

# Contemporary Social Policy in the E.U.

*Professor John Wilton*

## Lecture 4

**The principles and concepts of E.U.  
social policy -harmonisation, mutual  
recognition, cohesion and convergence**

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

### *CONTEXT*

- historical and theoretical frame

+

- underlying principles

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- there is a parallel process of E.U. social integration accompanying developments in political and economic integration (spillover)
- 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 harmonisation, convergence, diversity, and 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