

Social Policy Development in Greece

Edited by Maria Petmesidou and Elias Mossialos

Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, pp. 425

reviewed by Zissis Papadimitriou*

The collective volume with the title: “Social Policy Developments in Greece” is based on the results of the Conference on: “Social Policy in Greece and the European Union: New Challenges, Trends and Reform Prospects” that was organized by the Hellenic Social Policy Association in spring 2001 at the Democritus University of Thrace in Komotini, Greece.

The volume consists of seventeen chapters. Apart from the first chapter, the introduction, which refers, generally to the relationship between social protection and policy in Greece, the rest of the chapters are divided into three parts and concern different aspects of the Greek social welfare system. The first part (chaps. 2, 3 and 4) approaches the recent history of the welfare-state in Greece from the perspective of political economy and it also presents political evolutions during the last two decades; the second part (chaps. 5 and 6) explores the social inequalities and the phenomena of poverty in Greek society in conjunction with the negative effects of the current taxation system; the third part, which is the largest (chaps. 7-17), focuses on the study of basic areas in social policy, like the system of social security, gender equality and employment policy, social services, migration policy, problems of social exclusion etc.

In the second chapter, (pp. 25-54), Maria Petmesidou, investigates in a systematic way the origins, the peculiarities, the weaknesses and the perspectives of the Greek social welfare system in relation to the specific economic, social and political facts of the country. Regarding the evolution of the welfare state in Greece after the Second World War, she discerns three different periods and more specifically: a) the period from 1950 until the end of the 1970's. b) the 1980's and c) the period from 1990 up to 2001. In her circumstantial and especially meticulous analysis the author remarks

* School of Law, Economics and Political Science, Department of Law, at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, (Greece).

the fragmentation, exclusiveness and, in general, the adverse character of the Greek social welfare system. While she is not very optimistic, she hopes that the active participation of Greece in the formation of a common European Policy will influence, among other things, the organization, the functions and in general the evolution of the Greek social welfare system.

In the third chapter (pp. 55-72) D. Gravaris refers to the efforts at reformation of welfare state in Greece, over the last two decades, focusing his research interest on the relationship between economic growth and social welfare policies. Adopting the three categories of public policies (distributive, regulatory and redistributive) from Th. Lowi, the author explores in depth the elective affinities between types of politics and particular forms of interest politics, as these appear in Greece and affect directly the course of progress of social policy. Pointing out the role of macroeconomic policy in the formation of social policy, he reaches the conclusion that, in contrast to the developed western democracies "the macroeconomic policy in the Greek case has been systematically divorced from social policy issues at the redistributive level". (p.69). In the fourth chapter, "The Virtual Reality of Welfare Reform" (pp. 73-95), D. Veneris presents in general the advances in the area of social politics in the period 1980-2002, highlighting the main reform efforts, always in combination with social welfare, health and employment policies that were followed by the Greek governments. Enumerating the reasons for which the reform of social welfare has failed, he mentions, among other things, the absence of sustainable, consensual, sociopolitical support, the dominance of economic politics over social politics, the absence of a specific reform plan and the short range influence of progressive political forces in the formation of social politics. Generally, there hasn't been, as he characteristically writes, counterbalance of the "individual cost with collective benefit". (p. 90 ff.).

In the fifth chapter (pp. 99-125), Chr. Papatheodorou examines, based on the statistics and other data, the "distributional impact of income taxes and social security distributions in Greece, and particularly in relation to various income components", to show that they do not function in a redistributive manner. He concludes that, in contrast to the high incomes of entrepreneurial activities that escape tax, employees are paying significantly higher taxes and social security contributions in comparison to their wages and salaries (p. 110 ff.), and that "tax and contribution evasion appears to be mainly associated not with total income but with the structure of the income" (p. 119).

In the sixth chapter the authors P. Tsakoglou and Th. Mitrakos study the structure and the diachronic tendencies in the formation of economics and poverty in Greece in the last quarter of the past century. According to the data they present for the period 1974-1982, that is after the restoration of democracy, a significant reduction of poverty and inequality has been seen, while at the end of the 1990's increasing tendencies appear again. Moreover, the authors observe that poverty, like inequalities, is more likely to be found within rather than between groups, concluding in the end that their confron-

tation requires the application of preferably general and not selective policies, in order to improve the educational level and abilities of weaker social groups. (p. 138 ff.).

In the seventh chapter (pp. 147-174) Manos Matsaganis studies from a critical point of view the structure, and the type of benefits and imbalances of social security in Greece, underlining, at the same time, the need for reform of the system. He mentions more specifically: "Creating a social security system that is more comprehensible in scope and more universal in coverage, but not less affordable for that, requires redesigning the current structure of benefits" (p. 168)

The focus of the eighth chapter (pp. 174-193), by Kevin Featherstone and Platon Tinios, is the question regarding the stalemates, the difficulties and the prerequisites regarding the effectuation of a plan for the reform and development of the Greek pension system. While many of the features of the pension system are not exclusively Greek, the authors, apart from the political obstacles and the structural deficiencies of the system, also highlight some idiosyncratic elements of the Greek character that are responsible as well for the inadequate realization of reforming targets. On the other hand, they consider that the gradual domestic discourse regarding the necessity of modernization, as well as the "external intervention of 'Europeanization'", will reinforce the reforming tendencies in the country. (p. 190).

In the ninth chapter (pp. 194-218) Seraphim Seferiadis, explores the impacts of European Employment Strategy (EES), taking as an example the case of Greece, in order to study the way in which the European Union aims to deal with the problem of unemployment, indicating, in this way the contradictions, weaknesses and negative effects of EU employment policies. He concludes: "If the Greek experience teaches us something, it is that problems may persist not because of limited 'co-ordination', 'consultation' or 'monitoring' but because the substantive policy core of the EES is in need of serious revision". (p. 212).

