



Europäische Akademie

zur Erforschung von Folgen wissenschaftlich-technischer Entwicklungen
Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler GmbH

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PRESS RELEASE

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Europäische Akademie GmbH presented report:

Enabling Social Europe

Brussels, December 8th, 2005. – The Europäische Akademie GmbH (European academy for the scientific study of the consequences of scientific and technological advance Bad Neuenahr-Ahrweiler) presented its study “Enabling Social Europe” today. It is the result of a two-and-a-half-year cooperation of an interdisciplinary project-group of the Europäische Akademie on European social policy. The study proposes a new perspective on as well as strategies of action for European social policy in the decades to come.

The need for European welfare states to modernise and reconstruct their social systems is incited by the economic, social and demographic pressures they face. In addition, due to the enlargement of the European Union the widening of differences between member states raises the need for coordination. However, although the influence of the Union is growing, social policy remains a matter of nation states’ competence. Taking up these issues the group of scientists appointed by the Europäische Akademie combined sociological, economic, political, legal and philosophical analysis with comparative cross-national investigation of the development of social policy in the European Union.

The study shows the potentialities and limitations of European social policy in relation to European macro-economic and monetary policies, as well as to national policies in these domains. It seeks to answer the intriguing question of how European and national social policy might respond to new social, economic and political conditions at both national and European level more effectively. Albeit there is a sort of implicit normative consensus about the ‘European social model’, there is no ‘one size fits all’ perspective. In a multifaceted Europe distinct welfare regimes maintain their own path-dependent ways of achieving a fair

and just society with a high level of welfare for all. The book hinges on the notion of the 'enabling welfare state' and, in the empirical part, undertakes an appraisal of the various policies and reforms fitting that approach in a pertinent selection of countries. It scrutinises four important areas: health care, old-age security, family policy, and poverty prevention. Within each sector, the policies and practices in countries, typifying different welfare regimes, are explored comparatively: Germany and the United Kingdom, Germany and Poland, Finland and Estonia, and Belgium and Denmark. These country studies shed light on how future social policies should evolve and on the ingredients required for relevant reforms.

The primary idea is that social policy reforms in Europe should move towards the objective of an 'enabling welfare state'. The paradigm of the enabling welfare state transcends the notion of the active welfare state, going further in its vision of an activating, responsible and life-course-oriented welfare state that invests in people's capabilities and resources and enables them to work and take care of themselves. The paradigm of the enabling welfare state is underpinned by the philosophical and normative foundations of the European social model. Reflecting the implicit normative principles and values of social policy in Europe, an enabling approach to a social Europe serves broader social goals such as personal autonomy and responsibility, social inclusion and distributive justice. Furthermore, the challenge of European diversity precludes options of harmonisation. The substantial differences in the cultural, economic and historical evolution of the national welfare states lead policy regimes to pursue disparate objectives and to follow divergent routes in building their very own, distinct welfare state institutions.

Strategies of action and specific policy measures in line with the paradigm of the 'enabling welfare state' are recommended in detail for the four policy areas of health care, old-age security, family policy and poverty prevention. The recommendations regard the national as well as the supranational level of governance. In addition, specific proposals are made for the field of employment and labour market policies too, since it represents a cross sectional area between economic and social policies. At EU level, the most important instruments for coordinating and guiding national social policies towards an 'enabling welfare society' include the following. First, the acknowledgement and awareness for the social bearing and impact of political decisions and measures adopted by the European Union, irrespective of the particular area concerned has to be raised and enhanced by the competent Community institutions – above all the Commission and the Council. Second, social policy has to be integrated across various policy domains by improving the fine-tuning of economic, employment and social policies. Therefore, governance processes need to be restructured, integrated and streamlined and decision-making agendas rescheduled in order to allow a better institutional alignment of policies in different areas. Third, competences and interactions between various levels of governance, including the regional and local tiers and their interactions with the supranational level, have to be clearly defined and structured, thereby solving the contrast between the requirements of the principle of subsidiarity on the one hand and the practical overlapping of competences and mutual influences on the other. Finally, the application of the Open Method of Coordination should be further extended in the social domain, however with the limitation to three purposes: the setting of general goals, the

mutual exchange of learning experiences between member states and the benchmarking of achievements. This limitation of the OMC process is appropriate to the intent of leaving the member states plenty of room for choosing and adapting nation-specific tools for the achievement of the agreed goals.

The presentation of the study takes place on December 8th, 2005, 19.00 hours, at the Representation of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate, Avenue de Tervuren 60, 1040 Brussels, Belgium.

Publication:

B. v. Maydell, K. Borchardt, K.-D. Henke, R. Leitner, R. Muffels, M. Quante, P.-L. Rauhala, G. Verschraegen, M. Zukowski: *Enabling Social Europe*. (Volume 26 of the series: Wissenschaftsethik und Technikfolgenbeurteilung, edited by C. F. Gethmann.) Springer-Verlag, Berlin, 2005. ISBN 3-540-29771-5

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