

## **Family Policy in Europe**

### **Old and new issues**

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Two preliminary remarks:

First: What is Europe? The term Europe is confusing. Two definitions: geographical versus political. Political: The member States of the European Union: currently they number fifteen (Western Europe minus Norway/Switzerland) and an additional thirteen applicant countries (East Europe, economies in transition). Secondly: The Council of Europe (fourty three).

Secondly: What is Family Policy? What is Family? The notion of Family in reference to Family Policy/Population Policy changes over time. I explicitly will draw attention on this changes in the different stages of Family Policy I will identify in the course of this lecture.

#### **Introduction**

In Europe, one can identify three types of family policies, emerging successively. However these policies tend not to replace each other, but can be characterized as supplementing each other, they tend to come on top of each, as lagers. Yet, this leads to complexity, and more important, ambiguity. Ambiguity: since the characteristics (and sometimes even the goals) tend to be conflicting, and at some level even mutual exclusive.

One can identify three types of policy which correspond to the three historical periods in which they emerged. A first one can be labeled economic enabling policy (money); a second one (non-economic) family support and family replacement (services); a third from quantity to quality (of life) (time).

## 1. Family Policy Old Style

Statement: Family Policy from its very origine - at the turn of the century - (1880-1900) - to its high days - the thirties - had not the "poor" at its target population, it was not intended to combat the existing "poverty", it was not geared at the *deserving* poor. On the contrary, it was geared at the hard working, *productive*, blue collar worker.

The underlying values were not "compassion" as some American authors sometimes claim, but social justice and solidarity (solidarity among employees/workers/and even more so solidarity among employers). If we look at the key-measures of the early family policy: child allowances, as an example (e.g. in Belgium together with France and other countries which are the pioneers in F.P.) unmarried mothers did *not* qualify for child allowances till the sixties.

Indeed the early family policy measures (F.A. and fiscal measures: tax reductions or tax rebates) which can be qualified as "economic enabling policies" can be characterized by two characteristics: 1) wage-based, not income ceiled, 2) based on certain family organisation (wage earner model)/family policy = population (natalistic) policy.

### 1) First characteristic:

The crown jewel of family policy F.A. actually was - and still is in many countries - a supplement to the wage. It is based on the notion of "family-wage" and constitutes an indirect wage, this in

order to allow the worker (blue collar worker) to *provide* for him and *his* family (meaning *his* wife and *his* children).

This notion of "family-wage" is currently being advocated by some American family organisations which identify themselves as political belonging to the more fundamentalistic/right-wing groups. It involves the notion (and value) of solidarity to the effect that the employer (at that time referred to as: the boss) who employed many fathers (with a large family/large number of children) should not have to pay more than the employers engaging more singles (unmarried persons). Therefore the employers founded the "solidarity funds". Also the employees paid part of their salary into these "funds".

Conclusion:

a) In relation to social exclusion one can state that the function of these *transfers* were crucial to the effect that they constitute a major measure in *preventing* poverty (the term social exclusion not exists at that time). The impact on the income of families, the family policy at time can be characterized as effective: reaching the target. Therefore, I coined the term: "enabling family policies".

b) These family measures (Family Allowances) are "work-related" in a second sense. They were/are not income ceiled. Everyone from the prime minister to the door-man (the bell-man) had a *right* to these benefits. One must not *qualify*, but (only) *have* a family. This is very much related to the notion of "social exclusion" to the effect that no stigma was attached to these benefits. On the contrary in France one refers to "prestations familiales" which is a positive connotation. Moreover one does not have to apply to get it, one gets it almost automatically, this is also very important in relation to social exclusion: in contrast to many benefits which are income ceiled. In the former case (income ceiled) the ones who *deserve* most, do not always get it (because they are not familiar with or capable to handle the bureaucratic system). The family benefits do not fall in the category of "social assistance" but belong to the realm of social "recognition".

2) Second characteristic: "family organisation"/family policy equals (natalistic) population policy

The early family measures e.g. the fiscal system (ref. the splitting system in France) are geared a certain family-model e.g.: husband/father breadwinner, wife/mother housekeeper (instrumental/ expressive functions). E.g.: Child/Allowance was/is deducted (partly) from the wage of the husband/father but allocated to the wife/mother (the one who cares for the child)<sup>1</sup>. Here arises the notion of "deserved rights", not only in ref. to F.A. but also to other branches of social security such as pensions (survivor pension), sick-insurance (health care) a.s.o. The disappearance in certain European countries of the breadwinner-model (the model has become from a major model, a minority model) has put this system of "derived rights" into the core center of the socio-political debate on two accounts: (a) efficiency, (b) equity.

