

European Social Model in the 21st Century

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Abstract

Due to the fact that multiple ideologies and different social models exist in the world today, with different consequences, it appears crucial for the EU to develop and sustain its model of economic and social regulation. This paper focuses on the way the European Union develops its social model in the forthcoming decades. Different models in EU member states mean that it is not possible to have a unique model so the paper will look at what the general approach should be. This work is divided into the following sections; the first section contains the theoretical approach to the social model and defines it; the second part is devoted to the European current social politics and the way the EU has been working in the field of social politics; and the third part looks more closely at the changes going on in the EU, focusing on the problem of globalization and new trends, especially into the way families and intimate relations are changing. This is important because individuals, lifestyle and the changing nature of the family are crucial for social politics. The fourth part is devoted to the new trends and expectations, especially after the Lisbon Agenda and economic crises, and to finding out the possible consequences they can have for the social model of the EU. A theoretical approach is combined with the available data so the full notion of the problem can be presented.

The European continent has long been recognized as the part of the world where citizens are empowered by different mechanisms enabling them to control their political elites. Democracy has been a hallmark of Europe especially after World War II and the formation of the European Economic Community which consolidated the pathway towards further integrations later on. The welfare state was the product of these politics and has since been propagated strongly, in different manners, depending on the state.

This paper is focusing on the transformation of the European social model, which has been observed lately, especially in the last decades due to the changed conditions in which we now live. The focus is on implications this shift has both on the causes of the change and the response of the welfare state. It can even be argued that we are living a completely new life compared to a couple of decades ago because the world has become much more unstable and nothing seems to be constant as before. Therefore, the social model had to be adapted and accompanied by new policies which will contribute to the wellbeing of its citizens.

Problems of the European social model in this paper are discussed on different levels and it is divided into sections. The first part presents the new circumstances which we face. The second goes briefly through the dynamics of the traditional welfare state, while the third section develops theoretical implications of the European social model. The next two sections go on with the changes of the European social model in practice and the last part is dedicated to future expectations. A conclusion summarizes the debate.

What Has Changed?

The twentieth century has seen massive shifts in European politics, especially concerning the European Union. One of the key political issues at the end of the last century was the fall of the communist regime which meant that the EU had to change its political aims towards its neighboring countries which had become independent. Therefore, a new course needed to be undertaken.

In a little more than a decade after the communist breakdown the EU has changed the borders and included twelve new members. Also, adoption of the Lisbon Treaty and all the changes that have been made have significantly altered the political position of the EU. In many areas today the EU stands as the strong and influential actor, often acting more unitarily than before. One of the areas that have changed as well is the social policy and welfare. But changes in the social policy did not come only as a consequence of the political factors but there have been many other effects. Among these the key ones are: globalization, new technologies and a knowledge based economy, lifestyle change and the new family relations. It must be emphasized here that there are certainly more important factors but due to the limited space these will be mentioned only briefly.

Traditional Welfare

As Adnett and Hardy notice: “A distinguishing feature of economic integration in Europe has been a concern for social, as well as economic development” (2005, p. xviii). Even from the very beginnings of European Economic Community development, the welfare and care of its citizens was one of the key issues. Before the actual introduction of the new social model there was a period of the traditional welfare state which set the model for future development. Suspicion of the market and its mechanisms as a means to produce outcomes that would be acceptable for the majority of people, or at least for the political elites in Europe, led to the formation of the traditional social-democratic states. It is important to stress that Socialism in Western Europe was never an acceptable ideology; however, many of its sources were useful in creating welfare states in Europe after World War II. “The economic theory of socialism has always been inadequate because it underestimated the ability of capitalism to reproduce, adapt and encourage greater productivity” (Giddens, 1999, p. 13). Combining elements of social policies with democratic principles was the only acceptable way. It is important here to outline the model of the traditional welfare state because it is the problems and impossibility of implementing it in the new era that actually created the current welfare programs.

