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All these conditions gave me the opportunity, together with this group of eminent European Union (EU) experts, to make an assessment of the European Social Model more than ten years after I had written a book on the same topic in the perspective of EU enlargement (EU Enlargement versus Social Europe?, Edward Elgar, 2003). In those times there were fears that lower expenditure on social policy, lower labour costs and social standards in the new member states would lead to ‘unfair competition’ or ‘social dumping’, and might somehow threaten the global survival of the European Social Model. While some of the distortions we had predicted were confirmed, at the same time the EU enlargement also motivated new EU member states to take on board the ‘Community social acquis’ and to develop their social policies.

The financial and economic crisis and the subsequent adoption of austerity policies have provoked new changes in the European Social Model within the founders of the EU. As well as providing warnings about
some adverse developments, we hope that this book will help document and address these trends in an objective way, thus making it easier for policy-makers to find the right policy responses to these challenges.

In this respect, the conference the ILO and the EC jointly organized in Brussels on 27–28 February 2014, entitled ‘The European Social Model in times of crisis and austerity policies’, was an important event. More than 170 participants from 30 European countries (the EU28, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey), including representatives from governments and employers’ and workers’ organizations, were able to discuss our experts’ findings and start debating future social and economic policy options in their respective countries and at EU level. We hope that this initiative will help all of us to continue working together on the preservation, adaptation and strengthening of the European Social Model, not only to overcome the current difficulties, but also to respond to the future challenges.