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Master in European Studies

Is the EU a Social Union?

---the Function of Common Social Policy for European Integration

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Declaration

I, ZHANG LU, hereby state that this thesis is my own and original work, apart from the sections where origins are clearly stated. All the materials in this thesis have never been used (partially or wholly) in fulfilling the requirements for any degree or qualification in this or other universities prior to this submission.

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Date: 9 April 2012

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Abstract

The process of European integration is deemed as one of the most remarkable features of modern European development. Starting with the Coal and Steel Community, European countries, in particular the EU member states have progressively moved toward an ever-closer social union with substantial institutions and comprehensive common policies.

During this period, Europe has gone through an amazing transition from economy- steered polity to a double-tracked social-economic entity. It is no longer a merely multilateral instrument with limited competence or largely under the control of its member states. It has achieved highly success in establishing a supranational entity, holding certain legislative power and strong capacities to advance or modify policies and on the way toward an extensive convergence. More than a simple international organization, it has constructed a multi-level governance.

This research project explores the extent to which European Union has achieved its integration, in particular in social realm. It traces the development of European social policy over the 50 years since the founding of the European Economic Community in 1957 and points out the achievements gained through its implementation in treaty-emerging order. After analyzing the economic, social, cultural and political conditions at that time, it raises the question of whether the EU is a social union or not and if it is possible for the EU to forge a union-level common social policy in the near future. Through the research on ideological, social regimes and economic conditions in the groups of member states, it draws a positive answer to

the former question and a negative one for the latter as conclusion.

Though EU claims to be a social union (and the announcement is still justified), which is necessary for its legitimacy, the development of EU social policy from the Treaty of Maastricht till present is away from the original ideas of harmonization towards the principle of subsidiarity. A European social or welfare state in the full sense will not arise, therefore, never will a unified social policy come out. Supranational social intervention will exist, but this will mainly be achieved through regulation.

The bulk of the study was conducted prior to the present EU and Euro crises. To that issue, it is still unclear whether the crises will prompt a major step towards much closer political, economic and social integration or not. Thus it is too early to include its consequences into my present work. But one assessment is justified now: The introduction of the Euro was not complemented to the necessary economic and political EU- instruments for the governance of such a monetary Union. Those, who hoped – in the sense of the neo- functionalist theory- that such a requirement would more or less automatically translate itself into a common practice as soon as enough functional pressure has been built up, have been left disappointed thus far. Yet such a step may be done in the near future so that it is too early today to come to a sound assessment to the fundamental questions about the stability of EU integration raised in this context.

Key words: European integration, social union

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