

**GLOBALISATION AND THE FUTURE
OF WELFARE STATES
– GERMANY, ROMANIA AND SWEDEN –**

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INTRODUCTION

The increased globalisation of the world economy and the collapse of communism as a social system have introduced new challenges facing national policy formulation. The nation-state has been weakened, as it is much less the master of its own destiny. Even in traditionally strong national policy areas such as welfare, this development can be felt and seen.

In what way has the recent global economic and political changes influenced social policy making in Europe? What are the major changes in social policy in Eastern and Western Europe in the last decades? What are the future prospects of social welfare systems on our continent? These are the major questions that we aim to address in this paper.

First we describe the more general context of political and economic transformation with relation to social policy. Such concepts as ‘globalisation’ and ‘welfare state’ are discussed. Hereafter, we take a closer look at the developments in three European countries with very different welfare traditions, namely Germany, Romania and Sweden. Considering the differences between these countries, we believe they can help us to see that there are similar challenges facing all countries, at the same time as they operate within their own specific context and have very different problems and responses. In the conclusion, we discuss the future potential outlook for European welfare states in general, and for Germany, Romania and Sweden in particular.

Globalisation

The process of globalisation is a very controversial issue provoking negative as well as positive opinions. Still, most people would agree that it is an inevitable process leading to increased commercial, political and cultural relations between

people of different countries. According to Nikolai Genov (1999), the globalisation process divides societies into peripheral and central ones. This development concerns four major dimensions: technology, economy, politics and culture. The technological restructuring is guided by the necessity to adapt to the developments in the field of information and communication technologies. The globalisation of economy is mostly influenced by societal transformations. The globalisation of politics is also highly influenced by current societal transformations, while the fourth dimension of globalisation, the cultural one, is caused by changes in values and norms.

Ramesh Mishra (1999) rather focuses on the economic globalisation, which he regards as the openness of the national economies with respect to trade and financial flows. However, this development is seen very much in political and ideological terms. When speaking about the globalisation process, Mishra (1999) refers both to Hirst and Thomsons' concepts of globalisation and the internationalisation of economies. Despite internationalisation where the principal economic units remain national, in their opinion, "globalisation refers to a situation where distinct national economies cease to exist, in that they are subsumed and rearticulated into the system by international processes and transactions" (Hirst and Thomson cited by Mishra, 1999, p. 4). In this case, corporations become stateless and the global economic system can be controlled only at the international level.

The impact of economic globalisation varies from one part of the world to another. Within the Anglo-Saxon countries (the spiritual home of neoliberalism) globalisation trends are more obvious than they are in the rest of the world. Western countries embrace two forms of capitalism: an European model, which can be described as a "regulated" market economy, and a neoliberal form of capitalism exemplified by the United States of America. Economic globalisation is often seen as a process that is helping to extend and to consolidate the hegemony of the latter form of capitalism (a free market ideology with a minimum of social protection) worldwide.

The Welfare State

Today's conception of welfare state implies more than simple social politics that characterised the period after industrialisation and urbanisation. According to Gøsta Esping-Andersen, "it represents an effort to bring about economic, moral and political reconstruction". Economically, because it was separated from the orthodoxy of the pure market nexus. In addition, the new welfare state required the extension of income and employment security as a right of the citizens. Morally, it meant to defend values as social justice, solidarity and universalism. Politically, the welfare state was part of a project of nation building, affirming liberal democracy against the twin risks of fascism and bolshevism. Hence, many countries became self-proclaimed welfare states in order to achieve national social integration.

Esping-Andersen (1990) has identified three major types of state responses to economic and social change: liberal, conservative corporatist and social democratic welfare regimes. He has designed a typology of countries in regard to the type of their welfare states. It includes the Scandinavian countries that followed, until recently, a strategy of welfare state-induced employment expansion in the public sector (social-democratic); the Anglo-Saxon countries – in particular Britain, New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the United States – that have favoured a strategy of deregulating wages and the labour market, combined with a certain degree of welfare state erosion (liberal); and the continental European nations, like France, Germany or Italy, which have favoured a strategy of induced labour supply reduction (conservative corporatist). All three strategies were intimately related to the nature of their welfare states.

