

# The Implications of BREXIT for EU Social Policy

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## Focus and Strategy

- ▶ Centred around two questions
- ▶ Whether the EU social policy acquis is such that the departure of one member state out of 28 can affect EU social policy? What is the social policy significance of the fact that the departing member is the UK?
- ▶ Line of analysis –
- ▶ Examine the nature of EU social policy in terms of policy focus, institutions and politics
- ▶ Look at the role the UK has played
- ▶ Reflect on different future scenarios
- ▶ The argument is that the future will be 'determined' by the developing dynamics among policy, institutions, and politics.

## Nature and Remit of EU Social Policy

- ▶ Content/Issues:
- ▶ Rights of migrant workers; discrimination/gender equality; health and safety of workers; employment rates and labour markets; employment rights and leaves; poverty and social inclusion, pensions, health and long-term care

## Development in Foci Over time

- ▶ Founding Foci: living standards and working conditions, equal pay between women and men, free movement of workers
- ▶ 1970s: Education and training, health and safety at work, workers' and women's rights
- ▶ 1980s/1990s: Employment and working conditions (part-time work, fixed term work, parental leave), health and safety at work, and social dialogue + the above (social rights)
- ▶ 2000s: Employment, activation, social investment (understood as early childhood education and care plus 'work-life balance' measures), pensions, poverty and social inclusion.

## Political Orientations

- ▶ Some see market-making social policy – others market correcting
- ▶ Some see neoliberalism – others social investment
- ▶ In practice it's a mix (even a muddle) and very hard fought over
- ▶ Most expansive periods occurred under social democratic leadership

## (Key) Institutions

- ▶ Unanimity – some application of QMV
- ▶ Multi-level governance, 'soft' approach (OMC) very important
- ▶ Limited legal basis but huge role for ECJ
- ▶ The significance of non-state actors

## Signature Moments of UK (Dis)Engagement with EU Social Policy

- ▶ Both engagement and disengagement
- ▶ Disengagement
- ▶ Significant Opt Outs: Social Charter (1989)
- ▶ Special Conditions: Budgetary rebate(1984);
- ▶ Exceptionalism: Recent (2016) concessions around financial integration and free movement;
- ▶ Direct Oppositional Position: Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000), Working Time Directive, EU role in poverty and social exclusion
- ▶ More Passive Opposition: the European Employment Strategy, Youth Guarantee

## UK-EU Political Patterning

- ▶ Policy preferences
- ▶ Pro competition, free movement, unanimity, OMC broadly welcomed, activation and flexibility in labour markets; strengthening of fiscal policy rules (for others!)
- ▶ Politics
- ▶ Who did the UK vote with in Council? Northern European countries – especially Sweden but also Netherlands ; UK government was more often than any other member state on the losing side between 2009 and 2015
- ▶ EP: Very diverse voting patterns, UK MPs most often on the losing side of vote (29% of the time);
- ▶ Bilateral exchanges – especially Netherlands and Sweden

## Change in Institutions

- ▶ Change in QMF formula – analyses suggest that the power of the larger countries (including Poland) will grow
- ▶ Also more difficult to muster the necessary blocking vote in the Council.
- ▶ Not clear how or whether other institutional elements will change

## Future Options for EU Social Policy

- ▶ EU itself sees 5 – are they positive or negative for growth in social policy?
- ▶ Carrying on ?
- ▶ Nothing but the single market –
- ▶ Bilateral partnerships – a la carte + ?
- ▶ Doing less more efficiently ?
- ▶ Doing much more together socially +