

Title The European Employment Strategy: Governance Against the ‘European Social Model’?

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Abstract

The European Employment Strategy (EES), launched in 1997 at the Luxembourg summit, proposes to coordinate the employment policies of the European Union member states. At the core of this strategy lie the ‘national action plans’ which are handed in every year by the 15 member states. So the first interest of the EES is that it allows systematic comparisons between the policies led by the various countries under the same heading, such as ‘employability’ (Raveaud, 2001).

The functioning of the EES is exemplary of the new ‘open method of coordination’, a new method of governance defined during the Lisbon Summit (Pochet, 2002). Its purpose is to coordinate existing policies, with the view of making them more coherent and possibly convergent. This is not to be achieved through any ‘hard’ constraints imposed on the member states. Its basic tools are the yearly definition of ‘guidelines’ and the delivering of (not compulsory) ‘recommendations’ to the member states, as well as systems of ‘peer review’, exchanges of ‘best practice’, etc.

With the completion of the first 5 years of the EES, it is possible to assess the *content* of these procedures, and to question whether or not they define a common framework for national employment policies. Is there a (new) European consensus on what an efficient employment policy is? If so, how can we characterise it? Following a recent report written for the French Ministry of Labour (Salais and Raveaud, 2002) and the work of Trubek and Mosher (2001), we will test the hypothesis of a bias of such procedures towards a ‘liberal model’ of employment policies. This model, based on the individualisation of help and restricted access to benefits, bears possible consequences for the ‘European social model’.