

THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL MODEL

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FOREWORD

The title of this book, “The European Social Model”, may seem a provocation as many claim that it is not really a “model”, that it is not only “social”, and that it is not particularly “European”.

In fact, EU business is conducted between different cultures and in different languages. Semantics also conspire to magnify and distort national differences of policy in the fields of employment, welfare, health and pensions.

National differences of policy do exist, and are likely to continue to exist, given the Member States’ differing traditions and practices.

The European Union adds value to national social policy by setting minimum social standards in the workplace and beyond, as well as by providing political and technical support for national efforts to reform labour and welfare laws.

The words ‘social model’ hint at the progressive convergence of views among Member States on the broad objectives they seek to achieve in employment and social policy.

These objectives were clearly outlined in the conclusions to the Lisbon summit of March 2000, when it was said that “the European social model is based on good economic performance, a high level of social protection and education and social dialogue. An active welfare state should encourage people to work, as employment is the best guarantee against social exclusion”.

In his speech before the European Parliament in June 2005, Mr. Blair affirmed:

“The issue is not between a “free market” Europe and a social Europe, between those who want to retreat to a common market and those who believe in Europe as a political project. [...] The purpose of social Europe and economic Europe should be to sustain each other. The issue is not about the idea of the European Union. It is about modernisation. It is about policy. It is not a debate about how to abandon Europe but how to make it do what it was set up to do: improve the lives of people. [...]

What type of social model is it that has 20m unemployed in Europe, productivity rates falling behind those of the USA; that is allowing more science graduates to be produced by India than by Europe; and that, on any relative index of a modern economy – skills, R&D, patents, IT, is going down not up. Of the top 20 universities in the world today, only two are now in Europe.

The purpose of our social model should be to enhance our ability to compete, to help our people cope with globalisation, to let them embrace its opportunities and avoid its dangers. Of course we need a social Europe. But it must be a social Europe that works”.

In the forthcoming months EU political leaders will debate about the future of Europe, trying to give some answers to questions such as: what social model would help Europe face the globalisation challenge? How to bridge the confidence gap with citizens? Can the European social model be agreed on by 27 countries or more?

In fact, if employment, social cohesion and protection against globalisation are the main challenges, four levels should be involved in adapting the social model: the local, the regional, the national, as well as the European level.

Since labour markets and social security systems are in the hands of national governments, most of the actions needed to reform the European social model depend on member States. What the European Union could contribute is added value in terms of social cohesion, facilitating the mobility of workers – professional mobility and geographical mobility – as well as improving research and education.

The authors analyse different aspects of the European social policy, starting with the role of the institutions and their competences, with special emphasis on the contributions of the Constitutional Treaty. They will pay particular attention to employment policy, the protection of fundamental rights, freedom of movement of citizens, and social dialogue, concluding that although we have different social models at national level we share common values of economic prosperity and social justice within the European Union.

ROGER BLANPAIN
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	v
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CHAPTER I

THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

PAOLO PONZANO	1
1. Introduction	1
2. The European Commission	2
2.1. The present situation	2
2.1.1. The composition	3
2.1.2. The functions	3
2.2. The new Commission	4
2.2.1. The new composition	4
2.2.2. The new functions	5
2.2.2.1. The role of legislative initiative	6
2.2.2.2. The “executive” function	7
2.2.2.3. The role of external representation of the Union ...	8
3. The European Parliament	9
3.1. The present situation	9
3.1.1. The composition	9
3.1.2. The functions	10
3.1.2.1. The legislative function	10
3.1.2.2. The budgetary function	11
3.1.2.3. The functions of political control	11
3.2. The new Parliament	12
3.2.1. The new composition	12
3.2.2. The new functions	13
3.2.2.1. The legislative function	13
3.2.2.2. The budgetary function	14
3.2.2.3. The functions of political control	15
4. The Council of Ministers	15
4.1. The present situation	15
4.1.1. The composition	15
4.1.2. Qualified majority voting	16

Table of Contents

4.1.3.	The Presidency of configurations of the Council	16
4.1.4.	The functions	17
4.2.	The Council resulting from the Constitution	18
4.2.1.	The innovations in the composition and in the functioning	18
4.2.1.1.	The calculation of qualified majority	18
4.2.1.2.	The extent of majority voting	19
4.2.1.3.	The configurations of the Council	19
4.2.1.4.	The Presidency of the Councils	20
4.2.2.	The new functions	21
5.	The European Council	22
5.1.	The present situation	22
5.1.1.	The composition	23
5.1.2.	The functions	23
5.2.	The European Council resulting from the Constitution	23
5.2.1.	The President of the European Council	24
5.2.2.	Responsibilities and functioning	25
6.	The Minister of Foreign Affairs	25
7.	The Court of Justice	26
7.1.	Jurisdiction	27
7.2.	Forms of action	28
7.2.1.	Actions for failure to fulfil obligations	28
7.2.2.	Actions for annulment	28
7.2.3.	Actions for failure to act	28
7.2.4.	Application for compensation	28
7.3.	Appeals	29
7.4.	References for a preliminary ruling	29
7.5.	Procedures	30
7.5.1.	Procedures in direct actions	30
7.5.2.	Procedure in references for a preliminary ruling	31
7.5.3.	Special forms of procedure	31
7.6.	Judgments, language of the case, legal aid	32
7.7.	The Court of First Instance	32
7.8.	The European Union Civil Service Tribunal	33
	Conclusions	33

