Preface

Two major events of 2004 will go down in the European history books: enlargement to take in the central and eastern European countries as well as Cyprus and Malta, and the adoption of the draft constitutional Treaty for Europe. Both of these events were subjects of debate throughout the year, since their implications affect all the policies – and indeed the very future – of the European Union.

Nevertheless, these two events alone will not shape the future of the Union. They will be what the political leaders, intellectual elites, economic players, social organisations and trade unions make of them. Enlargement could in fact contribute, internationally, to making Europe a new model for other regions and continents: a model of economic development which takes into account the need for social progress and sustainable development. Alternatively, it could dilute Europe and its political goals into a free-trade area devoid of any ambitions apart from competition and trade.

The same holds true for the draft European Constitution, whose ratification by all twenty-five Member States could not be taken for granted at the time of writing these lines. Imperfect though it may be, the draft text does contain improvements to the workings of the European Union.

Enlargement and the European Constitution will give those who come to terms with them the opportunity to construct a new political, economic and social project for Europe. They will become what the players decide to make of them.

In this day and age of precipitate globalisation, extending and reinforcing the social model is not the least of the challenges facing Europe. The Union needs, in the immediate future, to square up to the differing degrees of economic and social development in its midst, but also to meet the expectations and needs of all the European citizens, and of all those people elsewhere in this world of ours who place their hopes in it – and they are legion.
In order to extend and reinforce the European social model it is more necessary than ever to create transnational forums for dialogue within the enlarged Europe. Indeed, the dissemination of information and the analysis of developments in European social policy can not only feed into the debate but can also 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 2004. This volume, published in English and French, 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.

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