Certainly, one of the key figures of the theory was Keynes, who believed that the state should be involved in the economy because the market cannot provide acceptable outcomes. This actually meant that the state must care for its citizens because otherwise their social position could be threatened. After the War it was necessary for the state to be more involved in the economy. Keynes was also suspicious of irrational characteristics of the market and thought that it was necessary that it was controlled and the best way to control it was by the state interference. Moreover, he was convinced that the major industrial forces must be handled by the state because private ownership would negatively influence their dynamics and production. Allowing these industries to enter the market would maybe mean their deterioration and underperformance because the market would not be able to control them. Among these, Giddens (1999) also adds domination of the state over the civil society, collectivism, full employment, egalitarianism, one-way modernization, internationalism and attachment to the bipolar world as the main characteristics of classic social-democracy.

All of the previously stated could function while development of the state and factors beyond the state were still underdeveloped. The first serious challenges to the classic welfare state were already present in the 70's and 80' due to its inability to adapt to the new circumstances. Neoliberalism, strongly encouraged in the USA and UK was also pressing welfare in Europe, but the fall of the USSR, which brought along many insights and equally important, globalization. This meant that the state needed much more flexibility and was among the key factors that pointed to the need of transforming the classic, traditional social-democracy in Europe.

Defining Social Model

It was necessary to present the traditional welfare state and its basic way of functioning so it is easier to understand how the new welfare and social models are formed and developed. The key issue in the European Social Model is to have an economic growth coupled with social cohesion. Hay, Watson and Wincott imply that "there is, as yet, no commonly agreed definition. Indeed, a number of different senses have been used interchangeably and, as such, frequently conflated" (Hay, Watson & Wincott, 1999, p. 14). As Jepsen and Serrano Pascual note, one of the first definitions of the European Social Model (ESM) was presented in the Commission's White Paper on social policy and it was defined as: "a set of common values, namely the commitment to democracy, personal freedom, social dialogue, equal opportunities for all, adequate social security and solidarity towards the weaker individuals in the society" (Jepsen & Serano Pascual, 2006, p. 26). A shift in the normative definition was seen in 2000 when conclusions were made that modernizing the ESM was necessary and these included: the need for education and training, lifelong learning, reforms of the social security systems and promotion of social inclusion (Jepsen & Serano Pascual, 2006). The key conclusion from comparison of the two definitions is that risk has become individualized and it is the individual that must deal with risks (Ibid.). Accordingly, the social model of the specific state is based on specific policies and aims which are based in the welfare and social policy. However, it is not only the welfare policies that define the social model but most often it comprises the wider circle of activity and is determined by the historical, political, economic, class and social relations.

Due to the fact that since the very formation of the European Economic Community in the 1970s there have been significant differences in social

policies and welfare, it was impossible to have a single and commonly accepted model. Such a policy has not been developed since and especially now that the EU now has 27 members, it appears even more difficult and is not even preferable as a solution. However, some of the member states have similar systems which are at least based on the same pillars. Because of these differences and also common traits, it is inevitable to speak of regimes and models rather than specific or all-encompassing scenarios (Esping-Andersen & Myles, 2008).

Conceptually speaking, Hay, Watson and Wincott (1999) made a four-fold division of the European social models. Firstly, the ESM comprised common institutional architecture in Europe. Secondly, it means a complex of different national models which are identified in Europe. In third sense the transnational aspect of the ESM is emphasized, meaning that national social policies are no longer tenable but it is rather the transnational level that dominates in formulating the social system. The fourth type comprehends the social model into wider political processes and integrations as the most productive means of developing the social policies (Hay, Watson & Wincott, 1999). It is inevitable to have a certain overlapping in previous definitions but these are the conceptual meanings of what the ESM actually embraces and how much it is linked to already mentioned wider social circumstances.

Esping Andersen made a three-fold division of welfare models, on the basis of "degree of de-commodification and modes of stratification, or if you wish, solidarities" (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 74). The first is the liberal welfare regime, commonly connected with the United Kingdom and the USA, and characterized by a minimal state, individualized risks and market solutions (Ibid.). Distinctive for this type of a welfare state are: social guarantees mostly restricted to "bad risks", narrowly defined "social risks", and encouragement of market (Ibid.).

