The European Union and National Training Systems

Rather than seeking to impose a ‘single institutional measure’, each member state ‘will endeavour to introduce and develop such arrangements as it considers necessary’ (OJ 96/C 195/01). The Council response stressed that the usefulness of EC initiatives lay in the exchange of information and the funding of experimental projects at a time of change.

(Milner, 1998: 164–5)¹

Introduction

This chapter analyses how the EU affects training systems in less-developed societies. EU policies on training provide a useful means of assessing the effectiveness of ‘soft governance’ as a mechanism for introducing new policy strategies for two reasons. Firstly, unlike a policy area such as competition or trade, the policy outcomes are quite accessible and tangible. Secondly, training was an area in which the EU initially did have the capacity to devise hard, binding legislation. The community opted not to introduce binding training initiatives, due largely to political opposition to ‘EU interference’ at the national level.

The chapter focuses solely on EU policies which aim to integrate the social partners into decision-making on training policies. It shows that the Community dynamically promoted the model of social partner involvement in training strategies and, indeed, member states and associative member states were strongly influenced by this model. However, it is shown that despite EU and national-level commitment to the ideal there is little evidence that less-developed societies have fundamentally reformed their training systems to include social partners. The chapter indicates that administrations which previously lacked social partner
involvement do introduce ad hoc pilot projects. Overall, however, the EU fails to introduce the social partner model into those training systems in which social dialogue is absent.

The chapter is organised into the following four sections. The first part looks at the EU policies on training and shows that the Community had the capacity to implement ‘hard’ training policies at the outset, but failed to maximise this opportunity due to national opposition. The second section introduces training systems in Ireland and shows the ‘soft’ nature of Europeanisation which occurred there. Thirdly, the chapter discusses how Hungarian training systems have been affected by EU training policies. Finally, the chapter looks at a selection of countries within the EU’s sphere of influence and shows that a major restructuring of training systems within Europe’s peripheral economies will need more than ‘soft’ tools.

**EU training policies and the social partners**

Sellin suggests that EU training policy can be divided into two distinct eras: those that were devised before the Maastricht Treaty and those which were developed after it (Sellin, 1999: 20).

**Pre-Maastricht EU training policy**

At the outset, Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome provided the Community with a clear legal basis for engaging in training policy. It stated that the Council of Ministers would lay down

> general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market.

This principle was implemented in 1963 when a Council Decision established a legally binding common vocational training policy which comprised of ten principles.² The common vocational training policy, however, was not the same as common policies which had been devised in other fields, such as competition, agriculture and transport. In these areas member states were obliged to change national systems to comply with Community initiatives. Unlike these areas, Community competence was more limited in the field of training. The principles were adopted over the years through non-legally binding policy statements (Bainbridge and Murray, 2001: 6). Rather than focusing on introducing an overhaul of national training systems as occurred in other policy areas,