Beyond Policy Change: Convergence of Corporatist Patterns in the European Union?

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This document contains the summary of a text that will be published as Chapter 12 of the following co-authored book:

Complying with Europe?
The Impact of EU Minimum Harmonisation and Soft Law in the Member States

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12 Beyond Policy Change: Convergence of National Public–Private Relations?

Summary
This chapter extends the study of Europeanisation from policy content to patterns of policy-making, specifically to co-operation in policy-making between the major interest groups and the state. Since the beginning of the 1990s, remarkable developments have taken place in EU social policy in procedural terms: EU social partners have become formal co-actors in the EU’s legislative procedures. While, so far, research has mainly addressed the emergence and development of interest group structures at EU level (bottom-up perspective), this paper analyses the top-down effects of EU social policy on all 15 member states: Are the national systems of public-private interaction affected by the “corporatist policy community” at EU level? If so, how?

In an exploratory manner, we examine three different ways – with potentially contradictory effects – in which EU social policy might exert top-down influence on patterns of public-private interaction at the national level. These EU incentives are based on “hard” binding law on the one hand, as well as “soft” transmission mechanisms like e.g. best practice diffusion on the other hand. As a yardstick for detecting major changes, we develop a particular typology of co-operation in public policy-making by management, labour and the state.

The empirical analysis of 15 member states show a light trend towards convergence, leading to a moderate social partnership model of involving private interests in the making of social policy. Most importantly, this trend is driven by the forced adjustment of the most extreme model of corporatism in the typology (social partner autonomy). While “soft” incentives were taken up occasionally, “hard” incentives, which were based on the binding force of EU (case) law, had the most far-reaching effects. This has led to the somewhat paradoxical situation whereby, despite significant progress of EU level social partnership in the field, EU social policy not only promoted the involvement of both sides of industry in domestic policy-making, but also contributed to a weakening of (a certain type of) national corporatism.
If you are interested in receiving draft chapters for feedback, please contact (falkner@ihs.ac.at). Related articles on specific sub-topics can be found on our project homepage: http://www.mpi-fg-koeln.mpg.de/socialeurope.

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