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TOP LEVEL ACTORS SPEAK ABOUT SOCIAL POLICY AND INTERGENERATIONAL INHERITANCE OF INEQUALITIES

SOCIAL POLICY WITHIN EUROPE AS A SUBJECT OF RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS

The European Union (EU) is often considered as a predominantly economic construction; however, there are shared values and priorities that set this political body apart from any other political counterpart of the world. These features are headlined as the 'European Social Model' (ESM) [Begg, Berghmann 2002].

The ESM and particular welfare states have been subjected to numerous analyses from all ranges of social sciences, as well as studied via interdisciplinary research projects. The inquiry into the condition and perspectives of social policy in European states was in past years structured around several particular topics mentioned below.

WELFARE STATE: PREDICTED BANKRUPTCY, ACHIEVED STATUS QUO, EXPECTED CHANGES

First, the idea of welfare state has been exposed to the analysis of some scholars who since the 1970s were trying to prove that the idea of generous welfare state is in crisis and could potentially bankrupt. As Kuhnle [2001: 103–105] states: *From the 1970s, various theorists have claimed a fiscal crisis (O'Connor 1973); a crisis of governmental overload (e.g. Rose and Peters 1978); a crisis of legitimacy (e.g. Habermas 1976); a crisis of liberal democracy (e.g. Crozier et al. 1975). If by crisis is meant breakdown or radical institutional change, none of the theories can be said to have <succeeded> empirically, so far.*

Kuhnle follows with assumption that accordingly to many empirical investigations the European welfare states were growing during 1980s and 1990s in terms of number of employees, as well as the scale of public expenditures and number of beneficiaries. Another distinguished welfare state analyst proving in scientific manner invalidity of crisis predictions, described them as myths, based on sometimes real and serious presumptions, but used frequently by ideologically motivated critics of socially responsible welfare state [Castles 2004: 45-46].

Indeed, even in the United Kingdom and the United States of America, where traditional welfare state was exposed to biggest ideological attack in course of 1980s, no fundamental changes in measurable outcomes could be noticed[1].

The analysts of welfare state in many cases try to disregard political swings in states under study and concentrate just on the institutional and economic dimensions of the welfare state, paying special attention to the size and structure of social transfers or the scale of public social provision. However, some scholars like for instance Walter Korpi claim that factors other than expenditure data and its relation to the Gross Domestic Product should also be taken into account. In his opinion special attention should be paid to: descriptions and quantifying of the legislated social rights in major social insurance programmes and analysis of the situation in the labour market and pay-as-you-go pension schemes [2003: 591-598]. In Korpi's work, also a nature of the partisan politics in given country is taken into account as impacting the welfare state, as well as increasing gender inequality in some Western countries as the result of reliance on means-tested benefits. Pointing out also at some global economic and demographic trends which appeared in Western post-industrial societies, Korpi agrees that the scale of the welfare state retrenchment in Europe so far does not support hypothesis of the twilight of European welfare model. Still some further changes in its nature seem unavoidable.

[1] Someone not familiar with the specific discourse of social policy analysis and methodology of welfare state measurement may say that the statement of exaggerated impact of Thatcher's policy on contemporary Britain has nothing to do with social reality. It is known from numerous sociological studies that reforms of national economy imposed by Margaret Thatcher contributed to serious transformation of social structure and situation of significant part of British society. However, what Kuhnle and Pierson as social policy analysts have in mind, is the scale of various national social expenditures, as well as the structure of public expenditure as the most important indicators of the welfare state development.