Deacon (1993) referring to Esping-Andersen's three welfare states wonders if the Eastern European countries will be included in one of those types, or if a new "post-communist conservative corporatist" welfare regime will emerge. The author analyses the difficulties that eastern countries have had to face in the transition from bureaucratic state collectivism to capitalism. Among other things, a new social system is needed. For some countries (for instance, Bulgaria and Romania) he predicts that a new model of social policy will emerge, a model he calls, as we mentioned before, "post-communist conservative corporatism". Its characteristics are: a long tradition in authoritarian governance, long time influence of church power (Orthodox Church) and left-movements background, which means the ideology of a powerful working class.

The influence of globalisation on the welfare state

Esping-Andersen (1990), Mishra (1999) and Deacon (1997) agree that globalisation influences the welfare states to a large extent. Esping-Andersen points out that the globalisation phenomenon "restricts the capacity of nations to exercise autonomy in designing their own political economy" (Mishra, 1999, p. 3). According to Mishra, three major developments have altered the welfare state in important ways. He mentions the collapse of the socialist alternative, the globalisation of the economy and the relative decline of the national state. Especially, financial globalisation has had a great impact on the welfare state as money and capital cross-national boundaries. Deacon argues that globalization sets welfare states in competition with each other, raises social policy issues to a supranational level, and generates a global discourse on the best way to regulate capitalism in the interests of social welfare.

The economic globalisation has strongly affected the welfare state that traditionally was build in relatively closed economic systems. For example, most OECD nations had dismantled capital controls by the early 1990s and businesses became free to invest worldwide. As a result, the context in which welfare states operated during the golden age of welfare capitalism has changed dramatically.

Therefore, the national governments' autonomy in managing their economies as well as in ensuring full employment and economic growth has been restrained. Full employment can no longer be achieved through demand management by a single country in an open economy. A monetary policy is also difficult to pursue. In other words, as Mishra (1999) stresses, by providing capital with an "exit" option, globalisation has strengthened the bargaining power of capital against both government and labour. For example, government policies concerning wages and working conditions may be determined by the threat of relocation or refusal to invest in their native country. The end of full employment has weakened the power of organised labour. These developments have led to a decline of tripartism and a consensual approach of economic management.

Considering the new economic rules, Mishra (1999) claims that globalisation has put an end to the classical social democratic strategy of full employment, high levels of public expenditure and progressive taxation. As a result, even though their responses might be different, the nation states are deprived of viable alternatives to neoliberal and monetarist policies. The neoliberal route to cost-competitiveness and profitability is through "social dumping", meaning: moving operations to locations with lower wages and working conditions, less social protection and regulation and lower taxes. Mishra (1999) emphasises the contribution that globalisation enhances to the prospect for social dumping at any rate. For example, he mentions a downward spiral in wages, working conditions and social expenditures, as countries compete with each other in the global market place in order to make conditions more "investor-friendly".

Ideologically speaking, the welfare state, according to Mishra (1999), is the foundation of the idea of maintaining and consolidating the community – economically, politically and socially. However, lately, the nation-state seems to be on the retreat. Globalisation, by crossing the boundaries of the nation state, contributes to this development and discourages the welfare state. Regional organisations, for example the European Union, have further weakened the sovereignty and autonomy of nation states. The question is, according to Mishra (1999), whether, in the absence of a strong sense of a shared identity and interest in the nationhood, the welfare state can survive as anything other than an institutional legacy of the past in the process of gradual decay. Nevertheless, he also argues that globalisation and regionalization continues to leave the nation-states and other jurisdictions with a good deal of policy autonomy in respect to cultural, social and many economic matters. He underlined the reality of nationhood and nationalism in respect to mass population that has no global identity.

WELFARE IN GERMANY, ROMANIA AND SWEDEN

It is clear that economic globalisation has a great impact on all nation-states. It has become more difficult for national governments to take independent

decisions in economic matters. As we have seen, this development has in general had an important influence on social policy formulation in welfare states. We will now take a closer look on the impacts on three rather different countries: Germany, Romania and Sweden. Depending on the national circumstances, countries can be affected by, and respond to societal transformations in different ways.

Germany

The current German social security system was mainly formed in the 1950s and 1960s.

