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Industrial relations and the quantity and quality of jobs in the public sector in Europe: the crisis and beyond.

BARSOP overview report part I

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1. Introduction

For many years, in most European countries, the public sector has been under pressure to reduce expenditure and increase efficiency. Whereas until the 1970s, a growing public sector was seen as a sign of development, since the 1980, the dominant view changed. Government debt increased and public expenditure came under scrutiny, leading to a situation of permanent austerity (Pierson 1998). At the same time, the New Public Management philosophy of a small government, privatization and outsourcing of public services, the introduction of market mechanisms and efficiency drives in the public sector and decentralization conquered Europe, albeit to a different extent and in different ways across European countries (Walsh 1995; Ridley 1996). In more recent years, and especially with the emergence of the financial crisis, austerity pressure on public expenditure has dramatically increased (Streeck 2014; Van Gyes and Schulten 2015), in particular in the Southern European countries that depended on external financial support (Pavolini et al. 2015). The long-term pressure on public expenditure and the public sector, and especially the recent austerity drives following from the crisis, have led to reforms and cuts in public budgets with serious negative effects on the European Social Model (Herrmann 2017), on the quality of public services and on social outcomes, including health (Karanikolos et al. 2013) and inequality (Heidenreich 2016). Indeed, increasingly it is feared that austerity and reforms are affecting the accessibility and quality of crucial public services like healthcare, education and public administration, activities that are crucial to both economic and social development and to the social quality and cohesion of European societies. These effects differ however between countries according to the depth of the crisis, the influence of external actors and differences in political choices. Also, with the crisis being over and a return to economic growth observable, we could expect a renewed interest of governments in strengthening the public sector.

Reforms and austerity obviously have had their effects on the number and quality of jobs in the public sector, as well as on public sector industrial relations. The number and quality of jobs are directly linked to public budgets, while industrial relations are different than in the private sector with the state being both regulator, responsible for budgetary conditions and employer. Studies done in the early 2010s have pointed to a number of developments including job losses where austerity has been strongest, wage freezes or wage declines, increased unilateralism and side-lining of trade unions and a weakening of social dialogue (Glassner and Keune 2012; Bach and Bordogna 2013; Culpepper and Regan 2014). In this paper, we will provide an updated analysis on these issues and introduce a number of new ones. We provide an overview of a comparative study (BARSOP Bargaining and social rights in the public sector) of nine EU countries that has analysed changes in employment and industrial relations in the public sector in the past 10-15 years, focusing on the most recent developments since the crisis and beyond.

We ask a number of questions: How have reforms and austerity affected the number and quality of jobs and industrial relations in the public sector? Have the effects of the crisis been long-lasting or can we observe a resurgence of public sector employment and job quality? What links can we observe between the number and quality of jobs on the one hand and the quality of services on the other hand? And have public sector workers and employers passively suffered the consequences of reforms and austerity or have they turned to protest and collective action?

Individual country studies have been completed for Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom (see: www.uva-aiaa.net/en/research-projects/barsop). These studies have focused on three major parts of the public sector which together cover a substantial part of the sector as a whole: hospitals, primary education and the municipalities. Through the analysis of statistics, document analysis and a series of interviews, these studies have answered the questions posed above. In this paper, we provide an overview of the main findings of the national studies, focusing on major trends and differences between countries. The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section we briefly summarise the main character of public sector reforms. In section 3 we discuss the effects of reforms and economic developments on the number and quality of jobs in the public sector. In section 4, public sector industrial relations and the changes therein since the crisis are analysed. Section 5 concludes. This paper constitutes part I of the overview of the BARSOP project, part II presents the findings concerning the European social dialogue in the sectors under study in a separate paper.

2. Public sector reform

Profound changes have occurred in the public sector in the nine countries here under study. Two closely interrelated dimensions stand out: the extent to which the public sector has been subjected to austerity measures and the type of reforms that have taken place. Although all nine countries have suffered from austerity policies that have put public budgets under severe strain, their experiences have been very diverse as can be understood by comparing the cases of Germany and Spain, the two extreme examples in the sample.

