Contemporary Social Policy in the E.U.

Professor John Wilton

Lecture 4

The principles and concepts of E.U. social policy - harmonisation, mutual recognition, cohesion and convergence
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Additional sources:

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Additional sources:


Talani, L.S. *European Political Economy*. Political Science Perspectives, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004 (Revised 2013), Ch.6 and Ch.7
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- what are the defining characteristics and underlying principles categorising E.U. social policy?

**CONTEXT**

- historical and theoretical frame

- underlying principles
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- there is a parallel process of E.U. social integration accompanying developments in political and economic integration (spillover)
- E.U. ‘single social areas’?
- A ‘europeanisation’ of social policy?
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1. Harmonisation and convergence

2. Diversity and mutual recognition
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- Harmonisation made more urgent, but also more complex, by preparations for EMU – and aim and need to maintain principle of freedom of movement in enlarged E.U.
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BUT, by Maastricht Treaty (1993) Social Charter stated account should be taken of “diverse forms of national practices, in particular in the field of contractual relations”

- stressed the need to maintain the competitiveness of the Community’s economy
Harmonisation of social policy not defined as, or suggested to mean, complete unification of social systems and social policy

- But acceptance of certain common principles and standards of social policy
- harmonisation seen as means of avoiding ‘welfare tourism’
  - and prevent national social policy becoming bargaining counter between member states
  - and avoid distortion of economic ‘competition’
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Single European Act (1985) – convergence in fiscal and employment law

- improvement in infrastructures and standards of education and training

- for competitive Single European Market harmonisation of social policy necessary
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- BUT Jacques Delors, as Head of the E.U. Commission, accepted various specific cultures, traditions and social policy models of member states meant harmonisation across all social policy areas impossible.

- advocated COHERENCE/COHESION,

- Acceptance of diversity and ‘MUTUAL RECOGNITION’
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COHESION = Member states ‘encouraged’ to co-operate and co-ordinate their efforts in order to bring about greater economic and social cohesion between the regions.
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‘Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers’, 1989
- harmonisation in context of freedom of movement – object of harmonising conditions of residence in all member states
- harmonise duration of paid leave from work
- harmonise safety conditions at workplace
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‘Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers’, 1989
- allowed member states to continue with national differences in social protection systems
- Social Charter (Maastricht Treaty 1993) – no mention of harmonisation
- respect for national specificity
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‘Open Method of Co-ordination’ (OMC)
- formerly launched as an E.U. process at Lisbon E.U. Council of March 2000
- purpose was to spread legislative (and therefore, policy-making) ‘best practices’ across E.U. Member States – primarily in areas where E.U. had no formal regulatory competence
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- 2004 enlargement brought different issues and problems
  - legacy of bureaucratic state collectivist systems
    - different institutional legacies
  - nature and character of revolutions
  - 1990s economic transformations
    - made harmonisation less likely
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SUMMARY:

1. Each enlargement made harmonisation less likely

2. ‘Deepening’ versus ‘widening’ – contradiction between economic and monetary union necessitating social policy convergence and expansion of E.U. complicating convergence
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SUMMARY:

3. Differences in social policy in each member state attributed to stage of social and economic development of each country – plus specific forms of national social policy resulting from social, economic, political and cultural traditions
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SUMMARY:

- NEVERTHELESS - can identify some over-arching principles of E.U. social policy

- based on ‘core values’ of social progress (i.e. high levels of employment, social protection, raising living standards and quality of life, promoting social cohesion and social justice)
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SUMMARY:

‘Europeanisation’ of social policy?
- framework, of principles of social protection, social welfare, social justice, equality of opportunity
- A balance between convergence, diversity, mutual recognition
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SUMMARY:

‘Europeanisation’ of social policy?

- A multi-level, varied approach model of E.U. social policy integration

- different social policy areas and at different social policy levels, different integrated approaches and degrees of integration employed