The situation was mainly marked by:

- The disastrous experience of two World Wars. A hyperinflation and the worldwide economic crisis weakened the confidence in private social provisions and strengthen the believe in solutions by the state.

- The strong economic growth, after the Second World War, led to a rise in the level of employment. Close to full-employment was reached in the mid-fifties and continued for almost twenty years.

- The friendly economically development in connection with clear constitutional guarantees, brought about a strong position of the collective agreement system (or free collective bargaining) (Lambert, 1998, p.120–133).

The post-war decades were characterised by a consensus about, on the one hand, a market economy system, which promised a higher effectively and welfare level but also higher risks, and, on the other hand, an extended social security system. The most important part of this system was the strong triangular connection between full-employment politics, social security and free collective bargaining. Decisions about an earnings related social system became a higher legitimacy, when all members of the society were able to participate on the labour market. Through this, an earning related system developed (under the condition of full-employment) (Döring, ed., 1999).

This consensus was supported by three political factors:

- Besides increasing prosperity, the extension of the social security system played an important role, legitimising and stabilising the new state when the national identity as a basis for legitimacy was absent.

- The "old" Federal Republic of Germany (before the reunification) was in a political and economical system-competition with the socialist part of Germany. This forced the development of a welfare system.

- The political class saw the great importance of the social security system for the integration within the society because of personal experiences of politicians in the world wide economic crisis. The welfare state was considered a condition for the stability of the democratic state (Kaufmann, 1997, p. 28)

Since the end of the socialist block in Eastern Europe, the foundations of the German social security system have been shaken. The reunification made the first two political factors mentioned above obsolete. The causal connection between

democracy and social security has been questioned and the discussion of the welfare state is becoming more and more fundamental.

The alignment of the social security system to earnings related benefits is becoming questionable, because of increasing rates of unemployment and changing structures of lifestyles, values and gainful employment. As social security systems are organised through insurance (e. g. the pension scheme), the demographically changes are bringing the system to its limits. The welfare state has so far survived, but is questioned by the conservatives as well as by the left. Recently, the German government published the country's first poverty report ever. The results show that economic inequality and poverty is increasing in an alarming way. Single female parents and children belong to the groups that are worse off. The conservatives point at this development as a failure of the welfare state. They claim that it does not work efficiently and that it is too expensive. The left says that the problem is that there is not enough redistribution from the high-income earners to the poor. To deal with the problem, they think high-income taxes should be raised. Nevertheless, the right as well as the left does agree that the welfare system in Germany has structural problems and that the social security system has to adjust to new circumstances.

Romania

The basic conception of welfare in Romania before 1989 was that everyone had the right and obligation to work. In order to support full employment the state provided jobs for everyone, although the place of work could be situated anywhere in the country. In this system there was no need for unemployment insurance, because everyone had the right to work. When you worked, you automatically entered into the social security system. In this way housing, free health care and many other social benefits and services represented no problem for employees. When somebody, for different reasons, refused a job, he or she had no possibility to use these services. Refusing to work was even defined as "social parasitism" and a delinquency that could give a prison sentence.

The ideology of the Communist Party (the only official party in the country) contained the idea of a new human being, healthy and in no need for services offered by social institutions. Institutions for disabled, orphans, etc, were not officially recognised and consequently suffered from neglect by public authorities.

Higher education was highly politicised, which also meant closing several university departments in the social sciences, for instance anthropology, sociology, psychology and social work. This policy was consistent with the idea that there did not exist any major social problems in the society. One consequence of this policy is the current lack of social policy experts and social workers in Romania.

After the political changes in 1989, there was a short period of euphoria among the population, but it was fairly soon replaced by disappointment because of inability of the new government to implement proposed reforms. The economic

development was negative, with declining production, unemployment and high inflation. GDP in 1997 was 82.3% in comparison with 1989 (Zamfir, 1999, p.71). At the same time, many politicians tried to use the transition for personal benefits.

The social effects of the transformation process in Romania have been increased inequality and poverty (even to the extent of pauperisation of large sections of the population). The transformation has meant a new social stratification, with a new class of rich people not necessarily connected to productive economic activity, and where large sections of the educated middle classes have experienced a social mobility downwards. During the first period of transition, this development created problems concerning the relation between reward system and the level of education and contribution to economic development. Today the situation is somewhat more stable in this respect.

