



# Competing Ideas: The Religious Foundations of the German and Italian Welfare States

*Josef Hien*

*Ph.D. Thesis defence on 20 November, 2012*

**Abstract:** The thesis investigates the influence of political Catholicism and Catholic social doctrine on the evolution of the continental European welfare regimes. Paradoxically it finds that the doctrine had less influence on the formation of welfare regimes in countries where Catholicism was strong in contrast to countries where it was in a weak position. This finding does not only challenge many of the accounts that have perceived and analyzed religious influences on welfare state formation as a static and quantifiable variable but also addresses and rivals most postulations of mainstream welfare state theories such as Logic of Industrialism, Power Resource, Class Coalition and Employer Centered Approaches. In contrast to these accounts the thesis finds that welfare in continental Europe evolved during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the result of a battle over ideas and worldviews between different societal groups and their political outlets. Which idea and worldview makes its way into institutional implementation is not primarily connected to the mere numerical strength or power resources of its societal and political representation but is a function of the performance of the programmatic ideas themselves. Decisive is how they strive in competition with other programmatic ideas. Two mechanisms stick out that determine whether programmatic ideas are successful: the performance and evolution of the idea in a process of ideational competition and the degree of ideational compatibility of a programmatic idea that enables the formation of ideational and political coalitions. The programmatic ideas and hence the worldview that performs these two tasks best wins its way into institutional implementation. However, ideational competition, evolution and implementation is not solely endogenous to the battle of ideas but structured through a variety of exogenous factors such as the institutional (election system, mode of governance, degree of enfranchisement) and structural-material environment (pace of industrialization, spatial diffusion of economic development, number of ideational competitors). The thesis shows against the backdrop of the Italian and German welfare state development, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present, that these battles of ideas and worldviews were a major driver in how continental European political economies were structured during the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



**Mark Blyth (Brown University), Wolfgang Streeck (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies), Josef Hien (candidate), Sven Steinmo (EUI) (supervisor), Stefano Bartolini (EUI)**

**Bio:** Josef Hien is a Post-Doctoral researcher at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne. He is researching Neo Protestant influences on contemporary Continental European Christian Democracy and their respective economies. Before completing his PhD at the EUI he had studied at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg, the Università di Bologna and in the graduate program of Duke University. His thesis analysed the role of competing ideas in the formation of the German and Italian welfare states with a special focus on the role that religiously informed economic doctrines played in this. Hien is especially interested in the complex constitution, construction and interrelatedness of rationality, material interests, ideology and the evolution of ideas.