Social policy in the European Union 1999-2019: the long and winding road

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Once upon a time, there was the European social dialogue

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Disclaimer and related issues

• This paper reflects solely the views of its author, and not those of the European Commission

• It is part of wider research into changes in European social policy over the period 1985-2020

• Related sensitive issues
A historical approach

• Understanding what is the European social dialogue by examining the conditions of its "invention"

• Analysing how it has evolved over the last two decades with reference to these conditions and to the successive stages in the European integration process
The Delors Commissions
(1985-1995)

• A "contractual relations area" at EU level
• A "joint" invention by the Commission and the EU social partners
• A political "deal" on the "social dimension" of the single market
• An emphasis on tripartite cross-industry social dialogue, and on negotiation
• "Double subsidiarity" and mutual trust

- Social Agenda: Amsterdam Treaty, concertation (TSS), Lisbon Strategy
- New paradigms for EU social policies and debates on the legislative instrument
- Diversification: sectoral dialogue, "autonomous" work programmes and agreements
- The "golden age": history and myth
The Barroso Commissions (2005-2014)

• First tensions, and then exasperation
• New challenges: an enlarged EU and a crisis which reveals some weaknesses of the EMU architecture
• Tensions on economic governance, austerity, structural reforms, the Troika
• Tensions about legislation (REFIT and sectoral social partners agreements)
• Distrust and exasperation

- Expectations and disappointments
- The "last chance" Commission: emphasis on some social rebalancing and EPSR
- A "new start" for social dialogue
- Extending consultation
- A new step in the Art. 155 controversies and the reinterpretation of the Treaty provisions
Conclusion

• "Once upon a time...": beyond the rhetoric on the European social dialogue as part of the EU DNA.

• Resilience issues: *without its negotiation component, is it still the European social dialogue as it was invented?*

• Trust and distrust; populism and technopopulism?
All comments and criticism are welcome:
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Bilan social de l’Union européenne 1999 – 2019 : une route longue et sinuose


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