In the tenth chapter (pp. 219-238), Th. Papadopoulos focuses his interest on the study of the welfare support system for the unemployed, which, as he states, not only does not comply with international standards but also concerns a limited number of unemployed. Additionally, he indicates that professional education, which is financed from EU-funded programmes, has often been used as a substitute for benefits and social assistance. As the author underlines, the empirical data confirms that "the Greek system of unemployment compensation is both institutionally and financially incapable of providing adequate welfare support to the majority of the unemployed". (p. 234).

In the eleventh chapter, Maria Karamessini provides a thorough and in depth analysis of the issue of gender equality and employment policy in Greece. The chapter is divided into four parts and, more particularly, in the first part the basic characteristics of employment policy are presented as well as the incorporation procedure of genders in labor; in the second part the author refers to the basic characteristics of gender inequalities in the Greek labor market, in its current state of evolution, describing at the

same time cases of equal gender treatment in the framework of employment policy from 1990 onwards; in the third part the author evaluates the efficiency of the actual employment policy in relation to the reduction of gender inequalities; in the fourth part she contemplates future perspectives for gender mainstreaming, stating in the end that nowadays the prospects are much better than some years ago.

In the twelfth chapter (pp. 263-285) Konstantina Davaki centers her interest on the study of family policies from a gender perspective. After presenting the progress of family policies from 1981 onwards, describing at the same time the reform of family law, she deals with two basic subjects that affect deeply the life of women, lone mothers and care. By using a wealth of supporting material she describes woman's status in Greek society and the treatment of women in social policy, underlining that women in Greece: "are seen more as mothers and wives rather than as independent workers despite equality-promotion legislation".

The thirteenth chapter by Konstantina Davaki and Elias Mossialos is dedicated to the Financing and Delivering Health Care of the National Health Service (NHS). More specifically, the authors present the structure, functioning, finance and services, as well as the weaknesses of the National Health Service. The authors note, among other things, that basic principles of the National Health Service, like universal coverage etc, are not being implemented in a way that "groups of the population enjoy different levels of cover and access to health care providers; patients face significant direct costs or have to purchase services in the private sector; there is an over reliance on expensive inputs, allocation of resources on a historical basis, and there are weak incentives for providers to be efficient" (p. 310 ff.).

In the core argument of chapter fourteen (pp. 319-357) by Maria Petmesidou, lies the analysis of Social Care Services in Greece. The study is regarded in a way as the extension of the previous study, which focused on the historical evolution of the Social Protection System. This meticulous work, supported by rich statistical data, provides a comprehensive image of the system of Social Care Services in Greece, beginning in the 1920's, when social welfare first appeared, and extending up to 2001. In this framework the author investigates the structure, the financing, the budget, along with other forms of services, like welfare services for families and children, for the elderly and, last but not least, for disabled people and other vulnerable groups.

In chapter fifteen (pp.358-379), Jennifer Carvounidis researches the issues of migration and confrontation policies in Greece, because the country, as is well known, has evolved since the early 90's from an exporting country to a migrant-receiving country. In the article the author refers to the origins and configuration of immigrants, to the migration policy of the country, and, in the end, to the problem of social exclusion, concluding "that the Greek authorities, as well as much of the populace at large, have yet to come to terms with Greece's new status as a migrant-receiving country". (p. 376).

Immigrants in Greece are also the subject of Iordanis Psimmenos (chap. 16, pp. 380-404), who concentrates on the phenomenon of social exclusion. Particular problems are presented and analyzed, such as the economic exploitation of immigrants in the workplace, the difficulties of adjustment to Greek society, issues of social security, etc. The author explains: "From a system of party-political and nationally oriented discrimination, and under the new civil service schemes and ethos, social exclusion develops into bits and pieces of old and new prejudices against all those, including immigrants, who do not 'fit' into the 'new', flexible and modernizing process of Greek society". (p.402).

In the end, in chapter seventeen, Peter Taylor- Gooby, beginning with the Greek case, develops a sequence of arguments relevant to the reform of the welfare system in conjunction to the challenges regarding social policy in the European Union.

As the editors of the volume, Maria Petmesidou and Elias Mossialos, mention in the introduction (chap. 1), the aim of the book is not "a systematic comparative analysis of the Greek case vis-a-vis other European countries or welfare-state regimes" but the detailed analysis of the Greek model of social welfare and more specifically, "its historical origins and specific pathway in the postwar period, the key sociopolitical forces, institutional configurations and policy processes, as well as developments up to the early 2000s which provide pressing challenges and reform prospects in particular policy areas - social security, employment, family and gender, health, social care and immigration". (p. 1). In other words, the purpose of the authors is the description, analysis and evaluation of the Greek social welfare system, in light of the discussion that has been conducted lately among experts regarding the future of the welfare state in European Union - since Greece, like all the other member countries of the European Union, is obliged to follow the changes that have been taking place recently in the area of social policy.

Concerning the conditions that affected in a catalytic way the evolution of the social welfare system in Greece, they mention, inter alia,: "fragmentation of social conflicts [...], the transformation of class-struggles into party-political/clientelistic power feuds and the dominating role of political parties over civil society; the extensive reproduction of a contradictory condition of state dependency on the one hand (as a considerable part of the population derives revenue from direct or indirect access to the state apparatus), but also incessant confrontation with state institutions and policies on the other; the instability of civil society to build its own system values and rules outside the sphere of the state (and political parties); and finally, the obstacles raised against controlling 'implicit' mechanisms of revenue creation and distribution - a condition that hardly favors reform in the direction of systematic and efficient redistribution policies".(p. 6).

In conclusion, the volume offers a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the system of social policy in Greece, in the English language, and fills an important gap in the literature on this particular issue.