

THE SOCIAL POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: MECHANISMS AND PRINCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

THE SOCIAL POLICY IS A VERY IMPORTANT POLICY WHICH DEFINES THE EUROPEAN UNION , SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A SET OF COMMON POLICIES. IT IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE IT IMPROVES THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN ALL THE MEMBER STATES.

DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF LIFE ARE INTERCONNECTED AND THIS IS POSSIBLE ONLY AT SOCIAL LEVEL: POLITICS IS MADE BY INDIVIDUALS, ECONOMY IS THE ENGINE OF SOCIETY AND IT IS MADE BY INDIVIDUALS. EVERY ASPECT OF THE HUMAN EXISTENCE CAN BE CONSIDERED A SOCIAL ONE , THAT IS WHY POLITICS AND ECONOMY CAN NOT EXIST AND FUNCTION PROPERLY WITHOUT THE BEST SOCIAL ORGANIZATION THEY CAN NEITHER EXIST NOR BE UNDERSTOOD OUTSIDE SOCIAL ASPECTS. THE EUROPEAN UNION SOCIAL POLICY HAS ESTABLISHED A SERIES OF OBJECTIVES WHICH DEFINE ITS SPHERE: FULL EMPLOYMENT, IMPROVING LIFE AND WORK CONDITIONS, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION.

THE PRESENT ARTICLE IS BRINGING OUT TO SURFACE DIFFERENT ASPECTS WHICH FORM THE EUROPEAN UNION SOCIAL POLICY , BY REVEALING ITS MECHANISMS AND ITS PRINCIPLES.

KEY WORDS: SOCIAL POLICY, EMPLOYMENT, NON-DISCRIMINATION, SOCIAL COHESION

INTRODUCTION

Specific social policy of the European Union is seen as not clearly defined , well delimited. This field, especially concerning employment and unemployment, working conditions, equality between men and women and social protection - reveals above all the competency of the European states. Certain aspects of their social laws must be harmonized. The fact that this field is not well delimited makes it very difficult for states to assimilate the legislation within the social field, and also makes it difficult for states to apply that legislation, which is, sometimes , very hard to adapt to the national one.

“There is a wide range of definitions of social policy. Some definitions are precise and well defined , others more vague and include a number of social activities. [...] Thus , in some countries , education is included in social policies and policies related to labor market in some countries are well structured social policies, while in others they are understood as a part of industrial and regional policies”². Social policy objectives , as required by EU treaties aimed at full employment of labor , improving working conditions and life conditions, social

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² George Poede, *Politici sociale. Abordare politologica* (Iasi: Tipografia Moldova, 2002), 6

cohesion and economic actors, and also social decisions³. The improvement of life and work conditions and full employment are the most important objectives, which stay at the basis of a well structured social system in any state. Where there is full employment, we can observe prosperity and wellbeing. Many states of the European Union throw a decisive accent on the objective of full employment, because it is also one of the engines of economy.

Employment policy of labor in each Member State of the European Union is coordinated by a common strategy, the *European Strategy for Employment*. Increasingly more, social policy has turned into a part of the European project. "In 1957, the Treaty of Rome contained only a few articles on social policy. *European Social Fund* has been created, and it aimed the fight against unemployment and encouraged the professional development. In 1986, The Single European Act included provisions related to health and occupational safety"⁴. To all these regulations were added those contained in the Treaties of Maastricht in 1992 and Amsterdam in 1997 and were reinforced by the regulations contained in the two European treaties. The matter which concerns employment and work force has become one of community interest, which needs a coordination strategy. Once the moment of the European Council in Lisbon had arrived, in March 2000, full employment had become the first objective in the horizon of the year 2000. The Lisbon Treaty in 2007 confirms the objectives (by mentioning: full employment, social progress, economic cohesion, social and territorial cohesion) and the decisions that already exist for the employment policy and social policy of the EU"⁵.