SOCIAL POLICY WITHIN THE EUROPEAN UNION: DECADE OF CHANGES AND EXPECTATIONS TOWARDS FUTURE

The same challenges faced by European countries used to provoke various solutions in the past, but in the era of Europeanization and harmonization of the policies, some common solutions are urgently needed. Here we get to another crucial point on the agenda of social policy analysts nowadays. The impact of the European Union (or by then the European Economic Community) on national welfare policies has been traced by scholars since the Treaty of Rome (1957) which contained the recognition of the right to equal pay for men and women [O'Connor: 2005: 346]. Further Europeanization of large sectors of economic policies in the next decades was not followed by similar process in the sphere of social policy which was exclusively the domain of national states. Therefore, the popular term 'European Social Model', which describes differentiated realms of various versions of welfare regime, was useful in the first place as the opposition to the American or more strictly speaking US welfare policy, or to any other social policy settings all over the world. For many years every kind of harmonization of social rights within the EU was blocked, usually by representatives of the UK. Therefore, next crucial cornerstone in the development of the joint EU social strategy was the Amsterdam Treaty, approved 40 years after establishing the European Community. Thanks to the agreement of the Blair's government, the Social Chapter has been added to the Treaty on European Union and for the first time it has become one of the focal points of the EU discourse [Begg, Berghman 2002]. This strategic decision has been confirmed and reinforced three years later at the Lisbon Summit, which has assigned new strategic goals to the European Community, underlying this time the need for further coordination of the social policies in a frame of the EU. Lisbon assignments were followed by agreeing on Social Policy Agenda which defined improvement of the quality of social policy, employment and industrial relations as crucial tasks, underlining meaning of social policy as a productive factor. The set of common social indicators of social exclusion was agreed covering poverty, employment, health and education, which are supposed to be used by EU member states while reporting on the social situation. Similar processes have been initiated for employment and pensions. The enhanced role of the social policy in new EU social policy agenda should be achieved via Open Method of Coordination (OMC) which combines establishing particular goals to be achieved on the national level, setting up common indicators, and creating a monitoring system to track the process [O'Connor 2005; de la Porte, Pochet 2001].

This kind of benchmarking should lead to 'institutionalized intelligent policy mimicking', using the phrase of Frank Vandenbroucke [2002: XIX-XXIII], the Belgian Minister of Social Affairs and Pensions who under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU commissioned preparation of the report 'A New European Welfare Architecture'. He pointed out three elements which are required to ensure well planned and efficient benchmarking: first, reliable information on social policy and its results; second, evaluation of this information in the light of commonly defined objectives and third, contextualization of this data in relation to particular local conditions.

One of the authors of this report was Gøsta Esping-Andersen, probably most prominent figure in the field of social policy analysis in previous two decades, especially since publication his influential "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" in 1990. His typology of welfare states was hailed and criticized, contested and discussed. It was undoubtedly the most important reference point for the analysis of the European welfare in the recent decades. His classification of the welfare states distinguished three ideal types of the welfare regimes: conservative, liberal and socio-democratic, which originated in different historical circumstances and followed different developmental trajectories. The typology is based in the first place on the level of decommodification in each of them and the kind of social stratification and solidarities [Esping-Andersen 1990: 27].

Esping-Andersen's classification was modified many times by various scholars, who usually extended number of ideal types using slightly different indicators and dimensions as the base for differentiation. Arts and Gelissen [2002: 141-144] point out the typologies of Castles and Mitchell (accordingly to the welfare expenditure, benefits equality and taxation), Ferrera (based on rules of eligibility and organizational, managerial and financing regulations), Siaroff (with family orientation and gender issues taken into account), Bonoli (states differentiated by quantity of welfare expenditure), Korpi and Palme (related to the bases for entitlement and governance of social insurance programme) and the one of Leibfried as the most notable and influential ones[2]. While selecting

[2] Researchers try to avoid axiological assessment of the welfare states or setting up the hierarchies. Quite rarely they present opinions which could be understood as supportive for one of the types. The example could be found in an article of Leibfried and Obinger [2001: 4] who admitted the efficacy of Scandinavian model of welfare, describing Finish experience of dramatic economic crisis at the beginning of the nineties. Nordic scheme proved at that time that system of social protection provided by the advanced, universalistic welfare state could help citizens to cope during even unexpected and overwhelming economic disaster. It turned out also that Scandinavian welfare model does not hamper the economic reforms with Finnish economic success without imposing drastic cutbacks in welfare expenditure being the best example.

country cases for the purposes of the PROFIT project, the latter Leibfried's typology has been implied. He has distinguished four types of welfare states: Anglo-Saxon (residual), Bismarck (institutional), Scandinavian (modern) and Latin Rim (rudimentary), accordingly to the social insurance and poverty policy in each of them. Four Western European countries being members of PROFIT sample represented these types of welfare states.

It has to be underlined that none of the above mentioned typologies could be applied directly to the countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Although Deacon in 1992 had tried to categorize CEE states accordingly to the Esping-Andersen's typology, a half decade later he admitted that this attempt proved to be a failure as no empirical evidence supported his earlier claims [Deacon 1992, 1997; quoted after: Cerami 2005: 44]. Cerami in his work on the emergence of welfare systems in CEE after the collapse of communisms provided evidence that in none of the states simple adoption of the pre-existing welfare regime took place. The appearance of certain solutions in a sphere of social policy was a combination of intersecting influences of pre-existing institutional rules inherited from the communist era (and sometimes also from the institutional legacy from before communism), the choices and beliefs of the actors influenced by the earlier discourse on the welfare issues and the interests of powerful pressure groups [Cerami 2006]. All these processes appeared in situation of rapid transformation of economic and political regimes and were also influenced by the specific historical and cultural tradition in each of the countries. As a result: *different national settings have produced a variety of welfare structures, which Esping-Andersen and numerous other authors have tried to summarize and to categorize, neglecting, however, to develop a logical social policy framework* [Cerami 2005: 45].

