Political Issues and Social Policy in the E.U.

Professor John Wilton

Lecture 3

Harmonisation, mutual recognition, and the 'europeanisation' of social policy?

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Additional sources:

Duina, F. and Raunio, T. (2007) 'The open method of co-ordination and national parliaments: further marginalization or new opportunities?', ***Journal of European Public Policy***, 14:4, pp.489-506.

Journal of European Public Policy, Vol.14, no.5, 2007. (Special issue: Mutual Recognition as a New Mode of Governance)

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- what are the defining characteristics and underlying principles categorising E.U. social policy?

CONTEXT

- historical and theoretical frame

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- underlying principles

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- there is a parallel process of E.U. social integration accompanying developments in political and economic integration (spillover)
- What is the 'politics' of E.U. social integration?
- 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

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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

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- 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

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Communitarianism

versus

Cosmopolitanism