(a) *efficiency*. two-earner families (husband/wife; father/mother), contribute in some case almost as much to the system (e.g. F.A.) - often the first child - as they receive: so what is paid for is mere bureaucracy.

(b) *equity*. some actions on the political score, including some political-oriented female organisations reject the system of "derived rights"; they want *own* rights based on their *own* role in society. E.g. the International Day of Women, March 9, 2000, featured as one of its major themes: abolishment of the derived rights. This coincides with the growing awareness of the dramatic changes in the so-called "population pyramid". In the European population pyramid the fastest growing groups are situated at the top, and women are over-represented above the age bracket 40-45. The oldest group (90%) consists almost exclusively of women. The system of "derived rights" does not put these women in a situation of "social exclusion". Yet, they are more "marginalized" than they would be, if these rights were based on their own account (rather than on their late husband). And indeed, some of them are put into "social exclusion" since they did not belong to

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover in many states a birth allowance is supplementing the F.A. (mother allowances) more than child allowance. This allowance still exists in many member States (e.g. Belgium 2002: ± € 1.000).

the family model described above. Moreover, with the democratic changes occurring in the life course (e.g. divorce), the system becomes more complex, and results in negative effects for these groups of aging women.

In this respect one can identify two major developments in the so-called "prestations familiales".

*First development:*

As to the F.A. two elements: a) a general tendency: not to include the F.A. in the s.s.s. (social security system) but to transfer it to the tax/fiscal system. This is the case with almost all new- or late-comers to the system (of F.A. or C.A.), or who had to rebuild their system after the Second World War (Germany/Italy). In addition one can observe a debate (socio-political debate) to have the child allowances not longer based on the father/mother employment (work) but to see them (F.A./C.A.) as a "right of the child" itself. Some claim: each child should receive the same amount: (i) irrespective of the occupation of the father/mother; (ii) irrespective of the rank of the child in the family; but the family situation should be taken into account. And this leads us to a second development in the socio-political debate as well as in the actual family policy.

*Second development:*

One can identify a shift in the focus on the "large family" (les familles nombreuses) to a concern for "one-parent families". The concern for and the allowances to one-parent families reflect a "child" orientation rather than a "family" orientation). The former (large family orientation) refers also semantic to (i) the number of siblings, (ii) to the number of children *parents* have to care for (the principle of bearing capacity/the principle of costs of a child), the latter (term: one-parent) refers to the *position* of the child which might be in jeopardy due to the lack of (two) providers. And indeed one can identify two major developments in this respect:

(i) in many countries, many member States of the E.U. see to it that the child support is being collected more efficiently (great example: G.B.).

(ii) special allowances (often income ceiled) to one-parent families are introduced. As a matter of fact, the situation of children in one-parent families tends to be given ground for concern in almost all member States as was recently documented in a study published by UNICEF. General speaking, a child in a one-parent family tends to be worse off (in economic terms) than in a two-parent family.

Similar trends can be identified re: *taxation system*. Generally a tendency from “family” to *individual* taxation: yet (married wives allowances). Erasion of reversed discrimination marriage versus cohabitation (equalization of tax-free amounts/vital minimum). This on grounds of: equality; non-discrimination.

### *Conclusion*

The old system of Family Policy is under pressure, not only on grounds of efficiency and equity (modern values) but also on grounds of social justice (old values). The system of horizontal (re-) distribution is equation (Familienlastenausgleich), the emphasis is to vertical redistribution.

Moreover not only values have changed. Current developments in family organisation (two-income families) as well as dramatic changes in the family life cycle (life course) result in the fact that this system who for decades effectively has served to prevent poverty (difference between the European and American model: “the working poor” now is under scrutiny and tends to become subject of social political debate on the "modernisation of social protection".

Moreover, the so-called economic transfers have been supplemented by total new elements of family policy to the effect that in the European Parliament, January 1999, a resolution was adopted: it reads (quote in French) "dépasser l'approche socio-économique des seules politiques de prestations" meaning: going beyond the socio-economic approach consisting of the political measures I just described.

