



## **Antecedents and developments in the family policies of some Council of Europe Member States**

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## **Introduction**

In the framework of Committee of Experts on Social Policy for Families and Children (CS-SPFC), a decision was taken to collect basic information about the family policy of the Council of Europe member states. The objective of this report is to complement the quantitative information with in-depth qualitative analysis. Using a concrete approach, a limited number of states were selected, in order to analyse the impact of context, major structural changes, relevant stakeholders and actors, on the developments and dynamics of family policies. This is supposed to add to the information provided in the Comparative Analysis Report prepared by Karin Wall and to build on the development of policy relevant knowledge. This understanding is crucial in the design of future family policy.

Based on several considerations, some member states were chosen to reflect different types of family policy regimes as defined by existing typologies. The geographical distribution in Europe was another determining factor. Various country characteristics such as size and state structure were additionally taken into account. Notwithstanding the availability of experts, resource persons and publications.

This report is divided in to three chapters: The main findings of relevant comparative and conceptual work will be considered first, in order to provide guidance for a more qualitative study of selected countries. The result of this theoretical work, will then serve as inspiration and guidance to analyse policy developments and dynamics in the Council of Europe member states in chapter II. Chapter III provides some tentative conclusions.

### **II.1 Main findings of comparative conceptual work**

Various scholars have attempted to classify national family policies, mainly for countries in Europe. Underlying these attempts is, of course, the assumptions that sufficiently clear similarities and differences exist, which form distinguishable subgroups or clusters of countries. Initially, such clustering was suggested as a continuum, whereby family policies were considered to be: explicit or implicit; harmonized or un-coordinated; episodic or comprehensive.

However, Gauthier (2002) argued that different components of family policies did not necessarily form an integrated issue, if judged in terms of the nature, direction and timing of reform.

Similarly, Daly & Clavero (2002), building upon earlier work, which focused on the family-state relationship, viewed it as having at least two dimensions: control and support. This suggests a series of family-state relationship models, varying across state policies and ranging from highly controlling and proactive on the one hand, to those which are highly reactive on the other. At this point, it is worth considering the enforcement of family responsibilities in certain domains, the manipulation of incentives in order to create specific family forms and behaviours and the use of constraining assumptions which limit the boundaries of family variation, while at the same time, supporting traditional family roles and responding to the arising needs and demands of families.

A number of models emphasise duties and obligations for families. This implies monitoring, sanctions and rewards. In other models, the state works with existing patterns to support families and respond to their needs. Here, interventions tend to

be limited to situations where families are at risk, or in trouble. Therefore, the clarification of similarities and differences among countries can only be made in terms of the generosity and the degree of diversity of family support.

Bahle (2008) who defines family policy as the “*institutionalized pattern of public policy-makers’ actions on the family*”, builds on the concept of ‘families of nations’ in Europe. This refers to groups of nations, which share central policy characteristics that were formed in a specific historical-cultural context. Starting with the ‘old’ EU member states, he develops a conceptual map of family policy classifications in Europe, constructed around two dimensions: family forms and state-church relationships. Adding the new Eastern EU member states to this analysis, he argues that existing patterns were profoundly changed by Communism. Bahle labels the Eastern European family policy model of that time as the ‘Working family’ model, because family policies were deeply based on the working couple family (similar to Scandinavian countries, although not based on similar individual rights and universalistic principles). However, once the connection between social protection and the workplace disappeared, the context for family policy in the Eastern European transition countries experienced a dramatic change. In conclusion, Bahle states that, in terms of family policy, Eastern EU European countries found their place amidst older member states.

