p - \lambda_i^{(2)} |A_2 A|^p
\]

for every \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \), for every \( \varphi \in C^1_c(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-1}}) \), and for every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \);

(b') (growth condition)

\[
|F_i^{(2)}(A)| \leq L_i^{(2)}(1 + |A|^p) \quad \forall A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k}, \forall i \in \mathbb{N},
\]

with \( L_i^{(2)} = L_i^{(2)}(\nu, M, p, \mu) \) for every fixed \( i \in \mathbb{N} \);

(c) \( F_i^{(2)} \) extends \( f \)

\[
F_i^{(2)}(A) = f(A) \quad \forall A \in E_k, \forall i \in \mathbb{N}.
\]

Now, for every \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \) and \( i \in \mathbb{N} \), we set

\[
F_i(A) := \inf \left\{ \int_Q F_i^{(2)}(A + \nabla \varphi(x)) dx : \varphi \in C^\infty_{per}(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^{k-1}}) \right\}.
\]

From property (a') it follows that for every \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \) and for every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \)

\[
F_i^{(2)}(A) - h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_2 A|^p - \lambda_i^{(2)} |A_2 A|^p \leq F_i(A) \leq F_i^{(2)}(A).
\]

(4.9)

Noticing that for every \( A \in E_k \)

\[
\lim_{i \to +\infty} h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) = \lim_{i \to +\infty} \left[ \frac{k-2}{i} + \frac{1}{i} \sum_{r=3}^{k} |S_r \ldots S_2 A|^p \right] = 0,
\]

from property (c) and (4.9) we have (1.6). Finally, (1.7) follows from (b') and (4.9).

Step 2. Case \( p \geq 2 \).

We first apply Lemma 4.2 with \( j = k \), \( \nu^{(k)} = \nu \) and

\[
f_i^{(k)}(A) = f(A), \quad h_i^{(k)}(A) = 0 \quad \text{for every } A \in E_k, i \in \mathbb{N}.
\]

At this point, we apply again \( k-2 \) times Lemma 4.2 with \( j = k-1, k-2, \ldots, 2 \) respectively, with

\[

\nu^{(j)} = \nu \left( \frac{\theta_p}{4\Theta_p} \right)^{k-j+1},
\]

where the sequences \( \{ \lambda_i^{(j)} \}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) are given by Lemma 4.1. In this way after the last step, corresponding to \( j = 2 \), we obtain a sequence \( \{ F_i^{(2)} \}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) of functions \( F_i^{(2)} : \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \to \mathbb{R} \) given by

\[
F_i^{(2)}(A) = f(S_k \ldots S_2 A) + \frac{\lambda_i^{(2)}}{i} |A_2 A|^p + \sum_{r=3}^{k} \frac{\lambda_i^{(r)}}{i} |A_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_2 A|^p.
\]

Finally, (1.7) follows from (b') and (4.9).
and, for every \( A \in E_k^{N^k-j} \) and \( i \in \mathbb{N} \),

\[
F_i^{(j)}(A) = F_i^{(j+1)}(A), \quad h_i^{(j)}(A) = \frac{k - j}{i} + \frac{1}{i} \sum_{r=j+1}^{k} |S_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_{j+1} A|^p.
\]

Finally, when \( j = 2 \), we obtain a sequence \( \{F_i^{(2)}\}_{i \in \mathbb{N}} \) of functions \( F_i^{(2)} : \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \to \mathbb{R} \) given by

\[
F_i^{(2)}(A) = f(S_k \ldots S_2 A) + \frac{1}{2} \sum_{r=3}^{k} L_i^{(r)}(S_r S_{r-1} \ldots S_2 A, A; S_{r-1} \ldots S_2 A)
+ L_i^{(2)}(S_2 A, A_2 A),
\]

(4.10)

where we set

\[
L_i^{(r)}(A, B) := -\frac{\nu(i)}{2 \Theta_p}(\mu^2 + |A|^2)^{\frac{r}{2}} + \frac{\nu(i)}{2 \Theta_p}(\mu^2 + |A|^2 + (\beta^r(i))^2 |B|^2)^{\frac{r}{2}}, \quad r = 2, \ldots, k.
\]

The functions \( F_i^{(2)} \) just defined have the following properties:

(a’) (strict 1-quasiconvexity up to a perturbation)

\[
\int_Q \left[ F_i^{(2)}(A + \nabla \varphi) - F_i^{(2)}(A) \right] dx \geq -h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_2 A|^p
+ \frac{\nu(i)}{4 \Theta_p} \left( \frac{\beta(i)}{\Theta_p} \right)^j \int_Q \left( \mu^2 + |A|^2 + |\nabla \varphi|^2 \right)^{\frac{r}{2}} |\nabla \varphi|^2 dx
\geq -h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_2 A|^p
\]

for every \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \), for every \( \varphi \in C_c^1(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^k-1}) \), and for every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \);

(b’) (growth condition)

\[
|F_i^{(2)}(A)| \leq L_i^{(2)}(1 + |A|^p) \quad \forall A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k}, \forall i \in \mathbb{N}.
\]