The old policies are still in existence and always have been strongly backed by the so-called Family Organizations; weak in many countries, very strong in a few member States. Yet, recently these old family policy measures tend to regain some appeal, partly due to some concern over the low fertility roots, Europe and facing: “population decline”.

## **2. Family Policy New Style**

After the Second World War new types of Family Policy emerged. Two types of measures can be identified. First: Measure of educational and remedial nature, which can be labelled as “family function support” (in American language: family life support), second: Parttime and partial: family replacement: a) (Child) care and b) Family help (non-monetary assistance).

*As to the first group.* The major measures constitute: (i) Family under the style of Planning, sexual education, family life education, and (ii) Family Counseling Services.

### **1) Family Planning**

The introduction of the pincus pil as a contraceptive device in the mid-sixties in Europe was not the cause but an important element in the so-called “sexual” revolution. At that time, all over Europe, the newly established ministers for Family engaged themselves in information campaigns and relatively large sums were made available for NGO’s to carry the programs engineered by the authorities. This campaign tended to be relatively short lined. But were revived in the eighties due to the spreading of the HIV virus and AIDS. New campaigns were set under the style of “safe sex” and geared at the general population. Lately similar campaigns were introduced in some member States geared at the youth in order to reduced and, if possible, avoid: teenage pregnancy. Whereas in the campaigns originally were conducted by NGO’s, gradually the market, commercial firms, more particular in mass-communication, tend to take over.

## 2) Family Counseling Services

Family Counseling Services almost 100% subsidized by the governmental departments of Family Affairs emerged in the sixties and gradually faded away in the nineties. They were aimed at consolidating families. Such counseling offices still exist but are in many instances currently integrated in larger systems of “advice offices”.

Next to these offices emerged at that time quite different “tele”-services, e.g. special numbers one can dial and get information and/or advice such as on domestic violence, suicide prevention, and “personal problems”. In the latter family relations problems constitute the main bulk of all calls made.

Lately in quite a few member States “mediation” services and more particular “divorce mediation” is a service that has been recognized as well by courts as by plaintiffs themselves. Many of these offices and services however are not subsidized by the authority but by the private customers. Yet, the authorities play an important role on two accounts: a) they set standards for the service and thus set the rules of conduct and b) they, more particularly, courts can refer plaintiffs to that service.

In the second group, under the style of partial and part-time family replacement, two measures: “family-help” and “childcare” form the backbone of this policy. The family-help service provides for a substitute “homemaker” in case of illness or temporary unavailability of a partner/parent: read: wife/mother. This service is provided by qualified persons for that job. The service is expanded to “aged” and in quite a few countries operates under the style of “Help for Family and the Aged”. In principle this service is temporary and payment arrangements: fee for service. Yet usually is: the service is subsidized heavily by the authorities and the fees are set according to the (family) income.

The second measure: Child care represents a crucial element of the Post War II, Family Policy in European countries. Quantity and quality are at the core center of the socio-political debate. Quantity: e.g. availability is a problem in quite a few member States: e.g. Germany. Quality is a major concern in most member States to the effect that quality tests have been established. Newly, two issues concerning the involvement of parents are at stake: first their participation of parents management in the governing boards and secondly: active participation of the parents in activities, as to day to day running of the crèches.

#### *Characteristics of these policies*

1. In contrast to the direct economic policy this policy provides services instead of cash. Not transfers of cash are here at stake but the establishment of infrastructure in terms of offices as well as in terms of organisation. So these policy measures can be labeled as *indirect* since one has to apply in order to get the service, to act as a customer. One does not get this non-material good automatically. The qualification “indirect” refers to our second feature. As a rule the authorities (the State) does not organise these services herself. Usually the services are subcontracted to large NGO’s and/or to a lesser degree to local communities (civil society). In many instances large NGO’s are established in order to carry out the measures taken by governments.

2. The introduction and expansion of these measures created for some services the emergence and expansion of “family” professionals: qualified and trained personnel in a double capacity: the ones who performed the services and those who run the organisation. Consequently the need for qualified personnel led to the creation of new and expansion of old training programs and even specialized “schools”, on top of that: “in service training” and “specialized” additional training. As a result some claim that part and parts of family policy in fact has become “employment policies”. To some observers family has become a last resort to expand the labour market.

