Preface

Rarely has the European project been reassessed to the extent that it was in 2005. The rejection of the draft constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands prompted a whole raft of questions and controversies about the political, economic and social model being pursued. What model - but also what project - should that be, and what are its future prospects? Is the Europe of the founding fathers a thing of the past now, or will enlargement and the debate about the constitution force our political leaders to go back to basics?

The main issues under debate in 2005 – the constitution, accession negotiations with Turkey and Croatia, the 2007-2013 financial perspectives, the European social model, the future of the CAP – probe the very identity of the Union, and likewise the capacity of political, economic and social stakeholders to carry forward a coherent project for this political entity suddenly plunged into globalisation. In this new context, is Europe a fortress besieged from all sides, or is it the prototype of a different form of globalisation which seeks to expand and strengthen a specific social model?

There is no ready answer to this question; the answer will come from those responsible for the project. But expectations and hopes are running high among Europe’s citizens. And many people in the wider world are vesting their hopes in the success of the European project. Thus there is a need to create European and transnational forums for debate, to encourage dialogue, disseminate information and engage in analysis so as to influence political decision-making.
To this end, the European Trade Union Institute and the Swedish trade union research programme SALTSA have once again joined forces with the Observatoire social européen to produce an assessment of European social policy for the year 2005. This volume, published in French and English, is aimed at a wide readership and seeks to promote reflection and debate about the state of social Europe and its future prospects. We hope you will enjoy reading it.

Maria Jepsen (ETUI-REHS), Lars Magnusson (SALTSA), Philippe Pochet (OSE) and Christophe Degryse.