After the general election in 1996, the opposition came to power and announced that they would implement more thoroughgoing structural reforms. These reforms have not been popular, due to the social costs and the lack of short-term improvements of the economy. As a result, the government from 1996 was not re-elected in the year 2000 elections. Instead, a new government, dominated by the "social democratic party" (a section of the party that governed before 1996) has been installed.

The configuration of Communist welfare policy in Romania

The basic goal of the communist welfare project was a prosperous society with a high level of homogeneity among people. Work represented a duty and a right, and welfare policy was a mix between universal benefits (accessible for all citizens) and social measures related to employment or to specific work places.

Most social benefits were related to *work participation* in two different ways:

1. Work meant that you were eligible to receive child allowance, scholarships, holiday and treatment tickets, health care, sick and maternal leave. People outside state-regulated work had no access to these social benefits.

2. Contributions at work were defining the level of benefits; an earnings-related system designed to maintain social differences. Examples of income related benefits were pensions, sick pay and paid maternal leave.

Communist welfare policies used *four types of welfare benefits* for social support:

1. *Universal transfers* of benefits and services: jobs, education, free or subsidised housing, treatment tickets, subsidised prices for everyday products, for example basic goods for children and food.

2. *Income-related benefits* related to work contributions: the social insurance system. This earnings-related system symbolises the socialist principle of distribution, benefits in relation to contribution and the ideological conception of promoting the value of work. Apart from material benefits from work, the

individual also got social esteem by his or her contribution to the collective welfare.

3. *Social transfers* dictated by needs but conditioned by employment: free health care, housing, child allowance, and free or subsidised specialised treatment or holiday tickets.

4. *Targeted transfers* directed to poor families, based on means tests. Additional child allowance if you had a low income, reduced treatment costs, scholarships for pupils and students from low-income families.

The configuration of welfare policies focused on some basic principles related to communist ideology. The full employment policy aimed at promoting a socialist ideology that work is the most important value in society, because welfare was produced by your own contribution. Another idea was to create homogenous collective welfare using social measures against poverty. These principles were implemented through the different welfare programs mentioned above (income-related social insurance, means-tested benefits for the poor). In this welfare system the enterprises where you worked were supposed to be responsible for social insurance. Special attention was given to child support, aiming to promote nativity (this policy also prohibited abortions, which was illegal). The communist system emphasised social services and subsidised consumption instead of direct money transfers. In relation to ethnicity, the policy was non-discriminatory, treating traditionally discriminated groups according to the same formula as the majority population.

Transformation of social policy

Important changes have occurred in Romania since the collapse of the communism. The transition from planned economy to market economy has meant high social costs for large sections of the population. One of the most important consequences is the end of full-employment. In the pre-1989 welfare system there did not exist any unemployment insurance and no social assistance. This lack of basic welfare programs needed under a capitalist market economy emerged into a social problem in Romania during the transformation, with a housing crisis, increased unemployment, deterioration of the social security system, and difficulties to cope with the increased prices for basic consumption, especially food.

The costs of transition have affected especially poor people. So, economic inequalities have increased, creating a bigger and bigger gap between poor and rich people. UNDP – National Early Warning Report – ROMANIA – report no. 5, May 2000 (*Centre for Political Studies and Comparative Analysis*) mentions the following: the Government decided to radically change the generous system of unemployment payments awarded to employees laid off as a result of company restructuring, reorganisation, privatisation, or liquidation. The government changed Emergency Ordinance no. 98/1999 to:

- End lump sum payments;
- Cut payments when a beneficiary gets a new job;
- Remove severance payments from the unemployment fund;
- Continue to pay laid off employees unemployment payments from the employer's wage fund, as per the collective labour contracts;
- Continue to pay unemployment to current beneficiaries;
- Continue to pay unemployment to those laid off by companies included in the EU Financing

Memorandum of the Enterprise Restructuring and Workforce Retraining Program (RICOP). However, it will be difficult to re-balance the social insurance budget.