(c) \( F_i^{(2)} \) extends \( f \)

\[
F_i^{(2)}(A) = f(A) \quad \forall A \in E_k, \forall i \in \mathbb{N}.
\]

For every \( i \in \mathbb{N} \), we define now \( F_i \) as the quasiconvexification of the function \( F_i^{(2)} \):

\[
F_i(A) := \inf \left\{ \int_Q F_i^{(2)}(A + \nabla \varphi(x)) dx : \varphi \in C_{per}^\infty(Q; \mathbb{R}^{N^k-1}) \right\}
\]

for every \( A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k} \). From property (a’) and by the definition of \( F_i \), we have

\[
F_i^{(2)}(A) - h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) - \frac{1}{i} - \frac{1}{i} |S_2 A|^p \leq F_i(A) \leq F_i^{(2)}(A), \quad \forall A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k}.
\]

(4.11)

Noticing that

\[
\lim_{i \to +\infty} h_i^{(2)}(S_2 A) = 0 \quad \text{for all} \quad A \in \mathbb{R}^{N^k},
\]

from property (c) and (4.11) we have (1.6). Finally, (1.7) follows from (b’) and (4.11).

\[\square\]

4.1. Proof of Theorem 1.3. To conclude the section, we give the proof of Theorem 1.3.

Proof of Theorem 1.3. It is enough to adapt the proof of [8, Theorem 3] and to use Theorem 1.3.

\[\square\]
5. Appendix

This section contains some auxiliary results used in the rest of the paper. First, we give the proof of Proposition 2.5.

Proof of Proposition 2.5. Since $A \in E_{k}^{N^{k-s}}$ and $B \in A_{s+1}E_{k}^{N^{k-s}}$, we can write $A = S_{s+1}A$ and $B = A_{s+1}C$, for some $C \in E_{k}^{N^{k-s}}$. As a first step, let us prove that for every $r, l \in \{k-s+1, \ldots, k\}$ with $r \neq l$ we have

$$A^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C^{T_{l-s}} = A \cdot C^{T_{r-s}} = A^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C. \quad (5.1)$$

To fix the ideas, let us assume $r < l$. By definition of transpose operators

$$A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}^{T_{l-s}} = A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}^{T_{l-s}} = A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}$$

for every $i_{1}, i_{2}, \ldots, i_{k} = 1, \ldots, N$. In the last expression, since $A \in E_{k}^{N^{k-s}}$ and $r, l > k - s$, we can exchange the indices in $r$-th and $l$-th position in the first factor, obtaining

$$A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}} = A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}$$

Summing last result with respect to $i_{1}, \ldots, i_{k}$ and renumbering the indices

$$A^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C^{T_{l-s}} = \sum_{i_{1}, \ldots, i_{k}}^{1, N} A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}}^{T_{l-s}} = \sum_{i_{1}, \ldots, i_{k}}^{1, N} A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}} = \sum_{i_{1}, \ldots, i_{k}}^{1, N} A_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}} \cdot C_{i_{1}i_{2} \ldots i_{k}} = A \cdot C^{T_{r-s}}.$$

In the same way one can prove the second equality in (5.1).

Let us now prove the proposition. We have

$$(s + 1)^{2}A \cdot B = (s + 1)^{2} (S_{s+1}A \cdot A_{s+1}C)$$

$$= \left( A + A^{T_{k-s+1}} + \cdots + A^{T_{k-s}} \right) \cdot \left( S_{s}C - (C^{T_{k-s+1}} + \cdots + C^{T_{k-s}}) \right)$$

$$= sA \cdot C - \sum_{r=k-s+1}^{k} A^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C^{T_{r-s}} - \sum_{r=k-s+1}^{k} A \cdot C^{T_{r-s}}$$

$$+ s \sum_{r=k-s+1}^{k} A^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C - s \sum_{l=k-s+1}^{k} \sum_{r \neq l}^{k} A^{T_{r-s}} \cdot C^{T_{l-s}}$$

Since the sum of the first two terms is zero, using relation (5.1) we get

$$(s + 1)^{2}A \cdot B = (s - 1) \sum_{r=k-s+1}^{k} A \cdot C^{T_{r-s}} - \sum_{l=k-s+1}^{k} \sum_{r \neq l}^{k} A \cdot C^{T_{r-s}}$$

$$= (s - 1) \sum_{r=k-s+1}^{k} A \cdot C^{T_{r-s}} - (s - 1) \sum_{r=k-s+1}^{k} A \cdot C^{T_{r-s}} = 0.$$

In the remaining part of the section we state some lemmas that are proved in [8].

