

## **New Aspects of European Integration: Corporate Social Responsibility, Social Dialogue and the Working Environment in the Baltic States – An Interdisciplinary Approach.**

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This seminar programme explores four interrelated themes of European integration; the European Social Model, social dialogue, the working environment and corporate social responsibility. It is intended to be relevant to public policy students, business administration, law and European Studies students. The course is interdisciplinary in nature and adopts a critical approach to many current issues of policy and practice in the area of working environment.

**1. The European Social Model.** The term European Social Model (ESM) has been used in policy circles in Europe but lacks a precise definition. Despite this, the idea of ESM informs much of policy making in social matters at European level. Thus, the European Summit (Lisbon 2000) member states adopted a formal position: “the European Social Model with its *developed systems of social protection*, must underpin the transformation of the knowledge economy”. The ESM is a set of European Community and member-state legal regulations, but also a range of practices aimed at promoting a voluntaristic and comprehensive social policy in the European Union. It contains elements of formal legal instruments and compliance mechanisms and elements of voluntary practice and self-regulation. This course will examine the impact of both in the specific areas of Social dialogue and working environment:

- social dialogue, that is, labour relations, employee rights to participation
- health and safety of employees in the workplace
- corporate social responsibility, that is, the behaviour of companies in the area of social questions of employee welfare and wider societal impacts of business

The course seeks to explore the issue of whether the ESM be transposed into the new member states, the *internal* and *external* political, economic, administrative, social barriers to transposing and implementing the ESM.

**2. Social dialogue and industrial relations.** While a growing number of new member CEE states have adopted legislation aimed at "harmonisation" in line with the general requirements of the "*social acquis*" (the body of EU social legislation), concerns remain as to capacities for implementation especially at the level of the social partners in industry. The goal of “quality” in employment (Lisbon council) is seen as central to the developing so-called European "social model", and a key aspect of European Commission concerns. The implementation of EU Directives on employee consultation in the workplace, and in particular, on health and safety at work, are aimed at realising principles of social dialogue and good practice in corporate social responsibility. However, evidence suggests that capacities for the emergence of a sustainable framework of industrial relations at national, sectoral and workplace levels are depleted, with low levels of trade union membership and weak employer and employee interest articulation. Despite the weaknesses of organised trade unions, industrial protests seem set to increase in the new member states and empirical case studies are examined.

### **3. Working environment**

This seminar assess the policy goals of the European Union against the available empirical evidence regarding the working environment in the new member states but in the Baltic countries especially. It reassesses the gap between post-enlargement objectives and the actual constraints and barriers to achieving a safe and healthy working environment in the new member states. The interrelations of questions of corporate social responsibility, social dialogue and industrial relations and workplace environment are explored. A view is developed of the importance and necessity of developing adequate forms of employee participation in the management of workplace safety and health.

**4. Corporate social responsibility.** There is an important current tendency at EU level to seek voluntary forms of self-regulation (in terms of ‘soft law’ and reflexive regulation), as against the reliance on traditional Community instruments in the form of Directives requiring the external imposition of procedures and norms of conduct. The shift towards new forms of regulation, as exemplified by notions of corporate social responsibility, raises issues concerning the politics and practice of regulation (and de-regulation), both at European and national levels. The development of corporate social responsibility, and significant failures in its practice, are illustrated via case studies of industrial disasters. Key aspects of corporate social responsibility, in the context of the new member states of the EU, relate to issues of developing effective workplace social dialogue and industrial relations, and of securing a safe and healthy working environment for employees. The seminar programme raises issues of policy relevance, as there is the possibility of emergence of a "two-tier" social model in an enlarged EU in which newer CEE Member States remain, below accepted or desired European standards embodied in the European Social Model.

### **Note to potential course participants**

The course lecture presentations and all relevant reading materials are posted on the chair website in a password protected ‘student resources’ area.

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