There are four main achievements regarding social policy of the EU. These achievements are grouped in four main subdomains, as follows:

1. Free movement of people and coordination of social security regimes
2. Equality between men and women
3. The right to work
4. Fight against discrimination

These objectives are the ones which make any social policy work, which make it functional. The first objective, involving the free movement of people, holds a key towards functional economies and of course a key to achieving the objective of full employment. The coordination of social security regimes is indispensable within the European Union and it shows that cooperation among states has reached a superior phase. The matter of equality, so much discussed at the European level, is a point that was touched by the social policy and, in this manner, equal opportunities are being offered to both men and women to succeed in their career and everyday life. Related directly to equality, there is the matter of non-discrimination and, close to it, the "right to work" that every European citizen must possess: both points are being touched and it can be said that the right to work is one of the highest ranked achievements of all. Why? Because it can lead to poverty reduction, unemployment reduction, it can bring prosperity for both the European citizens and for the Union as a whole, it can make economy function properly and it can bring political advantages by reducing the risks related to strikes against the system, strikes organized by dissatisfied citizens. It is interesting how full employment can bring peace to society, but it is also a realistic point of view the one that argues that it is almost impossible to reach full employment, in any state and in any system.

³ Poede, *Politici sociale*, 42

⁴ <http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/unioneuropeenne/action/politiques-communautaires/qu-est-ce-que-europe-sociale.html>; accessed on 09.10.2014

⁵ <http://www.vie-publique.fr/decouverte-institutions/unioneuropeenne/action/politiques-communautaires/qu-est-ce-que-europe-sociale.html>; accessed on 10.10.2014

In December 2000, The European Council from Nice adopted a Chart of Fundamental Rights, which contains political rights, economical and social rights. The Lisbon Treaty, in 2007, offered it a kind of value, the same value that is been offered to a Treaty. The Court of Justice received the competency to guarantee that the Chart was being respected by the Member States.

We can observe, related to national sovereignty, the fact that social Europe is limited by the will of the member states to keep their policies regarding work and employment. Within the framework of the Lisbon Treaty, there is a declaration which interprets Art.156 of Treaty Of Maastricht over cooperation between member states regarding the fields of social policy (employment, the right to work and work conditions, professional formation, social security) and which states that these fields reveal in an essential manner the competency of member states. The encouragement and coordination measures have a complementary character.

There is a very wide range of domains on which a social policy can act, when it is implemented: it acts throughout the effects that it produces. A social policy that is well defined and well implemented has positive consequences over the social system as a whole. Taking as an example only the field of education, it can be said that an efficient educational system in a certain state can lead to the increasing of culture degree existent among all the citizens. Here is an impact that is as beneficial as possible and it reveals a successful implementation of the social policy within the field of education. There is a multitude of examples of the beneficial effects of the implementation of social policies elaborated and applied efficiently, the general idea remaining that the influence of such policies in a state is a very accentuated one, with multiple frames and with multiple implications.

The present work analyses the social policy of the European Union, with its wide spectrum of objectives, with the mechanisms which stand for an important part of the resort that moves different actions on the European plan in order to reach a certain degree of welfare and wellbeing.

Social Europe Guide, elaborated within the framework of the European Commission in 2011 is a presentation of the main policies regarding social protection in the European Union, by focusing on the policies which help reducing unemployment among young people. *The Europe 2020 Strategy*, which provides a basis for all the EU national policies, sets out a social-economic model based on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, with a concrete commitment to achieve by 2020 an employment rate of 75%, a tertiary education completion rate of 40%, reduce school drop outs below 10%, and lift at least 20 million people from the risk of poverty and social exclusion.⁶

A very important work in the field of social policy that has been studied in the view of elaborating this work is called *Politica, putere, cunoastere* (Politics, power, knowledge), written by George Poede, professor at Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania. The book presents the problem of power and of social action within the first chapter. The social inequities are a real turbulence for the social system and they need to be eliminated, reduced. The author brings to the reader's attention the problem related to a reform of the social European model. The matters related to equality and cooperation are being seen as fundamental to democracy and wellbeing of a state.

The second chapter reveals the connection between politics and power: power has always been regarded as the center for the analysis of the political science. The author brings to attention the necessity of the existence of a political program. Many authors are being

⁶ Social Europe Guide, *Employment policy*, European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, (Luxembourg: Publications Office Of The European Union 2011), 2

cited, among which there is also Peter Blau, with his definition of power “as inherently asymmetrical and as resting on the net ability of a person to withhold rewards from and apply punishments to others , the ability that remains after the restraints they can impose on him have been taken into account”⁷. This definition of power offered by the author is important for a better understanding of social relations.