*“Most of them joined the Central European subsidiarity model. At the same time, however, this model is changing. All over Europe, except in the South, family policy seems to be moving closer to the Scandinavian model. (...) Family policies have gained prominence in the political process, foremost with respect to the electorate, but also within pressure groups”<sup>ii</sup>*

Finally, we turn to the framework and analysis by Hantrais (2004) who documents the family-state relationship in 25 EU countries. Her conceptualization combines its criteria in a flexible way and documents the four clusters and their subgroups by a variety of data, methods and perspectives. It aims to capture:

*“the complexity of the policy process as a form of social interaction between policy actors with different agendas and interests that change over time, as they react to a variety of socio-economic and cultural pressures, family and household events”<sup>iii</sup>*

Hantrais identifies four major clusters of EU countries that share similar features. The subgroups in each cluster reflect differences in funding mechanisms, vehicles for delivery, target population, and the overall impact of policy on family life. She particularly considers shared characteristics within each cluster, in terms of the design and structure of their family policies, level of commitment of state support for family life, a similar degree of legitimacy, and a more or less coordinated approach to the involvement of political, economic and civil society actors in the policy process.<sup>iii</sup>

Thus, to attempt to fit all countries, including those outside the EU, into such a framework, would require the analysis and comparisons of the different countries situations during that period; as well as monitoring whether Council of Europe member states in 2009 still fit into the same cluster or type of family policy that they were grouped in, at the start of the 21st century. For example, a number of indicators point to substantial developments and shifts in family policy-making within some Member states such as Germany. Providing such analysis in a comprehensive way, goes well beyond the possibilities of this project work, although much benefit was taken from the contributions prepared for the September 2008 Council of Europe Technical Family Policy Seminar.<sup>iv</sup>

In view of the large number of European countries included in Hantrais' analysis, and the policy relevance of the kind of characteristics considered (see above), it was agreed that this framework would be applied as the main source of inspiration to guide the selection of member states in the present report.

## **II.2. Country case studies**

Comparative family policy studies note that, when searching for similarities and variations, the '*small-n design*' sharpens the view for historical developments, which have shaped a country's family system and policy in specific ways. Moreover, it aims to "*supplement analyses of institutional regulations and social benefits by studies on how systems actually work, are perceived, and 'used' by individuals and how policies and individual strategies interact in various social contexts*".<sup>v</sup>

Family policies neither operate in a void, nor develop in a social vacuum. This explains why the country case studies presented below do not limit themselves to the present-day policies, but rather take into account the context of historical, socio economic and cultural factors of the actual family policy applied in a specific member state.

This section of the report analyses family policies in terms of a number of developments and dynamics. Some relate to the impact of major macro structural changes on family policy and how this raised daunting challenges for the political class. Others relate to important shifts such as the involvement of a growing number of objectives as well as of actors, which made the family policy process more complex and challenging. Finally, we turn to a number of dilemmas that many public authorities need to resolve. Examples from a number of Council of Europe member states have been included to illustrate this.

To document such developments and dynamics, countries have been chosen to represent different clusters of the framework referred to above linking the family – policy relationship.<sup>vi</sup>

### **II.2.1. Managing major structural changes**

We begin by considering member states that experienced major shifts in their family policy during the previous decades. Examples of this can be found with the transition from Communism (early 1990s) in many Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>vii</sup> Also countries like Portugal, Germany and the Russian Federation experienced major shifts of governments or political regimes.

Portugal has been characterized by two contrasting economic, social and political contexts: before and after the 1974 revolution. This event represents a major turning point in family policy. Radical changes took place within the political-juridical framework governing families and women's rights (e.g. marriage, divorce, maternity leave). The new Portuguese Constitution (1976) recognized the state's obligations to impose equality in all domains, to develop a public network of childcare services, to inform on family planning, and to provide other types of support for families with children. It is felt that the mere 'shame' of the explicit interference in private lives of families during decades of dictatorship gave the political class ample leverage to introduce the principles of gender equality as a natural part of the democratization process (Wall, 2008; Wall & Escobedo, 2009).