It also has to be remembered that in the course of transformation of economies of the CEE states, they all were exposed to serious economic pressure from the global institutions like International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which conditioned their financial support for the CEE countries, encouraging the political circles to choose the path towards residual welfare policy of neo-liberal origins [Deacon 2000: 146, 152].

Gøsta Esping-Andersen as the author of the already mentioned report on the new European welfare architecture underlined noticeable intensification of the EU-wide debate over social affairs and the need of coordinating efforts undertaken at national level and the need of further Pan-European cooperation in this fields, especially after enlargement of the EU structures. The OMC seems for him to be the best path and at the same time, the only one that could be politically acceptable

for all member states. It is a solution that could pave the way for EU social policy to follow employment policy which is hailed by Esping-Andersen as example of success that could be repeated in the other areas of social policy via introduction of the OMC [Esping Andersen 2002: 13-15]. These decisions are important as the European states and society, no matter under which model of welfare, face or will face similar challenges. What Esping-Andersen as well as other authors underline is the impossibility of introduction of the European Social Model as the real, coherent political model that could be imposed on all member states. As O'Connor points it out [2005: 346]: (*ESM…) is an overarching aspirational model incorporating the broad parameters to which European welfare states conform. It is based on a broad conception of social policy encompassing a wide range of 'interventions for social purposes'. In the EU context the social dimension relates not to direct provision of services but is designed to prevent, mitigate or alleviate the social consequences of economic development within the EU.*

It is significant and surprising at the same time, that while interviewing policy makers in countries which participated in the PROFIT project, researchers were rarely faced with respondents' views and considerations over such structural processes operating at the level of European Union. Obviously, this was not the most important subject of the interviews, but the European Community was quite rarely mentioned as the substantial one in reducing inequalities or counteracting inheritance of them between generations. Interviewed politicians rather tend to concentrate on the national level. Most of the respondents when asked directly about the EU impact on social policy tended to speak particularly about the process of the enlargement of the European Union and accession of the new member states. It refers especially to the politicians coming from new member states which entered the EU on the 1st of May, 2004 or candidate countries (when the fieldwork was carried out, Bulgaria was still on its road to the accession which took place on the 1st of January, 2007) who mentioned structural funds as the potential source of money which could be spend on social policy actions which could contribute to alleviating poverty, improving situation on the labour market or equalizing chances of children coming from families with low socio-economic status. Generally, impact of the EU accession was assessed very positively. Very few negative outcomes of the accession were mentioned with potential mass labour emigration which could cause a brain drain to the societies and economy as most frequent one [Pukelis *et. al*. 2006: 145; Warzywoda-Kruszyńska *et. al.* 2006: 197]. Respondents from Western countries quite rarely spoke about the EU's impact on inequalities in given countries. Their opinions were diversified according to political orientation. For example, left-wing politicians in Italy

criticized the EU for imposing neo-liberal economic policy onto member states and others claimed that no serious impact of the EU over internal social affairs could be observed [Longo, Sacchetto, Vianello 2006: 127].

At least partial answer to the question why policy-makers rarely perceive the issue of inheritance of inequalities, or more broadly the social policy affairs in relation to the supranational level of EU could be found in the concept of *welfare culture*, introduced by Pfau-Effinger [2005: 4-10] and defined as *the relevant ideas in a given society surrounding the welfare state and the way it is embedded in society*. Pfau-Effinger has enumerated three levels of welfare culture: values and models as a basis for policy; cultural values and beliefs in the population at large; and public and political discourses that mediate between the attitudes of the public and political decisions. According to her, ideas about the role of social policy vary substantially between countries. Meaning of such notions as *solidarity* or *integration* is conceptualized differently by representatives of different cultures. Beliefs about the personal responsibility for one's own fate, substantial for the national social policy are also connected with tradition and historical background of given state. The commonly accepted values constitute cultural foundations of policies towards work, poverty, state-market relationships and to some extent determine the concrete solutions in policy-making process for example level of redistribution of state interventionist.

