

Preface

The birth of a Europe comprising twenty-five Member States is incontestably one of the major political events in the history of the European Community. With this enlargement the Union will take on almost continental proportions, a development that was unthinkable barely twenty years ago. The institutions of the enlarged Union and its Member States, for their part, take on fundamental responsibilities not just for administering this new entity, but also – and above all – for defining and implementing the European political project.

In today's era of globalisation, the role of the State as regulator and the European welfare states risk being thrown into turmoil. Europe's part in this process is ambiguous. Its immediate commercial interests prompt it to be at the forefront of liberalising global trade. At the same time, Europe is determined – or at least so it says – to preserve its social model, which is unique in the world (social protection, public services, social dialogue). This is an ambiguous position in that “untamed” globalisation poses a threat to social progress and achievements – examples around the world are legion. By no means the least of the challenges awaiting the enlarged Europe is how to extend and strengthen its social model, in order – in the immediate future – to confront the differentials in economic and social development within the new Europe, but also in order to meet the expectations and needs of all European citizens in this rapidly changing world.

To extend and strengthen the European social model it is now more necessary than ever to create transnational forums for dialogue within the enlarged Europe. Indeed, the dissemination of information and the analysis of changes in European social policy can not only feed into 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 2003. 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 prospects. We hope you will enjoy reading it.

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