Another element is to the effect that expansion of the budget for this kind of policies not necessarily and not directly improves the condition and/or situation of families to be served. In certain circumstances only the families of the service providers, or the services themselves. Yet, in the long run: families gain by efficient and well-performing services. However, the link between financing and service providing is not mechanistic and indirect. In more general terms there is need for a net balance between the interest of the service and the interest of the families served. The relatively procedure/service provider on hand and consumer/service receiver tends to be somewhat unbalanced in favour of the former. Family empowerment and consumer organisations tend to be better organized in the market-sector than in the social service sector. As a rule, these subcontracts to large NGO's are organized along the socio-political cleavages in society, such as religious denominations (in the Netherlands, Germany), language divisions in others. In many of the member States the current tendency is to overcome these barriers and to concentrate less on ideological but are more oriented versus criteria such as: efficiency, accountability, transparency of the operations.

3) In contrast to the first type of Family Policy where Family Policy could be equated with Population Policy. These types of measures tend to crosscut population policy in its main, pro-natalistic overtones. E.g. Family Planning programs under the style of "the wanted child" etc. are directed towards quality not quantity and thus anti-natalistic. Measures concern crèches qualified as indirectly and are turning down handicaps for realizing the "child wishes".

The measures of Family Policy are predominantly congruent with a (female) emancipation policy. Many of the claims actually originated from the women's movement. Yet, in practice, some of the measures turn out to accentuate even more the division of labour between wife and husband. Therefore some effort is undertaken to develop measures geared at husband/father or at least to

define the latter as part of the targeted population. Men increasingly are targeted as “the” problem group.

### *Assessment*

Two facts:

1) Middle classes tend to be overrepresented as customers. This is even more pronounced for the more educational/counseling measures than for the replacement/substituting measures. Yet the former tend to be or at nominal cost free of charge whereas for the latter the contribution, the fee, tend to in relation with income. Moreover, for some measures specified, such as family-help statutory provisions are to the effect that lower income groups should have priority. Yet the mere definition of “deprived” or “belonging to the fourth world” refers to “exclusion” as measured a.o. by participation.

2) It is very hard to balance supply and demand. This not only is a question of quantity but also of quality. The measure re: family replacement/substitution such as child care are experiencing and overdemand and cope with undersupply where the measures of education/preventing nature hardly encounter these problems. The discrepancy between supply and demand is due to a double factor: (a) cost. The budget of these services tend to increase even without being able to expand service due to cost of staff (with issues such as growing seniority etc.) and equipment. (b) To planning, it takes time to build the infrastructure, to make the organisation operational (time for recruitment/training etc.). As a result the focus is shifted from providing services to providing time.

The focus on time management is clearly expressed by two directives of the European Union, up to now the only directive in the realm of family policy, e.g.: maternity leave, and parental leave. Both measures have featured for decades in the national policies of the member States but at the end of last century the war to some extent consolidate on the European Union and some

convergency was reached across the member States. “Family Friendly” measures under the style of “family-friendly-flexitime”, “career interruption”, week off for family purposes a.s.o. all feature increasing in the collective agreements between employers and employees. More new procedures such as “social auditing” including “family orientation” of the businesses are introduced, in the commercial as well as in the non-profit sector. Two elements are here at stake: a) under the style of “balancing” work and family or “combining” work and family not two but three elements are at stake: (i) family, (ii) work, (iii) citizenship or social life. Indeed since the middle eighties the target is not to reach a fair balance between “home” and “work” but between “home”/”work” and participation in social life. The purpose explicitly stated by introducing and enhancing these policies is to enable persons to allocate some of their time-budget into active participation in the civil society.

Two solutions, two tendencies.