It can be assumed that politicians, although representing different political orientations (especially those who operate just on the national level, not having connections to the debates in European parliament or without experience in supra-national bodies), are immersed in discourse which is dominant in given country and legitimized by specific values and norms, and as PROFIT research exampled, tend to concentrate on the state level while talking about social policy.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS SOCIAL POLICY:THE MORE STUDIES, THE MORE DOUBTS

It is already proved that populations differ in terms of their preferences about the welfare state, its role, in various areas of policy (e.g. employment, level of provision of services, taxation). Many studies have been conducted measuring attitudes and beliefs towards different aspects of social policy and welfare state, especially since large scale opinion surveys like International Social Survey Programme or European Social Survey were introduced. Their outcomes sometimes seemed to point in different directions, which is caused, as

Albrekt Larsen [2005: 2-3] argues, by dissimilar selection of dependent variables. However, generally they tend to prove that the more liberal welfare regime is in a given country, the lower support for redistribution and welfare policies in narrow 'American' meaning could be observed.

Some of international studies were concentrated not only on comparisons of the support for redistribution among countries, but went into analysis of patterns of support for redistribution on the national levels, taking into account class position of the respondents. Though the attitudes towards redistribution were found to be clearly differentiated by the type of welfare regime, patterns of support among different social strata was very similar [Svallfors 1997: 283]. Other researchers concentrated on question how the level of inequalities differentiates public demand for redistribution. In some cases, application of different statistical methods provides them with completely opposite outcomes. Finseraas for example [2006] claims that his application of multi-level modelling to data from European Social Survey proved that high level of inequalities in a given country is positively linked with the demand for redistribution and, moreover, it moderates the negative effect of income on demand for redistribution and increase the probability of rich people's support for the redistribution. It comes contrary to common beliefs and the results of the earlier studies, even those conducted with the same datasets [i.e. Jæger Meier 2005].

The quantitative studies over the level of legitimacy of certain welfare regimes are also criticized for its vagueness. Bonoli [2000: 432] criticized them for implementing too narrow definition of welfare state legitimacy. Accordingly to this author, not only questions concerning the role of the government and the role of social spending should be taken into account, but such analysis should encompass people's attitudes towards broader range of topics e.g. labour code as one of the crucial factors defining rights and situation of citizens.

All authors certainly defend their methodological rigours and selections of statistically advanced statistical tools, what could cause confusion among readers who would like to find some conclusive answers for sometimes basic questions.

The studies on the public perceptions and attitudes of issues linked to the social policy are numerous. However, empirical investigations of opinions of policy-makers, those who are responsible for the formulation and implementation of social policy are definitely scarce. Studying political elite or any other kind of elites is considered as one of the most difficult challenges for social scientists. Study conducted in frame of the PROFIT project combine two elements of this kind of research. On one hand it refers to the way how members of the political elite perceive social process of inequality reproduction from one generation to

another. The substantial element of this perception is their perception of people coming from the complete opposite stratum of the social ladder: those who are subjected to the inheritance of low socio-economic status. De Swaan *et al.* [2000: 43-44] designing studies on the elite perceptions of the poor applied the concept of social consciousness of the elites. Due to them: *Members of the elites possess social consciousness to the degree that:*

1. they are aware of the interdependence among social groups in society – and, most relevantly, of the external effects of poverty upon elites, which may perceive either as threatening or as promising opportunities;

2. they realize that as members of the elites they bear some responsibility for the condition of the poor; and

3. they believe that feasible and efficacious means of improving the lot of the poor exist or might be created. (...)

The three elements of a 'social consciousnesses refer to three different types of thinking by the elites. Points 1 entails a factual assessments of the condition of the society in which they live. It calls for a 'proto-sociological' insight on the part of elite members. Point 2 entails both factual assessments (the identification of a causal chain linking their (in)action to the living conditions of the poor) and moral evaluations, which researchers need to sort out. Point 3 requires them to accept the power of collective or public agency (governmental or non-governmental) to change about prevailing situation.

This concept with a slight modification moving the reference point from the poverty to the social inequalities could be applied to the inquiry about the political elites conducted in frame of the PROFIT project. This is not the substantial change in meaning, as from PROFIT empirical data it is evident that while speaking about social inequalities, most respondents tend to concentrate on people economically disadvantaged. However, in the short sketch of main findings presented in the latter part of this paper only some brief conclusions coming from the research are presented. The idea was to present general results in comparative perspective and not get into deep scrutiny over each of the national results, where concept of the social consciousness could be successfully implemented when taking into account specific national and cultural circumstances.

Thus, PROFIT research was concentrated in the first place on the way how members of political bodies perceive the policy-making process and social policy itself as factor that could influence the incidence of the inequality transmission from one generation to another. This is quite exceptional in comparative research

project, as even investigations over perceptions and attitudes of politicians towards welfare and its specific features are rare.