This unemployment pay policy change has two major implications:

The government is acknowledging that the former plan was wrong, since it placed a huge burden on the plan's fund, forcing select payment of a minority of beneficiaries.

At the end of April 2000, about 85,000 unemployed people had received almost the same amount of money spent for all of the rest, about USD 800, 000. This payment of the majority of the available funds to a relative few unemployed is not only unfair, it also ignores the lessons of the last three years, that people receiving generous unemployment benefits:

- have less desire to look for a new job;
- lack job-seeking experience, which further quells ambition;
- demand continued, generous support or government provision of a job paying at least as equally well.

Another important issue discussed in the report is the reform of the pension system. Pension reform has become an issue for two main reasons. On the one hand, those who retired before 1989 receive less money than those who retired after 1989 do. On the other hand, even though a relatively small portion of budgetary expense, pensions are a financial burden that the current social security system finds increasingly difficult to shoulder. Any increase in social security payments would unbalance the budget. Consequently, the current government has no electoral support from pensioners. Nearly one million pensioners benefited of the minimum pension increase in May. However, one quarter of pensioners is still not satisfied. The reform in the Pensions System was significant in percentage terms, but only increased the actual money paid by a few hundred thousand ROL (1USD = 20,675 ROL, as of May 31st , 2000). Under the reform, the average pension represents approximately 45% of the average gross salary. The replacement ratio has increased by more than 100%, due to new pensioners that receive pensions higher than their former salaries. The gap between contributions to the fund and pensions paid can be lessened by changing system variables, ideally some combination of:

- raising the retirement age;

- raising the amount of contributions paid;
- cutting pension amounts; and,
- increasing the number of contributors.

A structural reform of the pension system is needed more than ever. Nonetheless, changing the system alone is not enough. The current pension system requires structural reform since it is not financially viable in the long run. Private pension funds should be added to the state system, but Parliament has delayed passing the necessary legislation. This is a major mistake, since solving the pension system crisis requires time. If reform is delayed, the burden is further shifted to future generations.

The former communist countries have experienced that global organisations have imposed austerity policies, in the form of structural adjustment programs and other changes, as a condition for the granting or rescheduling of loans (Deacon, 1997). This is also true for Romania.

Sweden

Full-employment was for a long time the cornerstone of the Swedish welfare state, as it was the foundation of the social system. Female participation in the labour force started to increase by the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was largely the result of the expansion of child and elderly care, and the change from a family based to individual taxation in 1971. Since then, the participation in the workforce has generally been high among women as well as men.

While most Western European countries faced increased unemployment rates already after the economic problems of the 1970s, Sweden managed to keep the figures low until the beginning of the 1990s, when an economic crisis hit the country. Unemployment rose from 1.8 per cent in 1991, to 9.5 per cent in 1993 (Mishra, 1999, p. 75). It was then realised that traditional Keynesian economic measures were difficult to use in the ruling global economic order.

During the 1990s, Sweden has been forced to accept higher levels of unemployment, and, as a consequence of the crisis in public finance, cuts and changes have been made in the social security system. According to Ramesh Mishra, these changes have also been a direct result of forces that can be linked to the economic globalisation. Swedish capital is highly concentrated and internationalised. Therefore, with increased financial openness, it has become more difficult for the government to formulate an independent economic policy. The previously important system of neo-corporatist co-operation between the social partners has been undermined and top marginal tax rates have been reduced (Mishra, 1999, pp. 75–77).

In the second half of the 1990s, major reductions were made in benefits for sickness, unemployment and parental leave. However, recently the payments have been raised again although they continue to be lower than before the economic crisis. Another important change is the reform of the pension system, where more

emphasis has been put on private initiatives (Nordlund, 2000; Palme, 2000; SOU 2000:3).

Today, the Swedish economy has recovered and it is possible to trace some of the effects of the economic crisis. Generally speaking, it can be said that the welfare of the Swedish population as a whole deteriorated during the 1990s. However, groups with a weaker establishment on the labour market were more vulnerable and were hit harder. These were primarily single parents (mainly women), non-European immigrants and youth (The National Board of Health and Welfare, 2001; Björklund et al., 1999; Lundborg, 2000; SOU 2000:3).