CHAPTER II
COMPETENCES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

	PAOLO STANCANELLI	37
1.	Introduction	37
2.	The current system	38

2.1.	Relevant provisions in the EC and EU Treaties	38
2.2.	Principles	39
2.2.1.	Principle of conferral	39
2.2.2.	Principles of subsidiarity and proportionality	41
2.2.3.	Principle of the primacy of Community law	42
2.3.	Classification criteria	43
2.3.1.	Traditional categories	43
2.3.2.	The nature and scale of Union actions	44
3.	The system under the Constitution	46
3.1.	The reform process	46
3.2.	Grouping of provisions relating to competence	49
3.3.	Principles – Monitoring their application	49
3.4.	Classification by category	51
3.4.1.	Exclusive competence	51
3.4.2.	Shared competence	52
3.4.3.	Supporting, coordinating, or complementary action	52
3.4.4.	Special cases	53
3.5.	Flexibility of action	53
3.6.	Concluding remarks	54

CHAPTER III

THE EU COMPETENCE REGARDING SOCIAL POLICIES

	ROGER BLANPAIN	57
	Introduction	57
1.	Cooperation between Member States	58
2.	Legislative competence	60
2.1.	Social matters	60
2.2.	Support and complement	61
2.3.	Establishing minimum requirements	62
2.3.1.	In general	62
2.3.2.	Unanimity	69
2.3.3.	Excluded areas	70
2.4.	Pay	70
2.5.	Right of association	71
2.6.	Right to strike or to impose lock-outs	71
3.	Employment policy	71
3.1.	A coordinated strategy for employment	71
3.2.	The European Social Fund	73

Table of Contents

3.2.1.	Equal pay, opportunity and treatment. Combating discrimination	73
3.2.2.	Vocational training	73
3.2.3.	Paid holiday schemes	75
3.2.4.	Economic and social cohesion	75
3.2.5.	Reporting	75
3.2.5.1.	The role of the commission	76
3.2.5.2.	Involvement of the social partners	76
3.3.	Consultation at community level	77
3.4.	Implementation of Union legislation	77
3.5.	Social dialogue	79
3.6.	The judgment of the Court of First Instance of 17 June 1998	79
4.	Conclusions	80
4.1.	Vision	82
4.2.	Competence	82
4.3.	The actors	83

CHAPTER IV

THE EU VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

SALVATORE SICA	85
1. Introduction	85
2. The values of the European Union	87
3. The principles of the European Union	90
4. Europe and the future challenges	95

CHAPTER V

FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL RIGHTS

FRANK HENDRICKX	99
1. Introduction	99
2. Connecting fundamental social rights with EU labour law and social policy	100
2.1. Community Charter of 1989	101
2.1.1. Background and adoption	101
2.1.2. Impact of the Charter	102
2.2. Functions of fundamental social rights	103
3. Connecting fundamental social rights with EU policy in pre-constitutional terms	105

3.1.	General principles of Community law	106
3.2.	Initial case law of the court	107
3.3.	Treaty confirmation	108
4.	Fundamental (social) rights in post-constitutional terms	108
4.1.	Towards a comprehensive Bill of Rights	109
4.2.	Making the Charter of Fundamental Rights	111
4.2.1.	The Group of Experts and the 'Convention'	111
4.2.2.	Adopting the Charter of Fundamental Rights	113
4.2.3.	Content	114
4.3.	Pre-constitutional status of the Charter	114
4.4.	Post-constitutional status of the Charter	116
4.4.1.	The limitations of the Charter	117
4.4.2.	Prospects of the Charter	117
4.4.2.1.	General effects	118
4.4.2.2.	Effects with regard to competence	118
4.4.2.3.	Relationship with other Treaty competence	121
5.	Expectations depending on the ECJ	123

CHAPTER VI

THE SOCIAL OBJECTIVES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

VIRGILIO D'ANTONIO	125	
1.	Introduction	125
2.	The fundamental rights in the Europe of Treaties	126
3.	The fundamental rights in the European Constitution	129
3.1.	The preamble and the principle of the universality of rights	131
3.2.	The applicable principles	132
4.	The systematic value of the Charter: Dignity	134
4.1.	Freedoms	135
4.2.	Equality	140
4.3.	Solidarity	141
4.4.	Rights of citizens	144
4.5.	Justice	146
5.	Perspectives: Just Europe	148