The family policy developments of Germany certainly provide an interesting case on this dimension. For most of the 20th century, the German welfare system (at least in West-Germany) was an almost archetypical male breadwinner model with a strong homecare logic that encouraged and supported long absences by mothers from the labour market. During the last two decades, Germany witnessed two sweeping changes. First, in 1989 at the time of the reunification, there was a need to merge, if possible integrate, two very different views (cf. FRG and GDR)<sup>viii</sup> on family life, gender issues and family policy. In short, the outspoken preference for cash-for-care benefits in West-Germany versus the expansion of public childcare services that underpins a work-centred approach in East-Germany.

At the end of the 20th century there was a paradigmatic shift in Germany's family policy in a very short period of time. To understand why and how Germany moved away so clearly from its traditional family policy paths at the turn of the 21st century, some scholars point to the following underlying issues as the main driving forces (e.g. Erler, 2005, 2009; Fagnani & Math, 2008). The German unification worked as an important trigger. This was reinforced by the growing concern about Germany's very low fertility rate and the related issue of population ageing. Also, the European Union induced process of Mutual Policy Learning (cf. the OMC) and the EU Directive on Parental Leave (1996) stimulated German policy makers to turn more to some of their EU neighbours for possible policy solutions (especially the Swedish parental leave system and the extensive French system of childcare services). The German federal government has aimed to develop and implement a sustainable family policy in a consequent manner since 2005. It created a set of measures 'in cash' and 'in kind' to support families financially as well as in time management, which were supplemented by an outcome-oriented governance to monitor the effectiveness of these measures.

The profound social and economic changes in the Russian Federation during the 1990s also had an impact on family policies. In the years following the perestroika, the demographic trends threatened the basis of existing Soviet social policies. The development of industrialism disrupted the incentives to childbearing and the maintenance of family relations. Also, the strict employment regulations and a socialist discourse of gender equality did not foster a rapid shift in attitudes towards family life and gender roles in Russia during the post-Soviet period. Some of the non-egalitarian features continued to exist.

In 1994, when major restructuring was occurring in the social and economic sphere of Soviet Russia, the proportion of 'dual-earner' and female led families was even higher than in Sweden. Despite this, there was still strong support for traditional gender roles. A policy of privatisation together with the economic problems accompanying transition, worked to disintegrate the welfare mechanisms of the command economy. Under such conditions, Russian family policy was subjected to a considerable reformulation of the 'official' gender contract. New ways were sought to implement family policy due to scarce financial means and the break with ideological concerns. The structure of benefits and services for families with young children established during the 1990s to help their financial difficulties, nevertheless kept women in employment and facilitated childcare (e.g. Kravchenko, 2008a, 2008c).

It is important to note that the traditionalism seen in relation to the distribution of private versus public responsibilities of women and men did not break away all the sudden. However, by the early 2000s a turn towards more egalitarian values is noted. The Russian gender contract at all levels has not been as overwhelming as expected at the start of the transformation processes. It may have become more

traditional again.<sup>ix</sup>

There is evidence that the economic transition induced changes and even major shifts in family policy of many members' states in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>x</sup> In the early 1990s most of them were hit by its impact on their family policies. As a token, it has been observed that in spite of revived economic growth in the 2nd half of the 1990s in most of transition countries, by the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, almost half had surpassed their GDP levels of 1989 (UNICEF, 2001). Clear shifts in demographic behaviour were observed during the 1990s. In many of these countries, birth rates were already characterised by a long-term decrease (cf. except for Hungary), but in some of them a sudden relatively high decrease can be related to the Transition.

It has been noted that not all those countries have suffered lowered entitlements to family benefits, at least not to the same degree. They all share a considerable decrease in national GDPs, high unemployment rates and the resulting lowering of living standards. Beyond every doubt, the political transition created a generally unfavourable social environment for most families. Here we look at the ways in which policy makers in those countries responded to a shortage of resources for financing family policy measures and note that most governments cut social expenditure to limit severe budget deficits. Among the strategies that many of these member states applied during the 1990s were:

- An introduction of benefit targeting to replace universal family benefits. There was a move from universal child benefits (horizontal redistribution) towards target-specific benefit allocation, or income-tested benefits (stressing vertical redistribution e.g. developments in Bulgaria, Poland, Russia). This probably reflected the pressure on government budgets and the need to reform their social protection systems, as well as the growing concern to tackle increased poverty levels;
- A more subtle strategy of reducing benefits by omitting the indexation of cash social benefits. Following particularly high levels of inflation, there was a gradual erosion of the purchasing power or real value of child benefits;
- A lowering or extending of the duration of entitlements e.g. parental leave (unpaid) and/or not guaranteeing the return to one's former job (cf. Croatia from 1996 on), and a decrease of the wage compensation (cf. Czech Republic and Hungary) but not in the Slovak Republic (in contrast with the 100% wage compensation during 37 weeks in Slovenia).
- Furthermore, certain benefits or former price subsidies for goods consumed, especially by children and families, were abolished. Some countries instead, introduced a compensation benefit or imposed an income threshold for entitlement.

At the same time however, other measures or benefits were introduced such as:

- Provisions for large families (see Croatia, Hungary, Slovenia);
- Extending benefit coverage to additional categories of citizens/residents. For example, the entitlement to insurance-based maternity benefit given to non-insured mothers in the former Czechoslovakia, equal entitlement to long paid parental leave as insured mothers provided to non-insured mothers giving birth to their 3rd or subsequent child in Croatia between 1996 and 2001,

pregnancy benefit for non-insured studying mothers in Lithuania, the right to parental leave for full-time students in Russia, and parental benefit for all non-insured mothers in Bulgaria;

- Coverage of child benefits, being for a long time part of social insurance, was gradually broadened to families outside formal employment, in response to increasing levels of unemployment which had in fact eroded the coverage (see Hungary in 1990, Estonia in 1992, Poland in 1993, Lithuania in 1994); and
- More flexible modes of certain types of leave arrangements, for example, parental leave in Slovenia or the introduction of additional types of leave (see paternity leave, for example in Latvia which eventually found itself in the process of adhering to regulations required for the EU membership).

Overall, it can be noted that even in times of socio-economic hardship, governments not only trimmed but also introduced, or increased certain benefits. Most prominent among the situations described above, was certainly the need to decrease budget deficits, attempt to raise a birth rate considered too low for future development, and the wish to tackle rising poverty levels among population subgroups (e.g. single mothers).

This clearly expresses the different kind of aims and objectives policy makers try to reach via family policy measures.

In the next section, we address the issue of the impact of various and often conflicting policy objectives on the developments and dynamics of national family policies.

## **II.2.2. Multiple objectives and stakeholders**

### *Multiple objectives*

Family policy in Sweden has, for quite some time, been explicitly characterised by a combination of various aims and objectives. It is rooted in the early 20th century when social inequality, poor families and the declining birth rate became viewed as socio-political problems. Social reforms were advocated for, to bring about a new society based on social solidarity: a new planned economy and the vision of a people's home (*'folkhemmet'*). From the early 1970s, Swedish family policy strongly emphasized a dual-earner / dual-carer family model. This additionally aimed to strengthen gender equality by influencing individual preferences and creating a quite coherent social consensus about the equal gender rights in employment and childrearing. The latter became a formal political issue rather than a private family one.

Overall, Swedish family policies gradually developed to meet three major goals of social and family policy: (1) the well-being of children and combating child poverty; (2) gender equality especially through promoting women's economic independence; and (3) good possibilities to reconcile work and family life for mothers and fathers through facilitating men's involvement in childcare and family life.

It would appear that the main social goals are in accordance with prevailing social values and social institutions and were widely accepted by a predominantly homogenous population (Chronholm, 2009). Various social programs co-exist and complement each other (cf. widespread subsidized childcare, generous parental

leave, equal employment legislation).