Power within organizations is another interesting part of the author`s work, which reveals the meaning of power at the level of organizations. Between different organizations, there is also a struggle for power. In the last chapter of the book, George Poede presents the unbreakable connection between knowledge, politics and power: power appears always in a social context, which is continuously transforming, taking different shapes; economy plays a vital part in the equation of power; work has a great value and its results are precious for human existence. These are the main coordinates of *Politica, putere, cunoastere*, a complex work which offers a lot of precious information related to the variety of meanings of power at social level.

A deep analyses of social policies is presented within the work written by George Poede, called *Politici sociale. Abordare Politologica* (Social Policies. Politological perspective), appeared in 2002. The work begins with an introduction to the study of social policies and continues with historical perspectives over social policies. “The study of the political system contributes to a better understanding of the manner in which contemporary societies adopt the rules of social policies but also of the action of some political agents which are important and which are mediators between different social groups and political institutions”⁸. The author describes social problems as being the object of study of social policies and talks about manners in which these problems can be resolved. An important place is reserved for the agents of social policies: “the part a state plays in formulating , adopting and implementing social policies “⁹ is a field that is also being studied from the perspective of social policies: state is being regarded from a double perspective, as a protector and as the state of general welfare. Both perspectives are being brought to light by the author, and also, a definition of political parties is being offered, as well as a definition of social movements, “structured organizations which defend or promote the interests of their members.”¹⁰

Social policies are being analysed with the help of different instruments and a social program is being analysed also. Gail Marker has established a guide for analyses of the social programs. Other important issues appear in the work, such as: issues related to child protection, social integration, poverty reduction, education policies, unemployment, all seen within the European Union space. The work is an excellent presentation of social matters and enlarges any perspective over the European social space and over the problems which need to be solved at social level.

EVOLUTIONS AND CHANGE WITHIN THE POLITICAL SCENE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

A constant preoccupation of the European Community for the aspects related to social policy has existed since it first appeared, from the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957. In time, the constant interest for the social policy has led to the creation of the Social European Model. “One of the most important moments of the evolution of this model is situated around the year 2000, when it can be passed from an approach based on minimizing the negative consequences on a social plan of the structural change, to an approach which has in view the

⁷ George Poede, *Politica, putere, cunoastere* (Iasi: Tipo Moldova, 2004), 71

⁸ Poede, *Politici sociale*, 47

⁹ Poede, *Politici sociale*, 53

¹⁰ Poede, *Politici sociale*, 60

modernizing of the social European system. .”¹¹ This modernizing is both desirable and necessary in the context of a series of complex evolutions taking place on other plan in all the European states , such as the economic plan , the political and even the financial and technological plan. Also, a series of changes have taken place within the collective mentality , which led to changes within the scale of priorities which the individuals have both on a personal plan and on the social plan, in interhuman relations. The modernizing of the European social system appears as a direct consequence of these factors and is a very important aspect which contributes to a certain degree of welfare in Europe.

The critics of the social policy protection system revealed a series of side effects of its functioning.”The programs of social protection, with the benefits and services it has assured, would encourage the dependency of the poor and of other target groups throughout the absence of components which have as a goal the construction of an active attitude , of responsibility towards the personal and professional evolution”¹². It is also extremely true the fact that “the social protection systems operate in a new context, marked by individualism, which generates inequity and social exclusion”¹³. So, in this social framework, marked by the existence of inequities which are sometimes very visible - such as in Romania, where the social differences are very clear – appears the necessity of reducing the clear colours of exaggerated individualism , which is not justified by an appropriate level of knowledge and by the existence of human quality which could allow selfish attitudes, and also the necessity to erase social differences by promoting efficient policies. These policies must focus on what must lead to the evoding of social exclusion. Also, the norms which define the social policies must become more flexible, they must be detached by criteria which are extremely well rooted , by prejudices or by standards which are too strictly defined and this would lead to an easier social insertion of disadvantaged groups.

