Liberalisation and privatisation of public services: convergence or divergence of industrial relations across the EU-27?

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On the basis of an encompassing analysis of public sector industrial relations (IR) in all EU member countries it is shown that public sector IR systems are distinctive compared to other systems in the private sectors. This confirmed previously undertaken analyses. Following traditional classifications of IR systems the analysis shows that in the public sector two main systems occur in the EU; the concept of ‘national models’ of IR, implying coherence and homogeneity within countries, and secondly also typologies of geographic IR ‘models’. Public sector IR systems in the EU member states can be characterised as relatively homogenous, since IR practices are more similar across countries than sectors. Are international pressures leading to greater convergence between public and private sector IR in the EU-27? This will be tested on the basis of typical state owned sectors affected by the EU privatisation and liberalisation policies. Are public sector and former state owned IR systems like railway, civil aviation, telecommunication and health converging? We find evidence for converging sectoral IR systems across countries, as well as evidence of the divergence of IR systems and practices across these sectors within countries. This points to the fact that the IR systems of the public sector and former state owned sectors are becoming more diverse within countries than across the EU-27.