One of the unique examples of this kind of studies over opinions of political elites is the recent research by Bochel and Defty [2007] over British MPs' attitudes to welfare state. This impressive investigation was built upon the former study of Taylor-Gooby and Bochel from the late 1980s which allowed comparisons of MPs attitudes under the Thatcher's government with the ones of the members of parliament during Blair's era. The research covered the whole British political scene with every tenth member of House of Commons being interviewed. It combined interview with open-ended questions concerning politicians' views on the general role of the government in welfare policy with more structured questionnaire on specific issues. This inquiry provided empirical proofs supporting claim of some political scientists of convergence of political attitudes on a middle ground between formerly antagonistic opponents. As Bochel and Defty pointed out [2007: 7-10] this process could be observed as the attitudes towards the role of the government and its impact on the welfare policy have changed significantly. Since utmost polarization in 1980s when conservative MPs believing that the state should just provide the citizens with the safety nets and Labour Party representatives supporting opinion that state should be a provider of the universal provisions of the highest standards, the bipolar division of the political scene has narrowed with both big UK's parties moving to the centre. Twice less conservative MPs support currently the view of the state as the supplier of just basic safety nets and increased substantially number of the Labour Party members who spoke about 'new role of the welfare state' which should concentrate on active and selective measures, in first place in a field of employment policy.

EMPIRICAL DATA FROM THE PROFIT PROJECT

In the second part of this paper general conclusions coming from the PROFIT investigation over the policy-makers' views on social policy and its interrelations with the intergenerational inheritance of inequalities are presented. For the purposes of this short paper only general picture of the politicians' opinions and the differentiation of their judgments is sketched with reference to their differentiations among countries. In opinions of interviewees probably the most important factor that influences life chances of the young generation in comparison with parents is level and quality of education. Therefore, it is educational policy that is mainly in their field of interests.

For research purposes in the frame of the PROFIT project top level policy makers were defined as members of national parliament or those who occupy important positions in central governmental administrations (ministers, deputy ministers) and deal in every day practice with social policy affairs, being responsible for legislative works on the social policy formulation (for example as members of parliamentary committees on social affairs) This decision was based on the assumption that these politicians will possess broad knowledge on social policy and procedures which are connected with the legislative process. To reveal the ways of conceptualizing the problem in each country about ten semi-structured interviews have been conducted with elected members of parliament and representatives of central administration. In all countries also some interviews with representatives of non-profit organizations were carried out, including trade unions and entrepreneurs' organizations, who are engaged in implementation and sometimes also formulation of the social policy agenda.

National research teams were required to interview representatives of different parties and political orientations and they managed to reach them. It means that in each country almost the whole political scene existing at the moment of the study (December 2004 – February 2005) was covered. However, one ought to bear in mind the specific selection of political actors. In consequence, the below presented results cannot be generalized as covering the judgments of the whole spectrum of top-level politicians in a given country. Though opinions of political actors dealing directly with social policy are important for policy formulating and implementing, they could not be considered definitively decisive because the composition of the whole parliament as well as of the ruling coalitions can matter heavily. One of the respondents in Poland put it in this way: *In the [parliamentary] social policy committee we cooperate, we work together and some issues seem to be clear for all of us but when it comes to voting, party discipline forces left-wing parliamentarians to realize the program of the government* (left-wing coalition was ruling at that time).

Another thing is that since the time of the fieldwork elections took place in some of the studied countries. It needs to be underlined, however, there are no serious premises to claim that conclusions drawn from the results of this research would vary substantially if the research were repeated after the elections.

TOP-LEVEL POLITICAL ACTORS' UNDERSTANDING OF IIOFI AND THE PERCEPTION OF ITS 'PRODUCERS'

The United Kingdom is unique among European countries in its war against child poverty, which can be translated as the war against poverty reproduction. Although the mainstreaming of children has stepped up since October 2006 throughout the EU, the transmission of poverty across generations has not been declared *expressis verbis* a priority in official government documents, like the National Strategy Reports (NSR), with the exception of the United Kingdom and Germany. This means that the intergenerational inheritance of inequalities is not perceived by national governments as a challenge to society that requires consolidated actions. The perceptions of IIofI by top level actors match this point of view.

Though there are differences in opinions expressed by top politicians from particular countries, the following similarities should be underlined: [Warzywoda--Kruszyńska 2006:7]

1. The intergenerational transmission of inequalities is mostly conceptualized as almost identical with passing on poverty (social exclusion) from one generation to another, whereas poverty is considered as multidimensional deprivation.

2. The problem is mostly considered to be 'private' transmission [Moore 2001] occurring between parents and their children. Transmission of different kinds of capital (cultural, social, economic) and/or of specific patterns of behaviour and value system are underlined.

3. IIofI is perceived rather as a problem suffered by particular families than a severe social problem affecting society as a whole.