Lemma 5.1. Let $X$ be a Hilbert space, and let $g : X \to \mathbb{R}$ be given by

$$g(x) := \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 \right)^{\frac{1}{2}}. \quad (5.2)$$
For every \( p > 1 \), there exist two constants \( \theta_p > 0 \) and \( \Theta_p > 0 \) such that for every \( \mu \geq 0 \) the function \( g \) defined in (5.2) satisfies the following inequalities
\[
\theta_p (\mu^2 + |x|^2 + |y|^2)^{\frac{7}{2}} |y|^2 \leq g(x + y) - g(x) - \nabla g(x) \cdot y
\]
\[
\leq \Theta_p (\mu^2 + |x|^2 + |y|^2)^{\frac{7}{2}} |y|^2
\]
for every \( x, y \in X \).

**Lemma 5.2.** Let \( X, Y \) be Hilbert spaces and let \( p > 1, \mu \geq 0, \beta \geq 0 \). Let \( g_\beta : X \times Y \rightarrow \mathbb{R} \) be given by
\[
g_\beta(x, y) := \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 + \beta^2 |y|^2 \right)^{\frac{7}{2}}.
\]
Then
\[
g_\beta(x + \xi, y + \eta) - g_\beta(x, y) - \nabla_x g_\beta(x, y) \cdot \xi - \nabla_y g_\beta(x, y) \cdot \eta
\]
\[
\geq \theta_p \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 + |\xi|^2 + \beta^2 |y|^2 + |\beta^2 |\eta|^2 \right)^{\frac{7}{2}} \left( |\xi|^2 + \beta^2 |\eta|^2 \right)
\]
for every \( x, \xi \in X, y, \eta \in Y \), where \( \theta_p \) is the first constant in Lemma 5.1. Therefore, if \( p \geq 2 \), we have
\[
g_\beta(x + \xi, y + \eta) - g_\beta(x, y) - \nabla_x g_\beta(x, y) \cdot \xi - \nabla_y g_\beta(x, y) \cdot \eta
\]
\[
\geq \theta_p \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 + |\xi|^2 + \beta^2 |y|^2 + |\beta^2 |\eta|^2 \right)^{\frac{7}{2}} \left( |\xi|^2 + \beta^2 |\eta|^2 \right)
\]
for every \( x, \xi \in X, y, \eta \in Y \).

**Lemma 5.3.** Let \( X \) be a Hilbert space and let \( 1 < p \leq 2 \). Then for every \( \mu \geq 0 \) and every \( 0 < \delta < 1 \) we have
\[
\left( \mu^2 + |x + y|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{p}} |x + y|^2 \leq 2 \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{p}} |x|^2 + 2 \left( \mu^2 + |y|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{p}} |y|^2,
\]
\[
\delta^{\frac{p-2}{p}} \left( \mu^2 + |y|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{p}} |y|^2 \leq \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 + |y|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{p}} |y|^2 + \delta \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{p}} |x|^2
\]
for every \( x, y \in X \).

**Lemma 5.4.** Let \( 1 < p \leq 2 \). Then
\[
b^p \leq 8c \left( \mu^2 + a^2 + b^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{p}} b^2 + \varepsilon a^p + \varepsilon \mu^p
\]
for every \( a \geq 0, b \geq 0, \mu \geq 0 \), and \( 0 < \varepsilon < 1 \).

**Lemma 5.5.** Let \( X \) be a Hilbert space, and let \( f \in C^1(X) \cap C^2(X \setminus \{0\}) \). Assume that there exist \( p > 1, C > 0 \), and \( \mu \geq 0 \) such that
\[
|\nabla^2 f(x)| \leq C \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}}
\]
for every \( x \in X \setminus \{0\} \). Then
\[
|\nabla f(x + y) - \nabla f(x)| \leq K_p C \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 + |y|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |y|
\]
for every \( x, y \in X \), where \( K_p \geq 1 \) is a constant depending only on \( p \).

**Lemma 5.6.** Let \( X \) be a Hilbert space and let \( f \in C^1(X) \). Assume that there exist \( p > 1 \) and \( \mu \geq 0 \) such that
\[
|\nabla f(x + y) - \nabla f(x)| \leq \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 + |y|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |y|
\]
for every \( x, y \in X \). If \( 1 < p \leq 2 \), then for every \( \varepsilon > 0 \) there exists a constant \( c_1 = c_1(\varepsilon, p) > 0 \), depending only on \( \varepsilon \) and \( p \), such that
\[
|f(x + y + z) - f(x + y) - \nabla f(x) \cdot z|
\]
\[
\leq \varepsilon \left( \mu^2 + |x|^2 + |y|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |y|^2 + c_1 \left( \mu^2 + |z|^2 \right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |z|^2
\]
for every $x, y, z \in X$.

If $p \geq 2$, then for every $\varepsilon > 0$ there exists a constant $c_2 = c_2(\varepsilon, p) > 0$, depending only on $\varepsilon$ and $p$, such that

$$|f(x + y + z) - f(x + y) - \nabla f(x) \cdot z| \leq \varepsilon \left(\mu^2 + |x|^2 + |y|^2\right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |y|^2 + c_2 \left(\mu^2 + |x|^2\right)^{\frac{p-2}{2}} |z|^2 + c_2 |z|^p$$

for every $x, y, z \in X$.

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