CHAPTER VII

FREE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION

MICHELE COLUCCI	151
1. Introduction	151
2. The scope of free movement	152
2.1. From workers... ..	152
2.2. ...to “Union citizens”: Directive 2004/38/EC	154
3. Right to enter, leave and reside	155
4. Right of permanent residence	157
5. Right to non-discrimination	158
5.1. Non-discrimination on the basis of nationality	158
5.2. Access to employment and equal treatment in employment	159
5.3. Prohibited <i>indirect</i> discrimination	160
5.4. Harmonization and recognition of professional rules	161
5.5. Tax and social advantages	161
6. Social security	162
6.1. Health care	164
6.2. Social security contributions	166
7. Restrictions on grounds of public policy, public security and public health	167
8. Employment in the public sector	168
Conclusion	170

CHAPTER VIII

THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL DIALOGUE

ROGER BLANPAIN	171
Introduction	171
1. Forms and levels of dialogue	172
1.1. Forms of dialogue	172
1.1.1. Impact on decision-making	172
1.1.1.1. Collective bargaining	172
1.1.1.2. Consultation	172
1.1.1.3. Concertation	172
1.1.2. Tripartite or bipartite	173
1.2. The levels of social dialogue	173
2. The EU’s role in promoting the social dialogue	173
2.1. Consultation	173
2.2. Collective bargaining	174

2.2.1.	Concluding European collective agreements	174
2.2.2.	Binding effect of the European collective agreements	174
3.	The institutionalisation of the social dialogue	175
3.1.	The tripartite social dialogue	175
3.2.	The sectoral social dialogue committees	176
4.	The social partners	179
4.1.	Criteria	179
4.2.	List of European social-partner organisations	179
4.2.1.	General cross-industry organisations	179
4.2.2.	Cross-industry organisations representing certain categories of workers or undertakings	179
4.2.3.	Specific organisations	180
4.2.4.	Sectoral organisations representing employers	180
4.2.5.	European trade union organisations	181
5.	Results of the European social dialogue	182
5.1.	Consultation	182
5.3.	Collective agreements	182
5.4.	Process-oriented texts	183
5.5.	Joint opinions and tools: exchange of information	186
6.	The European social dialogue: genesis and content	187
6.1.	Community-wide collective agreements	187
6.1.1.	The Collective Agreement on Parental Leave of 14 December 1995	187
6.1.1.1.	Genesis	187
6.1.1.2.	Content	189
6.1.1.3.	Scope	190
6.1.2.	Substance	190
6.1.2.1.	Parental leave	190
6.1.2.2.	Time off from work on grounds of <i>force majeure</i>	192
6.2.	The Agreement on Part-time Work of 6 June 1997	192
6.2.1.	Genesis	192
6.2.2.	Content	193
6.2.2.1.	Purpose	193
6.2.2.2.	Scope	193
6.2.2.3.	Definitions	193
6.2.2.4.	Principle of non-discrimination	194
6.2.2.5.	Opportunities for part-time work	194
6.2.2.6.	Provisions on implementation	195
6.3.	The framework Agreement on Fixed-term Work of 18 March 1999	195

Table of Contents

6.3.1.	Genesis	195
6.3.2.	Content	196
6.4.	The voluntary Agreement on Telework of 16 July 2002	199
6.4.1.	Genesis	199
6.4.2.	Content	201
6.5.	Framework Agreement on Work-related Stress of 8 October 2004	205
6.5.1.	Genesis	205
6.5.2.	Content	205
6.5.2.1.	Definition of work-related stress	205
6.5.2.2.	Identifying work-related stress	206
6.5.2.3.	Responsibilities of employers and workers	206
6.5.2.4.	Preventing, eliminating or reducing work-related stress	206
6.5.2.5.	Implementation and follow-up	207
7.	Sectoral social dialogue: some examples	208
7.1.	The European commerce sector	208
7.2.	European agriculture	209
7.3.	The footwear sector	211
7.4.	Teleworking Agreement signed in commerce (2001)	212
7.4.1.	Introduction of telework	212
7.4.2.	Employment conditions	213
7.4.3.	Tasks and confidentiality	213
7.4.4.	Venue and equipment	214
7.4.5.	Health and safety	214
7.4.6.	Compensation for costs	214
7.4.7.	Trade union rights	214
7.4.8.	Trade union or other personnel activities	215
7.5.	Code of conduct in the personal services sector (2001)	215
7.6.	A code of conduct for the hairdressing sector (June 2001)	216
7.6.1.	Fair wages and good working conditions	217
7.6.2.	Social working environment	217
7.6.3.	Lifelong learning	217
7.6.4.	The guidelines	217
	Closing comments	218
	SELECTED CASE LAW OF THE EUROPEAN COURT OF JUSTICE	221
	NOTE ON THE AUTHORS	225