A very important characteristic of the social policy is sharing the responsibilities of thouching the communitary goals by the member states. The Communitary Chart of the Social Fundamental Rights of Workers was adopted in 1989 and it “reflects the preoccupation for the social dimension of the Communitary Policies”¹⁴. The member states must work together to be sure that social fundamental rights are being respected. Within the final document, called the *Social Chart* , a special accent is being thrown on the part that member states have to play and on the importance of their actions in the social policy field. The member states must be sure that social fundamental rights are being respected. Which are these social fundamental rights? The social fundamental rights refer, in general, to certain aspects, such as: free movement of people, employment, improving work and life conditions, social protection, equal treatment of both men and women, protectiong health and safety at the work place, child, teenager and elder people protection, also informing and consulting workers regarding problems which directly affect them. The Social Chart was signed in December 1989 by 11 member states of the EU¹⁵.

The *Green Paper* was also a very important step in the framework of social policy and it launched the process of debate over the future of social policies al communitary level (1993).

The lines which have been identified throughout the Green Paper concern :

- Common priorities to all member states
- An improvement of the situation of the work force

¹¹ Phare RO 0006.18.02 Seria Micromonografii, *Politici Europene. Politica socială*, 2003, 4

¹² Poede, *Politica*, 16

¹³ Poede, *Politica*, 20

¹⁴ Phare RO 0006.18.02 Seria Micromonografii, *Politici Europene*, 2003, 4

¹⁵ Phare RO 0006.18.02 Seria Micromonografii, *Politici Europene*, 2003, 4-5

- Stimulating solidarity and social inclusion
- Fight against poverty
- Fight against social exclusion
- Common Market and free movement of people
- Social and Economic Cohesion¹⁶

The *White Paper* was the next document which was very important for the social policy of the European Union, a key point which established the directions to be followed by this policy for six years (1994-2000). After the White Chart was signed, the main goal of the social policy was established, called “the creation of new places to work, closely related to the formation of a new and educated work force”¹⁷. An educated work force is an absolute necessity in any society which follows the road of development in all the sectors of activity. The citizens must be aware of the necessity of a serious approach of the problems related to professional orientation.

Social Policy Agenda is the next relevant document adopted in 2000 which reveals the framework and the priorities of 2005 policy. A series of major challenges existed and the *Social Agenda* had to face them:

- Employment of the workforce
- The importance of IT and the reduced number of the persons having abilities in this field
- The development of economy based on knowledge
- The EU enlargement and international social policies¹⁸

In 2005, a new *Social Agenda* was adopted and it was related to the period 2006-2010, in order to accompany the Lisbon Strategy. For 2007-2013, a program of the European Union was created, to occupy the work force and for social solidarity; it was called *Progress*, and it helps for the objectives of the EU to be applied, the objectives in the social field. In 2007, the Social European Fund was created, and it was related to globalization, with the purpose of offering help to employers losing their job because of changes taking place within the structure of world trade¹⁹.

After the signing of the Lisbon Treaty, on the 13th of December 2007, “which allowed new progress in consolidating the social dimension of the European Integration, a process of emphasizing the priorities on a social plan took place, among which there is full employment as a goal”²⁰.

In July 2008, The European Commission published a New Social Agenda, related to opportunities, access and solidarity in XXI-st century Europe, as an answer to raising unemployment provoked by the financial and economic crises. Measures meant to raise the impact of the existing financial instruments have been introduced. In 2010, a new European instrument of finance, called *Progress*, was introduced, throughout which microcredits were being given to companies and to persons which are unemployed and willing to create or develop their own business

Europe 2020 Strategy has as a priority the growth based on inclusion. There are seven initiatives which should contribute to the objectives of *Europe 2020 Strategy*. The following are the most relevant:

¹⁶ Phare RO 0006.18.02 Seria Micromonografii, *Politici Europene*, 2003, 5

¹⁷ Phare RO 0006.18.02 Seria Micromonografii, *Politici Europene*, 2003, 6

¹⁸ Phare RO 0006.18.02 Seria Micromonografii, *Politici Europene*, 2003, 6

¹⁹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/ro/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_5.10.1.html; accessed on 18.10.2014

