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The European Union and Social Cohesion

Résumés

- European Commission, The Social Policy Agenda. Brussels, June 28, 2000.

The European Commission recently unveiled its new Social Policy Agenda to the European Parliament. The Agenda forms part of the integrated approach towards achieving the economic and social renewal outlined at Lisbon. The guiding principle of this new Agenda is to strengthen the role of "social policy as a productive factor." This means viewing social expenditures on health and education as an investment in human resources, with positive economic effects. The Commission argues there is a positive correlation between the scale of such expenditures and the level of productivity in countries concerned. Social transfers covering pensions and social security do not only contribute to balance and re-distribute incomes throughout lifetimes and across social groups, but also support better quality in employment, with consequent economic benefits. The Agenda can be consulted at <http://europa.eu.int>

- Draft report from the Study Group on Education and Training in Europe (1996). European Union, Brussels, June 1st.

This report is not new, but its interest lies in the comparative analysis it develops between the European and American "models" of social cohesion in Chapter IV, entitled: "Maintaining Social Cohesion through Education and Training". The report argues that social cohesion can be obtained in two ways: (a) with strong involvement by central and local public agencies who are responsible for upholding social justice as socially formulated through the democratic electoral process; this is, in general, the situation in Europe; (b) through the collective expression of individual social conscience, which agrees on a common concept of achievement and, therefore, of failure.

The "American dream" is a good example of this second case. American society largely agrees on the legitimacy of success (self-achievement) and has developed an awareness of "benefit to the community" in the mind of each of its members. This is the basis for maintaining social cohesion. Considerable objective disparities in social positions have perhaps been tolerated

because the "losers" subscribe to the American dream and internalize their position as a personal failure. This is why they are less inclined to make demands on the state. But in Europe, the social contract linking the peoples of the European nations involves the state and public authorities. It is they who must guarantee social cohesion in most European countries, together with equal opportunities and social protection. There will be no long-term support if the emerging socio-economic model denies this historical reality.

- European Business Network for Social Cohesion (2000). For an Entrepreneurial and Inclusive Europe. Business Leaders' Input to the Lisbon Summit, March 2000.

In 1999, the Presidency of the European Union invited business leaders to make an input to the European Summit on Employment, Economic reform and Social Cohesion to be held in Lisbon in March 2000. This document is the answer to that invitation. It argues that the quality of education, social security and services, and the overall cohesiveness of societies are all essential ingredients in building economic competitiveness. A competitive economy cannot be built on a social wasteland. Government can do much by recognizing and promoting public-private partnerships to combat social exclusion. Business, government and NGOs working together can achieve more than any sector could do on its own. To get the full version of this paper consult the Copenhagen Centre, at <http://copenhagencentre.sm.dk>

What's New?

In the run-up to the Lisbon summit, high level actors from the business community within the European Business Network for Social Cohesion (EBNSC) met with the heads of government of several EU member states to share best practices and discuss possibilities for further cooperation in the areas of employment and social cohesion. Following the Lisbon Summit, the EBNSC agreed to lead the "European Campaign 2000-2005," intended to mobilize over half a million business people to embrace social cohesion and the principles of corporate social responsibility. The Campaign will be launched in Brussels on November 9-10, 2000 at the first European Business Convention on Corporate Social Responsibility. More information about EBNSC and their activities is available on their Web page at: <http://www.ebnscl.orh/>

A conference on the "social contract and demographic changes" will take place in Montreal next October as part of the Entretiens Jacques Cartier. For more information consult: <http://cied.umontreal.ca>

The latest issue of CPRN's Network News features an article on a Discussion Paper published by Paul Bernard entitled "Social Cohesion: A Critique". Bernard argues that the three principles that form the motto of the French Revolution (liberty, equality and solidarity) provide the basis for social cohesion. But these three ideas always exist in a dialectical relationship. For the complete version of text see: <http://www.cprn.org>

The Canadian Social Research Link, a website containing several useful references for issues related to social cohesion, has just added a new International Social Policy Link, with close to 100 assorted links to international sources. See: <http://members.home.net/gilseg>