It seems that the basic principles and goals have become so widely accepted that no special interest group or economic downturn can erode them easily. Despite this more long-term continuity, there are still some voiced concerns about the impact of a change of government coalition on entitlements and existing family policy measures (Duvander et al., 2008). Basically, although no major changes may occur following such shifts of office, the latest family policy reform is quite substantial. It considers more the different needs of various families and as such, goes beyond the 'one size fits all' model, which characterized, at least implicitly, the more universal support for Swedish families in previous decades.

Compared to other member states, it can be argued that family policies in France aim to pursue multiple and heterogeneous goals such as encouraging parents (especially mothers) to get and remain involved in paid labour market, tackling social inequality, keeping a high fertility rate, and lowering the levels of child poverty. France remains very successful in terms of its fertility level. There are several policy measures that contribute to this such as the well-established pre-school system ('école maternelle')<sup>xi</sup>, the longstanding system of family allowances and the percentage of female in (full-time) employment (Fagnani, 2007). Another issue distinguishing French family policies from that of other countries could be found in the amount of public expenditure on services for children and parents. In previous decades, various French governments continued to invest in childcare services and leave arrangements, despite budget cuts in other sectors. There seems to be a culture, which generally approves of public expenditure for children and larger families.

In recent years, family policy goals in Portugal have tended to focus on three major objectives: (1) expanding the service provision, (2) economic support for vulnerable families, and (3) the promotion of a higher birth rate. Strong budgetary constraints, falling levels of living and a sharp drop in the fertility rate underpinned the focus on those objectives (Wall, 2008). Two major parties (PS and PSD) having been alternately in power for the last 25 years, built up a fairly strong consensus about the link between conciliation and gender equality policies. The same holds for their vision of the importance of publicly subsidized services to support families. The leave policy model in Portugal is characterized by the endorsement of an early return to work after delivery as an expression of a full-time dual earner model and of gender equity in employment and in society (Wall & Escobedo, 2009). All this contributed to a substantial continuity regarding these family policy measures.

Early 2007, the Russian Government launched a new national reform to boost low fertility rates and to increase the well being of families with children. The so-called 'maternity capital' aims to facilitate multiple births. From 2010, only mothers will be able to use the new opportunities (buying accommodation, covering educational costs, or increasing savings for one's pension). But overall, the variety of choices available to Russian families remains rather small (Kravchenko, 2008a). This new family policy reform is based on four components: (1) the introduction of municipal vouchers for childcare facilities and preschools, (2) special measures to emphasize the pedagogical aspects of ECEC<sup>xii</sup>, (3) an equality bonus to encourage more fathers to take parental leave, and (4) childcare allowance for parents with children. These new developments will provide a new opportunity to monitor the implementation and outcomes of these components in the Russian Federation.

From the late 1990's, the debates over the direction that the German family policy could or should take were heavily dominated by the conundrum of how to encourage young couples to have children and reduce the opportunity costs of childbearing for

mothers. Even though (West) German fertility rates have been very low since the 1970s, policy makers only really began to tackle the issue during the late 1990s. Objective demographic pressures are considered as important driving forces behind family policy changes. These are however, insufficient by themselves to understand the timing and direction of such changes. German policy makers started to realize that the main family policy objectives were increasingly out of tune with the socio-economic realities of their country.

The shifts in the family policy aims also developed due to the rising concern, especially among German employers and multinational companies, over the decreasing competitiveness of the German economy. This stimulated the dawn of a discourse that married family policy with economic growth, a higher fertility rate and with more prosperity. The federal Ministry for Family Affairs specifically commissioned (economic) studies to document a different family policy as a win-win situation for better economic prospects (“increasing birth rate through increased female labour employment”).

Tackling child poverty has been central to the United Kingdom government's policies on social inclusion. In 1999, the Government declared its historic ambition to end child poverty by 2020 and halve it by 2010. The government's main lever to tackle this is to get more parents into work. It particularly targets lone parents who are the family type at greatest risk of poverty. In the late 1990s when the Blair administration took office they set out quite early some of the Labour government's aspirations across family advice and support, the relationship between work and home, marriage and relationship services, and family problems such as domestic violence and school age pregnancy (see “Supporting Families”, 1998). Much of this endeavour to support the upbringing of children has now taken the centre stage in political thinking in the UK (Henricson & Bainham, 2005).