The second cluster of regimes are social-democratic. These are Nordic states. "Here, the historical corporatist-statist legacy was upgraded to cater to the new 'post-industrial' class structure" (Esping-Andersen, 1990, p. 27). Crucial characteristics of this welfare type are extensive social coverage, state domination, egalitarianism, de-commodification of the state, national health care and full employment.

Finally, the Continental Europe is dominated by the Conservative welfare regime. "The essence of a conservative regime lies in its blend of status segmentation and familialism" (Esping-Andersen, 1999, p. 81). Esping-Andersen finds family relations one of the key aspects of these regimes and it

is “the security of the chief (male) breadwinner [that] assumes fundamental importance. The familialist bias is additionally reinforced by the dominance of social insurance” (Esping-Andersen, 2002, p. 16). Due to the number of systems that fall under this regime, there are many differences but these are mostly characterized by corporatism, compulsory social insurance and wide health insurance, strong influence of family and family relations on welfare.

Giddens adds the fourth type to Esping-Andersen’s cluster and it is “the Mediterranean one (Spain, Portugal, Greece), which also has a fairly low tax base and depends heavily upon provision from the family” (Giddens, 1999, p. 15). Besides, he adds, even a fifth model could be included today and these would be the post-Communist states which are trying to develop the Western European welfare model (Giddens, 2007).

Adnett and Hardy (2005) also recognize the four models but label them differently, still defining each by the similar patterns as in the previous passages: traditional-rudimentary model (present in Southern Europe), liberal-individualist (Anglo-Irish), Romano-Germanic (conservative-corporatist) and Social democratic (Nordic states).

Appreciating the differences among all the previously mentioned models or regimes, it is clear that one can hardly speak of a European Social Model. But, on the other hand, current shifts, especially globalization and homogenization of the EU are creating the same problems for each of these states and all of them need to face the same challenges. This does not imply that they are going in the same direction but the welfare regimes are going through a phase where rethinking is necessary. Besides, in each of these regimes, the same policy will not always have the same results and hardly will it be implemented in the same manner, just due to the different social, economic, historical or political context.

How is the European Social Model Changing?

Knowing what the ESM means for European citizens now, what has actually changed in it and what are the ascendants that define it today? It is clear that the previously dominating stability, both economic and political, has now swapped place with uncertainty, especially economic. One of the key determinants for such an alteration is globalization, which brought the entire world much closer than it geographically actually is. Castells (2003) stresses that it was only in the late twentieth century that the world economy has become truly global due to the new infrastructure and information and

communication technologies, but helped with deregulation and liberalization by states and international institutions. This is crucial for the welfare state and social politics because the state and its institutions were not able to fully control the market and the internal economic structure. Rather, it was the connectedness and interdependence that influenced social policy.

The nation-state which used to be the only actor is not alone any more and sovereignty as well does not have the same meaning it used to. Borders are open and the new economic actors are entering the arena. Therefore, the social policy needs to be adapted to the new circumstances. When discussing how the new social-democracy should look, Giddens stresses “[a] healthy economy needs well-functioning markets, but it also needs a well developed public domain, in which the state retains its essential role” (Giddens, 2003, p. 7). It is then the new relation between the state and the market, but also between the state and its citizens that must be developed in order to establish the new welfare state. It is also crucially important to have a welfare model which is sustainable because it is evident at the moment that the previously unmonitored and careless spending inevitably led to financial crisis and instability.

The European Union today represents a political union of too many different member states. However, ever since establishing the ECC it is on account of an appreciation of diversity and differences that, it can be said that new social model must also be based on this assumption. It is the promotion of what is acceptable for everyone that is crucial: regional or national so differences can be overcome. Also, Esping-Andersen (2000) adds that arriving at common grounds in the EU would necessitate two basic assumptions around which there is already an agreed methodology: social accounting, so there is a common system of monitoring progress and objectives and developing adequate measures for incomes and expenditures. Presidency conclusions from the Nice Summit in 2000 set the strategic goal of the EU “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (European Council, 2000, annex 1). The Commission’s Social Policy Agenda “seeks to ensure the positive and dynamic interaction economic, employment and social policy, and ... [a]t the heart of the agenda is the modernization of European social model” (European Commission, 2000, p. 2).