FI: *It does not concern so many people, but it is more like a stable and very complex problem. The big majority of children are doing well or at least moderately well, but then there is a stable minority of those people who are either badly marginalized or socially excluded* [Warzywoda-Kruszyńska 2006: 7].

4. Transmission of disadvantages across generations is treated more as a side-effect of other processes like reduced demand for labour, globalization, and shocks like the system transformation in post-socialist countries, than as a separate social ill to be prioritized and approached in a specific way.

5. Except for Finland, the top-level actors perceive the causes of the persistence of inequality and the possibilities for intervening in the process, according to their party manifesto, as ranging from relative reluctance (right wing parties) to requirement (left-wing parties) of state intervention in the process.

6. Reasons for the continuation of IIofI are considered complex and located at both individual and societal levels

7. Most top politicians attach responsibility of preventing/counteracting the IIofI to public authorities. They underline the importance of cooperation between central and local government in the reduction of the risk of IIofI.

8. Of the utmost importance in the IIofI process education was underlined while labour market and welfare policies were considered secondary in the process.

9. *Via* education people from poor or low status families may be upwardly mobile but the shortcomings in the education system functioning might 'produce' inequality transmission.

SHORTCOMINGS OF EDUCATION POLICY IMPACTING ON THE PRODUCTION OF IIOFI

Overall, the view held by most of the top level politicians in particular countries is that the educational system both limits and reinforces the cycle of inequality. It is only in Finland that educational policy was – almost without exception – considered successful among the political actors. Nevertheless, the interviewees recognised serious deficiencies in the education system as shown below. One of them said: *As regards educational opportunities, I would say that we have reached equality. What we have not reached is equality in results, equality in – being clear – managing through the system* [Naumanen 2006: 97].

Representatives of other Western countries were more critical but less specific than the Finnish ones. They pointed out that educational policy constitutes the most serious problem in their countries without going any deeper into the details. For German politicians, it is the selectivity of the educational system that contributes to the persistence of inequality. For the British politicians the biggest perceived problem were the fees to pay for tertiary education limiting access to university for poor students. Among the Italians, the reinforcement of gender inequalities was seen as the greatest problem.

Top politicians from post-socialist countries were much more specific. The reason for this seems to be the almost total reconstruction of the educational systems during the transformation period in terms of structure of school systems and curricula. In some countries, a new educational system was implemented in the 1990s whereas in others, like Bulgaria, the process is not yet finished. Tremendous changes in the educational systems have provoked detailed consideration in these countries.

According to top political actors there are deficiencies in educational policy contributing to the reinforcement of the cycle of inequality. They are the following:

1. Differences in the quality of teaching and equipment between schools resulting from:

a. Rural – urban differentiation, claimed in post socialist countries and in Finland. Poorly equipped rural schools offer a low quality of teaching and pupils do not have access to the equipment they need. Families living in rural areas usually cannot afford to buy all the teaching materials that are necessary for their children, including providing them with extra classes, fees, or support they need for further studies.

b. Privatization of education: private schools and commercial programmes in public higher schools were mentioned in post-socialist countries. On the one hand, there are schools for children from the financial elite. These schools charge high fees and provide high quality teaching, thus enabling graduates to study at foreign universities and maintain the social and economic status of their parents (as noticed in Bulgaria). On the other hand, private higher schools operating along commercial lines were established in post-socialist countries for those not able to meet the criteria to study free of charge at university. These students come most frequently from lower status families who were not able to provide children with extra-curricular courses to improve their chance of passing entrance exams. The quality of learning is low in private higher schools and thus the return on education is low, too. Therefore, it is an illusion to think that graduation from any higher school improves the opportunity to get a better job and be upwardly mobile in social and economic terms.

c. Formal differentiation among public schools: public elite schools in Estonia accept only pupils with the highest scores. There are schools for talented and gifted children that have excellent teaching staff and financial resources. Competition for admission is strong and parents invest different kinds of capital (cultural, social, material) in children to increase their chances of admission.

d. Informal public school segregation resulting from financing schemes: in post-socialist countries, schools are financed according to the number of pupils. Therefore they offer extras for payment, like additional language lessons, horse riding, etc., to attract children from upper income families living outside the school administrative district. Such pupils are gathered (in Poland) in separate classes for - as school teachers often claim – ‘organisational’ reasons.

In the UK, educational funds are dispersed by the central government to Local Education Authorities (LEAs). As Local Education Authorities also secure discretionary funds by competitive bidding, it becomes obvious that if an LEA is not properly equipped to co-ordinate and administers bids, the 'trickle-down' effects of this inadequacy directly affects the funds available to local schools.

e. The ethnic composition of pupils (Bulgaria, Estonia). Respondents admit that there is not sufficient provision in schools for pupils from ethnic minorities.