The overdemand has been met by two solutions:

- a) return to the family as provider of services (not exclusively a consumer),
- b) growing importance of business, corporate Family Policy and the market.

a) Back to the family

I already mentioned the question of time management. This tendency however is far broader and can be labeled as growing importancy of “family empowerment”. Examples are: influence of parents in schools, child-care facilities, hospitals. Parents are not only recognized as “partners” but co-actors taking part in the management of the services. This tendency is developing slowly but steadily.

b) The growing importance of the market

The growing importance of the market has been put in terms of “withdrawal of the state” under the style of (in the 80’s): from a welfare state to a “changing society”. I do not assess this statement as one hundred percent correct. The so-called “withdrawal” as the state is to be understood more adequately in terms of the changing role of the state: from *provider* to *manager* e.g. to the one who sets the “rules of conduct”. From provider to broker: the one who gets you a licence to perform services. The “market” has another connotation: new actors entering: the so-called corporate family policy. I should not draw on that aspect. You, in Japan, stand for us as our model in this respect. Yet, in Europe it has two somewhat specific connotations: 1) the great importance of the so-called social partners (employers-employees). The measures I just mentioned were the result of such negotiations between (European) employers organisations and (European) trade unions, this made for some tensions between the “political” power (elites) and the “economic” (market) decision makers. One of the main questions raising is: one fight over the competence to solve an issue rather than on the contents of the issue. This phenomenon is also emerging on the level of the member States under the style of decentralisation. 2) The social service sector itself become more market oriented to the effect that, as already stated earlier, economic parameters such as: effectiveness, efficiency, accuracy, become part of the management prerequisites.

### **3. Emerging issues**

The emerging issues in Family Policy relate to (a) the changing demographic situation (aging of the population), (b) changes in the welfare state (the end of the welfare state?) and (c) more particular the changes in social protection from combatting poverty over combatting social exclusion to promoting social coherence and “quality”.

1) Care. In this respect the increased preoccupation with “care” is to be mentioned. Family Care is less addressed in terms of “Family” Policy than in advancing “informal” care, which in fact is mainly constituted of family care. Yet, the “at home carers” do receive some more attention versus the formal care (ref. to above: professional home-care). The introduction of I.C.T. is being slowly but steadily and tend to be more advanced in rather remote areas (e.g. Scotland).

2) The emphasis on the so-called “active” welfare society advocating “social integration through participation in the labour market” has bearing an F.P. The goals set are: increased female participation in the labour market; measures against discrimination of “older” employees and stimulation of youngsters into the labour market. All three of the measures have direct family impact. One of the features, generally identified as a social problem in Europe (in the USA as well) is the transition of youngsters into adulthood. One of the parameters (markers) used is: time of the leaving of the parental home. This situation, typical for the last decades, is being explained in terms (such as employment) and structural (economic) increasingly in cultural terms (changes in family organisations).

The so-called active welfare society has another connotation: the more market-oriented value-system (as indicated above) with emphasis on efficiency, accountability, quality. In this respect renewed attention has been devoted in almost all of the member States to: 1) parenting and 2) increased attention to *Domestic Violence*.

As to parenting: parents increasing is being portrayed as (i) a technical skill one *can*, (ii) a difficult task that one *has* to learn. Parenting has become a *political* concern. Governments (more particular the legislative branch) are expressing concern (e.g. Great Britain, Belgium).

As to domestic violence the tendency in the last decades was to supplement the individual approach by a social welfare approach (involving the medical sector). Yet lately some indicating measures are to the effect to re-inforce the judicial approach. This relates to child neglect/abuse

as well as to partner abuse. Lately the realm of concern has been widened and more and more attention is paid to abuse of parents and elderly.

3) The element of combatting social exclusion, more recently put in terms of enhancing social cohesion has a direct bearing on measures related to Family Policy. In the society context of changing values it implies in many of the member States the erasing of any different treatment of marriage and cohabitation. The differences branded as “discrimination”, are gradually being phased out more particularly as far as social protection is concerned but also in civil law. Less pronounced is the growing non-discrimination between same gender and heterosexual couples. Where in the late 90’s, PACS (Pacte Civil de Solidarité) still was met by heavy demonstrations rejecting this bill. In the early XXIe century, in few member States same-gender marriage will be statutory introduced (NL, B, D).

As a conclusion one can state that the so-called “old” and even the so-called “new” Family Policy, under the style of Explicit Family Policy show some tendency to fade away in Europe. Yet, family and family matters have become a matter of concern of “mainstream” policy. Moreover family has become central an issue in Employment Policy, Educational Policy and Ecological Policy. As a result identifying what is going on has become more complex and the need for family “monitoring” is growing as expressed in Europe by the European Observatory for Social Change, Demography and Family.

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