

Keep trying? Polish failures and half-successes in social pacting

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Abstract

Poland's experience of social dialogue is mostly dismissed as pure failure and façade (Ost, 2000; Avdagic, 2005). Indeed, there is little evidence of those major, encompassing, comprehensive and institutionalized agreements that have been called 'social pacts' in Western Europe. However, a deeper and more detailed examination of the interactions between the actors shows that there have been very serious attempts at social pacts, and there have been some unintended effects of these attempts, as well as partial results. It also shows that there has been a 'functional need', or demand, for social pacts at certain times, to address similar issues to those tackled by western social pacts in the 1990s, such as inflation, pension reforms, labour market reforms, public deficits (Fajertag and Pochet, 1997 and 2000). In terms of 'supply' for social pacts, even if initially most 'prerequisites' were missing, by the early 2000s most factors associated with social pacts were being established: political commitment on the part of weak governments, growing trust among social partners, trade union de-politicisation, EU-promotion and employers' organisational capacities. Recently, a generalized perception of a crisis has also emerged. The issue, therefore, cannot be dismissed as 'nonexistent'. In contrast, there are two open questions, which this chapter will try to address: what, if any, are the effects of social dialogue in Poland, even if there are no major social pacts? Second, why exactly did Poland fail to reach social pacts, and will failure persist in the future?