The hardships of the 1990s definitely put the Swedish welfare system on trial. However, with minor modifications, the system survived. One could even claim that it proved to be rather efficient as it managed to prevent a massive rise in poverty and social exclusion. The overall poverty rate in Sweden continues to be lower than in most EU member states. Nevertheless, the economic inequality has become wider and the income gap continues to increase. A central issue in the current Swedish debate is that, while the country as a whole has recovered, a group of the population has been left behind (The national Board of Health and Welfare, 2001, p. 225). Sweden is becoming a more divided society.

CONCLUSION

No country has escaped the influences and processes of transformation linked to globalisation. Social policy has mostly been effected by changes in the international economic system. In this paper we have seen that it is becoming increasingly difficult for individual nation-states to take independent economic decisions. The increased financial openness has strengthened the power of capital and weakened the influence of governments and labour unions. The most evident result of these trends has been the increased levels of unemployment throughout Europe. Full employment can no longer be achieved through government initiated stimulation of the national economy. In addition, most countries are currently experiencing increased economic inequality among their population.

How economic globalisation will affect welfare policy in the long term has been a topic of vivid discussion. There are several different hypotheses focusing on the effects of global changes in terms of economic and political influences on welfare states. In the "dismantling hypothesis", promoted by Castells, Jessop and Teeple, it is argued that the welfare state will be reduced to a minimum due to international competition regarding wages and taxes. Pierson, however, has a contrary opinion. He argues that the welfare states are surprisingly resilient to the challenges of globalisation (Nordlund, 2000). This latter opinion is shared by Nordlund, who has shown that the welfare models of the Nordic countries have been quite sustainable during the 1990s.

The countries that we have looked at in this study – Germany, Romania and Sweden – have all experienced important changes with regard to welfare policies in recent decades. Many of these changes can be linked to global economic and political circumstances. Nevertheless, by comparing the three, we have also seen that not all countries experience these trends in the same way. Depending on the historical, economic and political circumstances that are specific to each and one, the context and response will be different. While Germany and Sweden are trying to adjust already existing welfare policies, Romania has during the past ten years struggled to implement a whole new system.

Both Germany and Sweden have been forced to accept higher levels of unemployment and increased economic inequalities. Minor adjustments have been made in their social benefit and insurance programs. Demographic trends will play an important role for future welfare prospects in these two countries. With an ageing population and low birth rates, financial contributions to the state will decrease and the need for different types of benefits (pensions, health care, family allowance etc.) will change. Hence, a reallocation of resources will be necessary (The National Board of Health and Welfare, 2000, p. 229).

In Romania, the transformation from a planned economy to capitalist market economy has created the need for protection against special risks in capitalist society, like unemployment, inflation and poverty. Currently, the social security system is not able to protect the most vulnerable groups exposed to poverty (long-term unemployed, families with children, single parents – especially women, ethnic discriminated groups like the gypsies, orphans, especially after they have reached 18 years of age). Unemployment benefits are only paid for a short period and after this period the unemployed even have to pay for retraining programs themselves. The major social insurance benefits are indexed in relation to income and not to price increases. Considering the high inflation in Romania, this means deteriorating purchasing power, especially among groups that relies on social security.

Globalisation has further meant that individual countries are more influenced by international and regional organisations. Organisations such as the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD are actively working in favour of liberalisation of trade and financial markets. Many countries in Eastern Europe, among them Romania, have had to formulate their social policy in accordance with structural adjustment programs designed by the IMF. Indirectly, these organisations are also influencing Western European countries.

The European Union is also becoming an important factor for national policy-making, in member, as well as applicant, states. However, as we have seen, European welfare traditions can be very strong and difficult to change in a more radical way. In a country like Sweden, where the EU is highly unpopular, it would be impossible to use European integration as a valid argument for change. Where the EU will influence social policy the most is probably through its economic policies. So far, an "European welfare state" seems very distant.

European welfare states are facing many new challenges. Their future success will most probably largely depend on how successful they are in adjusting to various types of changes. Germany and Sweden show us that despite the new circumstances, the welfare systems have largely remained intact. Romania shows us that some type of social policy is necessary for the wellbeing of a country. The welfare state is not going towards its end, it is rather adapting to the new circumstances.

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