2. Education is far too theoretical and does not match labour market demand.

a. Withdrawal of vocational schools from the educational system was mentioned in almost all countries in the study.

Our educational system seems to be oriented towards preparing top-level scientists. However, most of the graduates will not become physicians, cell-technologists or historians (EE) [Trumm 2006: 55].

b. Depreciation of vocational education. Vocational education carries a label of 'failure' in post-socialist countries. This image has been partially inherited from the initial phase of the transition: the rapid restructuring of the economy led to a reduction in the demand for skilled agricultural or industrial workers, which almost exclusively were educated in vocational schools. Consequently, the budget for vocational education was reduced, and schools fell into financial difficulties. The lack of resources led to inability to react to the changing needs of the labour market and improved technologies, which cumulatively resulted in overwhelmingly negative attitudes concerning the entire vocational education system.

c. Skewed educational preferences. Very few are willing to enter vocational schools and acquire vocational training. Therefore, the labour market lacks people with such qualifications as: bricklayers, plumbers, carpenters, etc.

d. Prevalence of theoretical classes in vocational education. Even when vocational schools remain, like in Finland, they are claimed to be far too theoretical. Consequently, there are many people who could become very good workers in several practical professions, but who remain without qualifications because they cannot cope with the more theoretical subjects.

3. Curricula are not flexible and are overloaded, a problem mentioned in all post-socialist countries as well as in Finland and Italy:

a. The universal policy is not enough as regards the multidimensional and cumulative nature of inherited disadvantages. If there are not additional remedial or other selective measures to accommodate the most disadvantaged children,

they will continue to drop out of school because the school programme is too difficult for them, as noticed in Finland and Estonia.

b. In schools, **pupils do not learn what they need:**

The main problem "is not to learn how to do things, it is to learn how to learn" (IT) [Longo, Sachetto, Vianello 2006: 132].

c. School curricula are overloaded with huge amounts of information and are ineffective in providing knowledge and training skills necessary for the future lives of students.

4. Education is underinvested and schools lack resources to make any improvements (especially in post-socialist countries) or offer compensatory programmes:

In practice, the money that are currently directed towards the educational system are used mainly for paying teachers' salaries, and there are ***no funds for the modernisation*** *of schools, for computers and for upgrading the level of education* (BG) [Ignatova 2006a: 27-28].

a. Construction and maintenance of school buildings is included in the expenditures for education. Such practice makes educational expenditure less transparent and produces the impression that education is generously financed.

b. Policy decisions made elsewhere undermine any supportive structures. These policy solutions include not only the cuts in educational expenditure, closing down schools and making classes larger, but the tightening of timetables and demands in the school curriculum. There are not enough possibilities for individual teaching and learning.

5. There are intra-school mechanisms pushing children from disadvantaged families out of school, noticed mainly by Estonian respondents:

a. Labelling and stigmatization

by teachers:

It seems to me, that the school rather legitimises inequality, instead of reducing it. Real stigmatisation happens here – children are stigmatised because of their families and they are treated according to that stigma. Sometimes teachers even look differently at the 'stigmatised' children. The teacher, who allows him/her not to notice the efforts of the child who tries to achieve the same results as his / her schoolmates from better conditions, is a psychological criminal. Unfortunately, there are many such criminals (EE) [Trumm 2006: 59].

Particularly in the smaller rural schools, the family background of children (unemployment, family conflicts, drug abuse, etc.) is sometimes ascribed to the child by the teachers.

by schoolmates:

Of course, children are not blind. They always notice if somebody wears second-hand clothes; they know who has a cellular phone and who does not; they know when somebody has no pocket money, etc. They know all of this, and they speak it out. Nevertheless, they do not think about why it is so (EE) [Trumm 2006: 60].

It results in the exclusion of poor children from better-off peers and constrains them to belong to a group of peers who have the same living standards and attitudes.

b. Withdrawal of socialization functions from the school. Schools try to get rid of students with problems. Schools are selecting pupils according to their behaviour and performance.

Though above-mentioned deficiencies were underlined mainly by politicians from post-socialist countries, they seem to affect all countries in the study to some extent. Prevalence of general education and withdrawal of vocational schools makes it difficult for less talented pupils and for pupils who do not have the support from their families to get the qualifications and be materially independent as an adult. Underdevelopment of education for adults, claimed by many politicians, makes the situation worse. Those who dropped out of school have little possibility to get a second chance.

