

Introduction

Who or What is PRESOM?¹⁾

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PRESOM is the short version of: Privatisation and the European Social Model

PRESOM is a network of social scientists who are critical of the current wave of liberalisation and privatisation of public services in the EU. We regard this as a threat to the European Social Model (ESM). At the same time we notice with astonishment the frequency with which European institutions are invoking the ESM to underpin and justify their policies. This raises questions about the meaning of this term. Obviously unions and social movements who oppose privatisation as an attack on the European Social Model have something different in mind than politicians who justify privatisation with reference to the same term.

PRESOM takes up these contradictions with the aim to clarify the issues, disseminate our findings and thus to contribute to the public discussion. Our basic position is that one of the essential pillars of the European Social Model is social solidarity and that this requires a strong and democratically organised public sector which provides public goods to everybody living in the EU regardless of his or her origin and economic and social status.

PRESOM has 14 participants from 10 countries of the EU, amongst them three new member states (see box). It is a so-called "Co-ordination Action" financed under the sixth framework programme for Research and Technology of the EU. The project started in January 2006 and will be financed until December 2008. It will organise a number of workshops and international conferences and participate in workshops and conferences organised by others.

From 2007 onwards PRESOM will publish bi-monthly Newsletters in which we present our work and inform about current issues in our domain, inclu-

ding official policies and responses from social movements and civil society.

Structure of PRESOM's work

The work of PRESOM is divided into **three phases**:

In the **first** phase a general stocktaking has taken place of :

- a. the background and history of privatisation in the EU.
- b. theoretical approaches to the explanation of privatisation.
- c. the concept of the European Social model.

This phase has been terminated by now, reports have been written and are available on the homepage of PRESOM (www.presom.eu).

In the current **second** phase more in-depth studies are undertaken for four areas:

- a. privatisation and finance
- b. privatisation in social services (health and pensions)
- c. privatisation in education
- d. privatisation in the new member countries

This phase should be terminated by the end of 2007.

In the **third** phase conclusions will be drawn and policy proposals will be formulated with regard to the political approach to further liberalisation and privatisation and to the role of a democratic sector in a progressive European Social Model. This phase is envisaged for 2008.

Communication and an exchange with the scientific

community and with stakeholders like policy makers, social movements and civil society are essential in all phases of the project. This will be organised in small meetings, workshops and larger open conferences.

1) The text of this introduction is a part of the first PRESOM newsletter, see www.presom.eu.

PRESOM partners

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