

Analysing the influence of the EES in new member states
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Abstract

There is evidence in the literature that policy aims of the EES have been institutionalized incrementally and variably in Member States, leading to varying degrees of Europeanisation at the level of discourse and policy development, and actor creation and/or empowerment. However, due to its political and malleable form, the EES can be used either as a comprehensive social investment strategy focusing on the development of human resources for the needs of the labour market, or alternatively, as a liberalization strategy with little or no social investment. This risk of using the EES as a liberalization strategy (exclusively market-making) is evident for all Member States, but it is particularly perilous for the new member states, which are under more pressure to stabilize their economies and finances, including the reduction of social expenditure. This paper analyses how and to which extent the EES has been integrated in the new EU member states (EU-12), taking account, first, from the domestic perspective, of institutional legacies (creating particular constellations of reform challenges), economic and financial situations and political priorities and agendas. Accordingly, the paper shows that the response to and use of policy defined via the EES is channelled by these factors, but also by diverse and even contradictory pressures for reform from the EU level (on the one hand, to curb public expenditure and on the other to make social investments), by the relative stability and strength of actors and by the extent of co-funding available for implementing reform objectives.