

# **Public services and the European Semester**

An overview of the National Reform Programmes of 2011,

A report by the ETUI for EPSU - Christophe Degryse, December 2011

## **Introduction**

This report is based on a full examination the National Reform Programmes (NRP) published in 2011 by the governments of France (FR), UK, Germany (DE), Poland (PL), Latvia (LV), the Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Cyprus (CY), Spain (ES), Belgium (BE), Romania (RO), Ireland (IE) and Greece (EL).

National Reform Programmes (NRP) are national reports that all member states must submit to the European Union (European Commission, Council). In these reports, each government presents information about priorities and measures that will be taken in order to be in line with European priorities in areas such as employment, research, innovation, energy or social inclusion. In principle, the structure of all these documents should be the same for each country, making it easier to compare them. These documents are an important step in the so-called process of the European Semester, which is supposed to be the concretization of the new “economic governance”.

It is on the basis of the NRP (and the Stability or Convergence Programmes) that the European Commission and the Council will formally adopt, in July of each year, the “Country Specific Recommendations” (CSR). It will then be up to Member States to implement these recommendations by taking them on board as they draft their national budgets and other relevant policies. In this sense, NRP and CSR are two very important pillars of the new economic governance.

It is to be noted that while, in principle, the NRPs are to be presented each year (and should thus refer only to measures taken during a single year), some member states, in their NRPs for 2011, draw attention to all relevant measures – whether already taken, in the process of adoption, or planned for adoption in the future. It is therefore difficult to see what are the real links between annual European priorities and the national measures taken in order to implement these European priorities.

In this report, after a preliminary remark, we will examine the reforms undertaken by these countries under seven different headings: the public sector (public spending, administration, etc.); public employment; public services; healthcare; education and skills; social inclusion; local and regional government. It goes without saying that not every country has announced reforms in all these areas.

We will then attempt a synthetic overview of the data obtained for the purpose of interpreting the European impact on national policy directions in these various fields.

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