In-work poverty was also addressed. In 1999, a national minimum wage was introduced and has been increased in real terms since. Tax credits have also been an important part of the Labour government's welfare policy: the almost universal Child Tax Credit, and the Working Tax Credit which is an in-work payment to people on low incomes. The British Government has also given a high priority to parenting in its social exclusion and criminal justice agendas, and clearly considers the promotion of good parenting as a significant tool in fostering social cohesion (Henricson, 2008). The government's approach has been one of ‘rights and responsibilities’. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 introduced parenting education into the criminal justice system, followed by various pieces of legislation extending the use of parenting orders. Social order and social control became strong underlying currents in these and other measures (Daly, 2009). Sure Start, now mainstreamed in children's centres nationwide, sets a high premium on supporting parents. New Labour's family policy is explicitly aimed at strengthening family relationships. To increase employment rates, particularly among mothers, various measures have been introduced to enable parenting and paid employment to be combined: an increase in statutory maternity leave to nine months paid and three months unpaid; two weeks paid paternity leave; a right for parents of children under five to take up to a total of three months off work with job protection but without pay; and the right for parents of children under six (or under 18 for a disabled child) to request flexible working arrangements (Henricson, 2008).

There is also a range of policies geared towards significant strands of family wellbeing. Families are referred to in a number of government initiatives (see a Ministerial Group on the Family, a Family Policy Unit at the Department for Children, Schools and Families and a strategic document on support for parents – Every

Parent Matters (2007). The Children's Plan 2007 also includes a section on 'A family policy for the 21st century'.

*A growing number of stakeholders.*

Most Council of Europe member states share this common development within family policy. Over time, more stakeholders and actors play a part in the development and the outcomes of family policy measures. Some stakeholders came into play or are even urged to become involved (e.g. employers) whereas others may fade out or lose part of their influence (e.g. Roman Catholic Church). New actors also come to the fore due to the nature of Governmental initiatives and reforms launching major new programmes (e.g. NGOs, local public authorities, ECEC professionals, service providers).

In the United Kingdom, for example, Sure Start was launched in 1999 as a comprehensive community based programme of early intervention and family support, targeted at deprived areas. In rolling the programme out across the country, the original projects have now been converted into Children's Centres, run by local authorities. These provide childcare and family support. There is a target to have 3,500 Children's Centres in place by 2010. The Childcare Act 2006 gave local authorities duties to assess the supply and demand for childcare in their area; to provide sufficient childcare for all working parents; and to improve outcomes for all young children in their area and reduce inequalities, through the provision of accessible and integrated early childhood services. For older children, extended schools are being introduced, which will be open from 8am to 6pm. The intention is that these centres will also provide activities for children, community services, parenting and family support. By 2010, all schools should be offering extended services.

The integration of child public health and youth care (incl. integrated family services and parenting support) has been very high on the political agenda in the Netherlands. In the early 21st century, a Dutch Ministry for Youth and Families was created for the first time. Another innovation was to create Youth and Family Centres (*'Centrum voor Jeugd en Gezin'*) to operate at a local level for parents and children aged 0-23 years where a variety of professionals create a programme of support for all children and parents as an integrated system. Community schools (*'Brede Scholen'*) have been developed to promote the cooperation of all organisations and services working with children. Beside the school as the leading party, there are other partners such as childcare services, social welfare, child public health, community centres, sports, theatre, etc.

