

Policy

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European Union (EU) does not regulate the social policy of each member state, yet it sets main guidelines and minimum standards. Gradually more and more social problems of the EU member states have been addressed collectively, while the direct social support in the form of different monetary supports and allowances is still the responsibility of each of the member states.

The social policy of EU covers the following areas:

- legal regulation of the employment;
- equal treatment;
- social dialogue;
- social protection;
- safety and health at the working place;
- employment.

In the Article 2 of the Treaty of the European Community (including the amendments to the Treaty made by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and Treaty of Amsterdam (1997)), it "shall have as its task... promotion of equality between men and women... a high level of employment and of social protection, the raising of the standard of living and quality of life, and economic and social cohesion and solidarity among Member States" among others. By recognizing these tasks the role of EU in the social policy increases although initially the development of the social policy on the EU level was not a priority.

The Treaty of the Establishment of the European Economic Community (signed in Rome, 1957) contained articles about the free movement of the labour and freedom of commercial activity. Only in the beginning of 1970's the Council of Ministers adopted the Social Agenda that sets as the priority the improvement of the working and living conditions, employee participation, and facilitation of the employment of a higher level and higher quality. Considering these priorities, most of the directives that tackle the rights of employees, health, hygiene and safety at the working place and the area of gender equality were adopted between 1974 and 1986.

In the response to the increased anxiety that the process of social integration could lower the established social standards in several member states, the amendments to the Treaty of European Community made by the Single European Act (signed in 1986) stated that the member states are entitled to cancel or postpone the enabling of the harmonized legal acts, if the actions that they require could lower the national standards.

Another important event was signing of the EC Social Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers in 1989. Among others, the issues of safety and health at the working place, maximum length of the working day, the participation of employees in management of the enterprise and the gender equality were included.

After adopting the Charter, all member states except UK suggested that a separate Social Chapter is included in the Treaty of European Union (Treaty of Maastricht, 1992). As UK objected to the suggestion, the Social Chapter was annexed as a Protocol to the Treaty of the European Union, and UK was not its signatory.

The integration of the member states in the social area was facilitated by the Green Papers on the Social Policy of EU (adopted in 1993 and 1994). In 1993 EC published the *Green Paper on European Social Policy thus establishing the social model of Europe based on democracy and individual rights, freedom to sign common agreements, equal rights to everybody, social welfare and solidarity*. Further in 1994, European Commission published *White Paper on European Social Policy, that named the development of employment and the legislation in the area of social policy as the main targets*.

With adoption of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), a separate chapter was included in the Treaty of European Commission,

"Social policy, vocational training and youth", and a new chapter, "Policy of Employment" added. Two new tasks of the social policy were adopted, namely, a fight against discrimination and integration of excluded persons.

During the summit of state and government leaders of the EU states in Lisbon in 2000, dealing with social and employment issues was indicated as a common task of the EU. In Lisbon a new strategic target of the development of the EU was set for the next ten years: "becoming, by 2010, the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion".

During the summit the Open Method of Coordination was also formulated. It was developed to help member states to work on differing policies while European Commission would keep its coordination role. This method includes:

- setting guidelines and deadlines;
- creating indicators of quality and quantity, based on good practice and considering the needs of each state and sector;
- implementing guidelines in state and regional policy acknowledging the differences between states and regions;
- systematic supervision, evaluation and revision.

Open method of coordination provide the opportunity to facilitate the co-operation of the member states and exchange of a good practice in agreement about the common goals and setting the guidelines for their accomplishment. In the area of employment and social inclusion the common guidelines are complemented by the action plans of the states. The open method of coordination includes the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the policy of social security and the updating of the social protection. In the future it is planned to include also the cooperation in the health care area, especially tackling the problem of the ageing of the population.

As of today, the most important goals of the social policy of the EU are the following:

- increase employment (according to the level set in the Lisbon summit - by 2010, reach the level of employment of 70%);
- facilitate constantly increasing labour efficiency and quality;
- facilitate accessibility of the labour market considering also the expertise necessary for the jobs;
- emphasize life-long education and training;
- increase the employment in the service sector;
- implement an effective social policy matching the European competitive power;
- facilitate equal opportunities in all areas, fighting xenophobia, racism and discrimination against women and the disabled.

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