

Daniel Tarschys: Abstract of presentation

For all the talk about a crisis of the European social model, it is quite obvious that the MS share a lasting commitment to ambitious policy goals in the social sphere. Accents differ a bit between different forms of redistribution and service provision (with varying shares assigned to public funding, employment-linked schemes, corporate social responsibility, voluntary programmes, and families) but the essential features are very much the same. Whether it is called “the Rhineland model”, “l'état-providence”, “der Sozialstaat”, “the welfare state” or “the social market economy”, we are basically agreed on the need for social protection, extensive social services and an active labour market policy.

But which of these tasks should be handled at the European level? Given the scarce resources in the European budget, the EU must concentrate its efforts on highly strategic interventions, especially those with significant public-goods, long-term and trans-frontier dimensions. The main question about the future of the ESF is not whether its interventions have been effective (many have) or whether the success stories are impressive (many are), but whether there is genuine European added value in continuing these programmes. The subsidiarity question cannot be answered once and for always; it must be raised again and again whenever there is a need to reconsider priorities. Nor is it a yes-no question but one of degree. Compatibility with general Lisbon or EU 2020 goals is not a sufficient criterion for future funding since far too many activities pass that test. Which elements in the ESF agenda pass the test with fanfares and flying colours?