In Portugal, the launch of formal state-provided childcare services (remaining low mainly due to budgetary constraints and the lack of experience to implement them) led to the development of a new public/private mix centred on publicly subsidised non-profit organizations to expand services to support working parents. This expansion was slow but steady. It was more visible during the 1990s when a considerable constituency was built up regarding reconciliation policies, particularly from a gender equality perspective. Another major trend in family policy during the first years of a Socialist government (1995-2002) relate to the increase in different types of services to support families and elderly persons. For a short period (2002-2004) family policy discourse and objectives changed under a centre/right-wing coalition government. Support for large families was strongly emphasized by focusing on pro natalist, pro-life and familialist objectives. However, strong budgetary constraints and other factors only led to the introduction of more flexibility in the leave scheme rather than a major revision of its principles.

In France, for example, family policy is a highly institutionalised domain with strong players such as the National Family Allowance Fund (CNAF) or the National Family Association (UNAF). Besides, there also was a formal platform such as the annual 'Family Conference' (since 1994) under the auspices of the French President. There, representatives from the social partners, as well as from family organisations and the central Government can exchange and debate new measures which the latter intend to implement in the near future (e.g. a permanent High Council for the Family).

Somewhat similar to France, Belgium has a multitude of actors, some being involved in the family policy process for many decades (for example, the Family League), others are newcomers but have an increasing impact on developments (e.g. employers, ECEC professionals). For example, as an active and quite influential NGO the Family League (*'Gezinsbond'*) continues to remind the federal government that family allowances have lost about 40% of their purchasing power since the 1970s. The development of Belgium into a federal state structure, mostly from the early 1970s till now, also contributes to the increasing number of actors. When the 'Aid to persons' came under the authority of the three Community-level Governments, the involvement of public authorities -from local to supranational level- diversified and increased. For example, this can be seen where the Belgian federal government regulates the leave arrangements whereas the Community-level Governments and municipal authorities rule early childhood education and care services (Deven, 2007).

A very large member state such as the Russian Federation certainly has to deal with a great number of actors, because of the sheer number of regions, which are 89. Local authorities are a key agent in social service provision but have no direct impact on the social security management. In addition, families also receive different kinds of support from NGOs and local enterprises. The Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation arranged a number of seminars and round table discussions with scientists and practitioners at the start of the 21st century to discuss the problems of national and regional family policy. The economic difficulties of large families, the educational problems related to adolescents, as well as the growing 'devaluation' of marriage and the rise of the divorce rate were pointed at by various participants. The rather dramatic transformation of the public administration in Russia was also linked with the division of responsibilities between various levels of government (national, regional, and local).

### **III. Some tentative conclusions**

Family policies remain crucial as large parts of the population in most Member States find themselves yet again, amidst the turmoil of financial and economic difficulties, which influence the daily life of families. At present, the global financial-economic crisis affects the budgets of many European Governments and the extent to which it begins to impact on family policies may well be considered on the basis of past experiences.

Analysis of family policies in terms of their dynamics and developments reveals the impact of major structural changes at a macro level, raising daunting challenges for governments and public authorities. Other important shifts relate to a growing number of, even conflicting, objectives as well as actors, making the family policy process more complex and challenging.

Can a comprehensive and sustained family policy ever be developed? Can we or any one European country really talk about a family policy that mainly centres on the well being of the family as a unit? On the basis of the previous discourses and analysis, mainly from an academic perspective, one may doubt whether any member state can. Still, there remain some member states, which developed their family policy over many decades and managed to build a continued, comprehensive and even consistent family policy.

The family policy of Sweden is considered as perhaps the closest, having elaborated quite consistently the dual-earner model over various decades. It is still worth remembering that the present-day Swedish family policies started in the early 1930s as an attempt by public authorities to counteract the demographic crisis at the time: the pauperisation of households and large families; and a decreasing life expectancy. Up to the 1990s, Swedish family policy developed as an integral part of the success story of the Nordic welfare state. Single-party governments ruled the country for almost half a century (1932-1976), which made it easier to gradually develop a comprehensive and consistent set of family policy measures and services. As one element of the broader social policy, family policy thrives better as part of a hegemonic project, where there is little need to strike an alliance and reach compromise with other parties. A country witnessing longer periods of government stability seems better equipped to develop a greater consistency in its policies.