The new social model for Europe must combine three strategic components: the state, market and family. More broadly speaking, it is the

role of these three factors that will determine how the new social model will look. Consequently, having that in mind, there are specific fields which need consideration and attention if we are to arrive at a conclusions that will be useful for the new context for European welfare. This paper pays special attention to already mentioned factors which define the European social model (globalization, new technologies and knowledge based economy, lifestyle change and the new family relations). Globalization has been sketched already but it is its other effects that are important in the context of this paper. The new welfare state must be ready to cope with deregulation and flexibility that inevitably follow it. Held is discussing new social-democracy and adds its task is “promotion of those core values and principles which affirm that each and every person is treated, in principle, with equal concern and respect” (Held, 2003, p. 147). If such is not the case, it is social exclusion that will inevitably be the outcome of unsuccessful policies which will be discussed shortly.

New Social Model in Europe

If we are to define the new social model for Europe, it is necessary to redefine the concept of a welfare state in the context of risks. The classic welfare states were organized to remedy the risk after it had already happened. For example, if a worker lost his job and is unable to find one for a while, the state was there to provide social assistance and help him/her live while being unemployed. This was the concept of the static welfare which did not act in advance. The consequence of such an approach was passive citizenry: people who are not willing to invest in themselves and in their human capital. Also, responsibility is in this manner transferred to the state and citizens do not feel the need to improve their position because it is the state that will provide and satisfy their vital needs.

The new welfare state must be active and build citizens who are active and responsible. In order to create a more just and equal society, the state must find a means of intervention before problems actually happen and not after them (Giddens, 2007) and make a distinction between the two types of activism. The first meaning is that “welfare services should be designed to help people help themselves” (Giddens, 2007, p. 100) and the second referring to social activism so citizens turn more to local and civil society organizations which can be helpful in delivering welfare programs (Ibid. p. 102). Citizens should be turned towards their own social capital and

knowledge and not disinterested in obtaining needed skills. The state should act as the provider of services which encourage citizens to search for a workplace that will enable them to escape poverty and create living conditions which are acceptable for them. Giddens (2007) discusses the enabling state, but believes that it is the ensuring state that is more encompassing and a more acceptable term. Shuppert uses the term *the ensuring state* to refer to the redefined welfare state and for him “the ‘ensuring state’ emphasises the responsibility of the state in areas where non-state agents play a dominant role in the provision of public services” (Schuppert, 2003, 57).

Before going into other aspects of new welfare it is the changing form of a family that must be examined. The traditional family with the male breadwinner who is responsible for the welfare of his family is no longer dominating the social structure not only in Europe, but elsewhere in the world. One of the key issues for such a change is the redefined position of women. Firstly, women have equal rights with men which inevitably contributed to the second issue of their potential independence from men i.e. from husbands. Thirdly, women who have jobs are financially independent which makes them manage their own life independently of men. All of this implies that women are no longer binded to the house only but are able to perform regular jobs. Consequently, it is not the housework that is their only obligation. Besides, raising children is no longer only the duty of mothers but it is also fathers who are equally entitled to help with children and provide care. Women used to leave work after the child was born but today they are provided with parental leave, as well as fathers. All of this significantly influenced welfare provisions. In the EU, these provisions vary considerably and it is not only the legal provisions that define these policies but it is also the cultural traditions (Taylor-Gooby, 2001, p. 12).

All of this is associated with another aspect of social life, which is that stable families which endure for the whole span of life are losing their majority to non-standard households. These include the non-married couple who do not step into marriage and single parent households (for different reasons which cannot be discussed here due to the limited space). Such a change has important relations with welfare because the new circumstances alter the way the state replies to these changes. Whether it is non-working or one-income households, there is a serious threat here of child poverty and one of the key aims of the EU is extermination of child poverty (European Commission, 2000). Child poverty can alter the position of the child and

significantly contribute to its disability to later provide the society to its full capacity.

