

## Converging Europe: The Transformation of Social Policy in the Enlarged European Union and in Turkey

*Edited by İpek Eren Vural*

Surrey: Ashgate, 2011, 274 pages, ISBN 9781409407096.

Is Europe converging in terms of policy development? How has the global financial crisis affected this and policy development in Europe more generally? What policy differences exist between European Union (EU) member states and other European countries? These and other questions posed in this volume are largely motivated by an attempt to understand the implications of the EU's Lisbon Strategy, which the editor, İpek Eren Vural, defines as "a medium term development plan to facilitate transformation of the European economy, and to coordinate the economic and social policies at the national level" (p. 2). On the basis of this strategy and the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), or "governance tool" to pursue the economic and social "pillars" of the strategy (p. 2), there is reason to expect some convergence in Europe. Focusing primarily on the above-mentioned social pillar within what Vural labels as institutional, intergovernmentalist, and neo-Gramscian frameworks in her introduction, this volume explores a wide range of issues/policies, including (un-) employment, poverty, flexicurity, pensions, welfare states, and gender equality. Drawing on time-series data from Eurostat as well as other data sources, the contributors generally find that the Lisbon Strategy was not successful in achieving its social policy aims; it was also undermined by the global financial crisis. There has been some policy convergence in Europe, but this varies by the type of convergence, the time period examined, and the

specific policy domain. This review will briefly summarize and analyze the parts of this book and conclude with some final thoughts about the volume as a whole.

Organized into five parts and eleven chapters, the book is rich in content. The introduction and part one provide conceptual, theoretical, and historical grounding. Julia S. O'Connor's chapter (three) provides four astute ways of conceptualizing and operationalizing convergence: 1) "growing together," 2) "catch-up," 3) ranking change convergence, and 4) "minimizing distance from an exemplary model" (p. 53). As a whole, the book focuses on the first two types: EU member states growing together and some countries playing "catch up." The degree of both of these types of convergence has changed over time in the EU, with the period between 1992 and 2000 (but not after) witnessing all EU member states' welfare expenditures growing (p. 58). The book also does an excellent job of highlighting the complex, multilevel nature of social policy development and convergence by focusing not just on domestic and European influences but global ones as well. Pension reform is a good example of how global influences, such as World Bank standards and International Monetary Fund (IMF) pressure, have also shaped national-level systems, according to many of the volume's contributors (e.g., chapter). The book also nicely situates the Lisbon strategy and the issue of "catch-up" convergence in the larger historical con-

text of the integration of Ireland, Greece, Spain, and Portugal (e.g., chapters three and four). Yet, given the volume's emphasis on policy coordination and convergence, it is surprising that the "Varieties of Capitalism" approach<sup>1</sup> is not to a greater extent used to provide a framework to understand the Lisbon Strategy.

Parts two to four of the book discuss specific areas of social policy and their implementation (or lack thereof) throughout Europe. Chapters five and seven address the issue of pensions, raise the question of policy trade-offs between pensions and other social expenditures, and highlight the fact that national politics and history play key roles in mediating international pressures for pension convergence. The sixth chapter on flexicurity questions the extent to which Denmark should be seen as the prototype of the flexicurity model promoted by the EU. Another contribution of the book is its emphasis on how the economic stratification between post-Communist EU member states and other member states shape social policy development in the former (part three). Among these countries, Slovenia most closely approaches some of the traditional welfare state models in Western Europe, and the Baltic countries tend to follow a more liberal model (p. 162), but these countries' social policies have been greatly affected by the financial crisis (chapters seven and eight). Interestingly, Lendvai speculates that "it may well be that the economic crisis, and the socio-economic shock it causes will be more significant in forging convergence than the EU governance has been able to achieve in the last ten years" (p. 200). The contributions on Turkey in part four highlight the domestic challenges of ensuring gender equality and reducing poverty, even in the face of EU

pressure (which have been more successful in producing gender equality *directives* than national policy changes, according to O'Connor in chapter three). Although based on an analysis of post-Communist versus other EU member states, Lendvai's conclusion that "the Europeanization literature has over-emphasized the role of policy learning" (p. 200) may also apply to Turkey, particularly in the most recent era. However, if the volume would have also focused on other candidate states to a greater extent (e.g., Croatia, which is expected to enter in 2013) as well as applicant countries, it could have provided a fuller account of policy learning in countries in various stages of EU relations.

This volume is likely to be of interest to policy makers as well as scholars of the welfare state and the EU. It directly speaks to the implications of the Lisbon Strategy and some of the tensions between EU integration and enlargement. Another one of the book's major strengths is that it extends early welfare-state models<sup>2</sup> to post-Communist states. Its focus on gender<sup>3</sup> also offers a corrective to early welfare state literature that has largely neglected this axis of inequality. Finally, the book is extremely timely, as its focus on the financial crisis is yet another contribution to the literature.

However, because the volume is largely organized around a policy, some of the above-mentioned theoretical contributions are not elaborated to the extent that they could have been. Empirically, the use of expenditure data to measure social policy development is problematic, as some of the contributors note (e.g., in chapter eight). A related empirical matter is that policy and theoretical debates about multi-level influences on social policy and

the causal ordering of these processes call for fairly complex empirical models not found in this volume.

Notwithstanding these critiques, there is much to learn from this volume. And, this volume is sure to spur future research in multiple literatures, given the importance of the questions it raises and its breadth of coverage.

**Jeffrey C. Dixon**  
*College of the Holy Cross*

## Endnotes

1. Peter A. Hall and David Soskice (eds.), *Varieties of Capitalism: The Institutional Foundations of Comparative Advantage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

2. For example see Gøsta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

3. See also Ann Shola Orloff, "Gender and the Social Rights of Citizenship: The Comparative Analysis of Gender Relations and Welfare States," *American Sociological Review*, No. 58, Vol. 3 (1993), pp. 303-328.

## Gender and Society in Turkey: The Impacts of Neoliberal Policies, Political Islam and EU Accession

**Edited by Saniye Dedeoğlu and Adem Y. Elveren**

London: I.B. Tauris, 2012, 312 pages, ISBN 9781780760278, £ 59,50.

Women have been both the subjects and objects of Turkish modernization for a long time. They have always been at the forefront of burning questions in Turkey, either with the decades-old debate of wearing headscarves in public institutions, or, lately, with Erdoğan's agenda-setting remarks that women need to give birth to at least three children or abortion will be constrained. However, studies about their position in society or their role in modernization have not gone far beyond superficial repetition. Dedeoğlu and Elveren, to a large extent, fill this academic gap in Turkey through editing this book. It consists of thirteen valuable chapters dealing with different aspects of gender issues that are at the junction of tradition and modernity. To this end, the book mainly aims at understanding the impact of neoliberal social policies, political Islam, and EU accession on gender

in Turkey. Women stuck between formal equality on paper and social realities in practice are examined using different data sets and topics, from female labor ratios to payment policies, and from social security reform to the individual pension system. For all the diversity of topics, the authors' comprehensive analysis about the reasons for the secondary position of women in society and the possible outcomes of eager but not-yet mature governmental reforms makes this study a reference book not only for readers who want to learn more about gender, society and the neoliberal economy in Turkey, but also for decision makers who want to be aware of the margins of socio-economic dynamics in Turkey.

The editors have gathered the chapters into two main parts. While the first seven chapters contribute to the discussions around the gendered nature of the welfare

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.