²⁰ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/ro/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_5.10.1.html; accessed on 20.11.2014

- an agenda for new competencies and new places to work, which concerns the restructuring of security policies in order to improve the functioning of labour market , in order to help the individual to gain those competencies which will be required in the future
- *Youth on The Move*, which will contribute to the improvement of education and formation, which will help the young people to study abroad and will help them find a place to work
- Another program refers to fighting poverty and social exclusion and will contribute to the spreading of the best practices and will make sources of finance available to sustain social inclusion²¹

MECHANISMS AND PRIORITIES OF THE SOCIAL POLICY

The social policy is a set of principles and activities “which orient the manner in which the state makes itself heard and mediates the relationships between individuals, groups, communities and social institutions. These principles and activities decide the redistribution of resources and the level of wellbeing of the members in a society²².

Richard Timuss proposes three models or functions of social policies:

- The residual model of social policy - starts from a series of facts which state that there are two natural channels or social dates, private market and family, throughout which the needs of the individual are being satisfied²³. In these conditions, any intervention throughout social services appears only when the two elements do not function properly.
- The model of industrial achievement and performance - gives a significant space to welfare institutions, and the criteria of access to necessary resources for social needs are based on social credit, work performance and productivity.
- The institutional model - is a model based on social equality and it possesses a series of mechanisms related to the redistribution of resources. Universal services are being offered based on a series of needs, without market related issues to consider²⁴.

“The member states have become more and more interdependent from the economic point of view [...]. The differences between the employment conditions between states can bring great advantages and it is important to be kept a certain balance between states and the needs of the employees and of the employers.”²⁵. Within the sphere of work force , a great step ahead was the introduction of a strategy for work force, in 1997. It promoted a certain type of policy and it focused on the problems related to work force and on the problems related to employment and these were common to all member states.

CONCLUSIONS

No system and no political organization can be understood in a proper manner except for the times when they are placed in a social system, in a historical and operational context. The structure and the functioning of the European Union , of its institutions, the nature and dynamics of the political forces and also the political power are being modeled in a constant

²¹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/ro/displayFtu.html?ftuId=FTU_5.10.1.html; accessed on 01.01.2015

²² Poede, *Politici sociale*, 5-6

²³ Poede, *Politici sociale*, 9

²⁴ Poede, *Politici sociale*, 9

²⁵ Social Europe Guide, *Employment*, 8

manner by the events of the actual context. The European Union must be seen as being related to forces that have generated the context. These forces must exercise their influence throughout cooperation and integration: these are political and economic forces.

It is absolutely necessary that for the Union to identify a series of external answers, in order to successfully face the economical crises and also the financial crises. This is the context in which was launched the *Europe 2020 Strategy*. This strategy is a document which, being taken by *The Agenda of The European Council*, was adopted as a new strategy for creating new places to work. In such a manner, it is possible for the social integration to exist and this is in favour of certain social groups. These groups include a great number of persons. The strategy, extremely important to the Union, is also formed of the conclusions drawn by the European Council.

In conclusion, the social policy elaborated by the European Union is one that is related to the essence of welfare in Europe, because a high level of welfare of the population means a high level of development in any state, no matter which state of the Union we are talking about. Even if the social policy can not be regarded as acting by itself, but only in relation to the economic policy and with other policies which help, together, to the defining of a wide spectrum of actions at the state level and at the Union level, it remains of a major importance to the European states. A clear definition of the priorities on the social scene and also a very serious approach of all the problems that can tear down the European populations are safe ways of exiting any type of crises: financial, political and social. The social policy is the basis on which a state with a strong economy is being built, a state with a political sphere in which decisions are being taken responsibly, in the interest of the citizens.

Acknowledgements:

This paper is a result of a research made possible by the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132400 - "Young successful researchers – professional development in an international and interdisciplinary environment".

Această lucrare este rezultatul cercetării făcută posibilă prin sprijinul financiar oferit prin Programul Operațional Sectorial Dezvoltarea Resurselor Umane 2007-2013, cofinanțat prin Fondul Social European, în cadrul proiectului POSDRU/159/1.5/S/132400, cu titlul "Tineri cercetători de succes – dezvoltare profesională în context interdisciplinar și internațional

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