Also, young cohorts often do not have the smooth transition from the school or faculty to work, this being the problem especially in Southern Europe (Esping-Andersen, 2000). It is young families as well who do not have stable jobs that can fall into the trap of poverty and find themselves socially excluded. Battling social exclusion is another of the EU aims (European Commission, 2000) and it is a concept that is specifically related to the new social environment, especially because it depicts the wider social environment of the person. "Social exclusion is ... defined as the state in which certain poor people feel obliged to live outside accepted social norms in order to cope with poverty and to survive financially" (Walker, 2005, p. 79). So it reflects not only financial instability but also exclusion from the society and an inability to get involved in a normal life, which often implies finding a proper job. Rumford (2002), basing his arguments on Procacci's theory criticizes the concept of social exclusion as too individualistic. But this is not the full picture of the problem because this is exactly the social affair, often independent of the individual.

The new social model for Europe must embrace all the mechanisms at its disposal to combat social exclusion by policies which entail effective measures. One of the key areas is certainly employment. Reducing unemployment is as well one of the aims of the EU for the forthcoming period. Efficiency often entails flexibility but European welfare regimes have always been recognizable by their protective social policy, often repressing efficiency. The new social model must be especially friendly towards female employment. It has already been emphasized how the family has changed and it is this issue that needs reconsideration. If we are to create a society of equality and equal opportunities, the state must care for female workers and their domestic duties and therefore set conditions which are favourable to women. Such policies will contribute to future generations because a "revised social model requires a future-oriented perspective, and must therefore focus on those who will become tomorrow's adults" (Esping-Andersen, 2000, p. 31).

Workers have traditionally been empowered in Europe, especially in contrast to the USA for example, however, it is the state that must protect workers and provide them with incentives for safer work places. This does not imply creating state funded jobs but creating a social environment where opportunities for proper jobs are adequate. Adaptability to new circumstances requires flexibility and the social model must be created in a way that citizens

can receive necessary education. Changing jobs most often means staying in the same field, but new knowledge and education is also necessary. Therefore, the state must fill the gap in this process and help its citizens when they are in transition within the labor market.

A knowledge-based economy is one of the EU goals and the Commission's Social Policy Agenda sets the development of human resources, upgrading skills, life-long learning, and access to quality education to be "of utmost importance in providing people with real opportunities to prepare for rapidly changing working conditions and the requirements of the knowledge-based economy" (European Commission, 2000, p. 31). However, this might be a dangerous step because there will remain a significant number of people who will not be able to follow technological pace and stay in touch with the ones who are qualified. This will especially refer to the elderly and pensioners, which is another field where the new social model must be adapted. Longer living today changed the concept of retirement and the especially the retirement age which will probably move even higher to above 70 in coming decades. Consequently, younger generations will find it more difficult to have a full career which would begin just after finishing their formal education. Current high pensions and generally the well being of pensioners in Western Europe is a case because of the so called 'golden years' in the previous century, but this does not imply that the same will remain. All of this can have a negative impact on youth because their work positions will be different compared to a couple of decades ago, which can lead to different living conditions after retirement, often being negative. However, younger generations will probably adapt to new circumstances due to three factors: due to higher education and skills they will be more adaptive and able to retrain, they will be more healthy and will live longer and women's employment will be more frequent and stable which will result in steady earnings and higher earnings, inevitably leading to advantages after retirement (Esping-Andersen, 2000).

There are now different approaches to retirement varying from state to state. Generally, there is a tendency of moving the retirement age to 65 and even more, but it can even be argued that the retirement age limit could be removed. One can support such a policy due to the already mentioned facts, the key being the one that citizens are often healthier than before and can work longer in their life. Beside, welfare states are becoming too expensive and any move towards lowering the burden of the state expenditures is welcome. Also, many workers find it difficult to give up work simply because

they are used to a specific pace of life and often very much dedicated to their job. There can even be a combination of allowing retired persons to work part time or even full time but in a way that the state subsidizes the earnings of the worker. The problem with this solution is that it can become too expensive not only for the employer but for the state as well, no matter how acceptable and favourable it is for the worker.