INTERRELATIONS OF CENTRAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE OVERCOMING OF IIOFI, AS PERCEIVED BY TOP-LEVEL ACTORS

Apart from structural reasons attached to the school system, some deficiencies in school functioning are embedded in the division of responsibility between central and local government. In all countries, provision of social services including school education and welfare is attached to local government, which is overloaded with tasks and underfinanced. Nevertheless, communities attempt to do their best to support people, particularly children in need.

Division of power and responsibilities between central and local levels of government is different in different countries taking part in the Profit project. Finland and the United Kingdom (or – to be more precise – England, where Loughborough is situated, the only region within the UK that has not increased its autonomy *vis-à-vis* the central authorities in London during the recent wave of devolution, i.e. series of institutional reforms of the British governance system)

are centralized countries, also when it comes to the policy responses aimed at counteracting the intergenerational inheritance of inequalities. In Finland activities counteracting inequalities, even though they are locally implemented, are mainly designed and promoted by central government authorities. The ways of organising and financing activities may vary according to the needs of local communities, but the main ideas and principles of operation are formulated at the national level.

Alternatively, Italy and Germany represent countries with the largest margin of autonomy at the local and – first and foremost – regional level. Germany is a federal country where only selected policies (e.g. labour market policy) are formulated and implemented at the national level. Educational policy lies in regional governments' (Länder) hands, while local communities are responsible for delivering welfare to their inhabitants. In Italy, although formally it is not a federal country, regional governments possess considerable autonomy, too. Since constitutional amendments were passed in 2001, the regions are exclusively responsible for welfare policies. Thus, it is the regional level of governance that has become crucial in designing policy measures aimed at overcoming the intergenerational inheritance of inequalities.

Bulgaria, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland are countries with a uniform model of administration, in which, however, local authorities play an increasingly important role. The range of autonomy (and responsibility) of the local authorities has gradually expanded in these countries during the previous and the current decade. Poland has the most complicated division of responsibilities between three levels of self-government and between central and local government.

Though the division of power and responsibilities between central and local levels of government is different in countries in the study, there is a commonly shared opinion among top-level actors that:

1. The interrelationship and cooperation between central and local government is necessary in the fight against poverty and the reproduction of inequality

2. Decentralization of responsibility for solving social problems is useful because only communities are able to:

a) define social needs according to local circumstances
b) define accurately groups and individuals requiring support
c) provide social services tailored to specific needs
d) implement a holistic approach
e) act efficiently in spending public funds
f) create networking respective to needs
g) attract private institutions and organizations to cooperate.

3. Cooperation between central and local levels of governance in overcoming poverty and its reproduction is a matter of criticism.

4. The imprecise and inappropriate division of responsibilities between central regional/local governments makes it often difficult to satisfy needs.

5. Overloading and under financing of communities makes them less efficient than they could be.

6. Coordination of social services in communities is perceived as weak and insufficient.

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Wojciech Woźniak

TOP LEVEL ACTORS SPEAK ABOUT SOCIAL POLICY AND INTERGENERATIONAL INHERITANCE OF INEQUALITIES

(Summary)

The article has been divided into two parts. In the first one the author presents dominant trends of the contemporary academic discourse over the European social policy, in the context of progressive europeization in this field as well and on the level of comparative research. The second part of the article depicts results of studies led among central level politicians (members of parliament, members of government) conducted by each national research team within the framework of the PROFIT project. The starting point of the research was the assumption that the way politicians contextualize the problem of social inequalities inheritance and politicians' opinions about the phenomenon of IIofI can considerably influence the mode state's priorities concerning social policy are being formulated.

POLITYKA SPOŁECZNA I NIERÓWNOŚCI SPOŁECZNE W PERCEPCJI POLITYKÓW SZCZEBLA CENTRALNEGO

(Streszczenie)

Artykuł podzielony jest na dwie części. W pierwszej autor prezentuje główne nurty rozważań obecne we współczesnej akademickiej refleksji na temat europejskiej polityki społecznej, zarówno w kontekście postępującej europeizacji tej dziedziny, jak również na poziomie badań komparatywnych. W drugiej części przedstawione są w sposób porównawczy oraz syntetyczny wyniki badań przeprowadzonych przez zespoły krajowe realizujące projekt PROFIT wśród polityków szczebla centralnego (parlamentarzystów, członków rządów) zajmujących się zagadnieniami polityki społecznej w każdym z ośmiu krajów uczestniczących w badaniach. U podstaw przeprowadzonych badań leżała konstatacja, iż sposób konceptualizacji problemu dziedziczenia nierówności społecznych przez polityków oraz ich opinie na temat tego zjawiska mogą mieć znaczący wpływ na sposób formułowania priorytetów państwa w zakresie realizowanej przezeń polityki społecznej.