For a long time Hungary could also qualify as an example of explicit and consistent family policy. Certainly between 1960 and 1985, its family and population policy became part of long-term governmental planning. From a comparative perspective a number of family and childcare allowances in Hungary during that period, were among the best in Europe. It was social insurance-based and gradually expanded throughout the 1970s.

France too has a long record and tradition in terms of family policy measures. It is well understood that its system of transfers is rooted in a long-established natalist tradition, which partly emerged from the severe loss of population of World War I (cf. *idem* for Belgium). Although this discourse is disappearing, to an extent this tradition still pervades French family policies, which are clearly partial to large families. The taxation system as well, continues to favour married couples where only one spouse is in paid employment. Some experts consider that this contradicts the more recent objective of promoting gender equality and the stronger involvement of women (mothers) in the labour market. In this sense, it is argued that French family policy is yet to say farewell to maternalism.

At present, the increasingly dominant discourse of the rationale for family policies is that children benefit the well being of their parents as well as the rest of society. There is an economic gain in productivity, and social rewards result from investing in children's education. Hence, it is better understood that society bears its share of the direct and indirect costs of childrearing. This discourse reflects the 'promoting profitable investment' model, which represents a rather dominant approach to the new welfare policy paradigm of investing in children. Its future-orientation largely overlooks the quality of childhood itself.<sup>xiii</sup> Children are somehow perceived as the pension-providers of the older generations in Europe. An underlying assumption is that by investing in children's welfare, one can avoid costly and remedial interventions in adolescence and young adulthood. Therefore this type of child-oriented family policy is recast as 'an ECEC social investment policy'.

In conclusion, many governments consider family policy a useful tool in providing a number of cash benefits and a variety of family support services. But it also

increasingly relates to helping families with young children with their time management so that they can reconcile paid employment and care. Other governments still wish to adopt a broader approach, which may involve housing subsidies, health related prevention, or free pre-school education. In the end, the overall interest and challenge lies in the extent to which and how family policies succeed in compensating the cost of having children and in supporting the well being of families as dynamic networks of care.

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<sup>i</sup> See Bahle (2008: 120)

<sup>ii</sup> See Hantrais (2004: 199)

<sup>iii</sup> See Hantrais (2004: Figure 8.1)

<sup>iv</sup> The contributions prepared for a Council of Europe Technical Family Policy Seminar (Paris, 11-12 September 2008), especially provided relevant information for Austria (K. Mazal), Belgium (F. Deven), Portugal (K. Wall), the Russian Federation (Z. Kravchenko), Sweden (A-Z Duvander) and the UK (C. Henricson).

<sup>v</sup> Pfenning & Bahle (2000: 3)

<sup>vi</sup> The formal labels Hantrais (2004) uses in her framework are: 'defamilialised', 'partially defamilialised' 'familialised', and 'refamilialised'. They are not used here, as discussions within the Expert Committee on Social Policy for Families and Children (CS-SPFC) revealed they triggered an amount of confusion and uneasiness. For example, when Nordic countries such as Sweden are labelled as 'defamilialised' this may suggest to them that family policy and family issues may not be a priority in their country. Rather the opposite may be true.

<sup>vii</sup> See especially: Stropnik (2003).

<sup>viii</sup> In order to consider developments during the 2nd half of the 20th century we need of course to remind ourselves the co-existence of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) between 1945 and 1989.

<sup>ix</sup> Using 'again' may not be appropriate as the initial Soviet gender contract was traditional in its views on care in the domestic sphere. Such observations point to the importance of looking behind the official discourses of family policy in order to be able to assess its real social outcomes.-

<sup>x</sup> For a thorough review, see especially Stropnik (2003).

<sup>xi</sup> Other countries such as Italy and Belgium very much share this characteristic with France but remain less successful with respect to their TFR or their employment rates of mothers.

<sup>xii</sup> ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care

<sup>xiii</sup> See especially: Lister (2008)