Lifestyle Change and the Social Model for the Future

All of the previously mentioned changes, both in the functioning of the welfare state and the life of the citizenry, tend to create a redefined social model in Europe. The crucial alteration in the process is lifestyle change. People tend to have different lives in different social environments and the state institutions, especially the welfare institutions, must change and adapt to the new circumstances. Conditions for wellbeing are not any longer social but are much more individualized and the state must provide its citizens with basic skills so they can live on their own. The social model must be adapted to the cultural and historical background but it must also look into the future and especially with the needs of children as future bearers of the welfare of society. The key aspects of the new social model for Europe have been described, and furthermore there are expectations concerning the future.

Firstly, the state will just be less able to finance needs of its citizens because it is becoming unsustainable and often does not mean better living conditions. Social exclusion often means withdrawal from the social world and even if the social care is provided from the state it is not certain that the person will have better living conditions. Therefore, the state will probably look to provide basic needs, most often concerning education and necessary training but it will not be able to ensure social assistance for longer periods.

Secondly, there will have to be greater coordination among the states, especially the EU members, so the control of the system is with the institutions of the members and the EU as well. Globalization tends to displace control outside the borders and state institutions so it will be crucial for the EU institutions to provide a model for acting before the crisis actually happens. Examples of Greece and Ireland and probably some more states, Portugal being the major candidate, show that there have to be greater controls which will be pursued in advance because the remedy can never be a sure solution for the problem.

Finally, European states must turn to creating jobs and not only jobs that will provide workers with income but rather the workplace which will safeguard worker's wellbeing and especially his/her family. Creating stable jobs for women especially will mean different relations towards children and when applicable, towards elderly who are in care. This will inevitably result in greater social capital of citizens which implies active citizenship able to cope with changing life conditions. Field (2003) discusses different opinions and implications of the social capital and its necessity for the citizens today adding that social capital often contributes to greater performance of citizens in both their private and working life.

All of this leads to the conclusion that the new European social model will have to be reconsidered, not because it is not good or unacceptable, but rather because it has to be adjusted to new conditions. The EU has always put the care for its citizens, especially the neediest, as one of its crucial aims and it will have to remain the same. However, the competition is becoming greater than ever from different states in the world and many adaptations will have to be made, probably many of these unpopular. It is the price that will have to be accepted if the EU wants to stay competitive and an active actor. Careful considerations will have to be made but the European citizenry will have the final word.

Conclusion

It is inevitable that the European social model will, as many of the political projects of European continent, be unique and even impossible to be applied anywhere else. It is the specificities of the European political and social context in addition to stronger than ever input of the EU institutions and governance that actually enable such transitions. Despite the differences in the member states, willingness and ability of European states to provide the means of living and welfare for its citizens have been emphasized as crucially important. Consequently, diversity does not inevitably entail impossibility of adaptation and implementation of certain policies.

It is obvious here that the new European social model will embrace all of what Hay ascribed to it, which was discussed earlier. It has different meanings and aspects and all of these must be carefully included and implemented if we are to have a positive outcome. This will mean sustainable development coupled with growth. In order to attain this each of the three components of the new social model: the state, market and the family will

have to be evaluated with special attention paid to the fluctuations that result from changed living conditions.

A change in lifestyle has been of one of the pressing moments for the new welfare, especially coupled with other social transitions concerning family, jobs, children, in general terms, the welfare of the family. The new social model must be based on prevention of risks and encouragement of citizens to be active and involved in social life. It means that not only should they work but try to find a proper job which will provide them not only with the income but will put them forward in society. Therefore, the state must foster social inclusion through the policies which are directed to the neediest, but only in a way that enables them to be involved in the process. Obviously, more than this will hardly be expected due to the higher than ever costs of welfare. The European social model for the 21st century must be defined in a way that it fosters equality and equal treatment for its citizens so they can perform in full operation and feel safe and satisfied with their life.

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