Germany has been the country that has suffered less from the crisis (Schulten and Seikel 2018). On the one hand, this is so because its crisis has been the shortest and less profound of the nine countries, largely limited to a one-year dip and a return to economic growth after that. Public budgets have hardly been affected in Germany, in sharp contrast with most of the other countries. It is important though to realize that Germany had already experienced extensive austerity policies in the 1990s and 2000s, more than in the rest of Europe, among others because of the constraints unification imposed on public budgets. Public sector employment declined by over 30 percent between 1992 and 2008. And also in those years it introduced many of the reforms we see since the start of the crisis in the other European countries. Indeed, in this sense we can consider Germany a frontrunner in public sector reform (Schulten and Seikel 2018). In recent years, it has managed to increase public sector employment, contrary to most other European countries. The same can be said for Czechia, where the crisis has been limited as well and public sector employment increased since 2007 (Martišková 2018).

In Spain, on the other hand, even though the country had a low public debt and a fiscal surplus before 2008, the crisis hit very hard and between 2007 and 2013, real GDP per capita declined by 9 percent and started to recover only in 2014. Public debt and the fiscal deficit increased rapidly and unemployment rose to 20 percent in this period. After an initial attempt at Keynesian policies in 2008-2009, the government, also under pressure from the IMF, the ECB and the EU (the Troika), responded with a series of severe austerity measures in 2010-2014. As will be further discussed below, this had strong negative effects on employment and wages in the public sector in Spain.

The crisis hit Spain in a context of ongoing reform of the public sector in line with New Public Management ideas, characterized by two main developments (Molina and Godino 2018). On the one hand, this concerns the process of regional decentralization where Autonomous Communities (regions) have acquired increasing responsibilities in areas like health and education. As a result, the role of the central government is increasingly the coordination of public services and the setting of the respective standards, instead of the delivery of these services. On the other hand, there has been a significant increase in the private provision of public services through privatization and contracting out of public sector activities.

The other seven countries can be placed between these two cases in terms of the depth of the crisis, the extent of austerity policies and the type and extent of public sector reform. In terms of the depth of the crisis, apart from Spain it has been most severe in Italy, while it has been more limited in Czechia and Slovakia and intermediate in the Netherlands, Denmark, France and the UK. In general terms, the extent of austerity policies is linked to the depth of the crisis. However, in some cases there are significant differences in austerity policies between the three sectors. For example, in the UK, the budgets of primary education and hospitals have been ringfenced, limiting negative budgetary effects largely to inflation plus the increase in demand. However, the grants municipalities receive from central government have been cut by around 38% since 2010 and local authorities have been able to compensate for these cuts only to a limited extent, leading to an average decline in finances of 26 percent since 2009 (Hopkins and Simms 2018). In the Netherlands, municipalities became responsible in recent years for a series of new tasks following the decentralization of a number of welfare-related policies, including reintegration of jobseekers, sheltered work places, home care and youth care. This decentralization process however also included a very substantial cut in the respective budgets, putting strong pressure on the municipal finances (Stiller and Boonstra 2018). In Denmark, the budget in the hospital sector was increased in the period under study, however, due to growing demand it actually declined per user (Mailand and Larsen 2018). Hence, the impact of the crisis has not always been homogenous and some sectors have experienced a deep crisis while others have fared better.

As to the character of reforms, New Public Management (NMP) ideas seem to continue to provide most of the inspiration here in all countries. Decentralization, privatization, contracting out and the introduction of market mechanisms can be observed across the country and sector cases. However, it would be too simplistic to categorize all reforms and policies as NMP-driven as many other examples can be observed as well, as can be read in the nine country studies. Here also the colour of the government plays a role. For example, in France, under the Sarkozy administration, reforms were of a clear NMP character; however, under the subsequent Hollande administration this was much less the case (Ramos Martín 2018). Also, in recent years, public services are increasingly running into the limits of austerity and NMP-inspired policies. These limits have become visible through the dissatisfaction of the general public with the quality and accessibility of public services and the growing consensus that the public sector suffers from a lack of investment. They also show in terms of the insufficient quantity and quality of public sector jobs that make it more and more difficult to provide sufficient and good-quality public services, as well as in the related rising level of protest of public sector workers. These issues will be discussed below.

3. The number and quality of public sector jobs

The public sector reforms of the past decades, as well as the more recent ones related to the crisis and its effects, have had important consequences for the number and quality of jobs in the public sector across the nine cases and three sectors under study. The burden of budgetary pressures has frequently been put on the shoulders of public sector workers. Indeed, austerity policies have directly or indirectly been translated into reduced numbers of jobs and/or declining job quality, in particular in the form of stagnating or declining (real) wages but also through high and increasing workloads. Adjustments have been the strongest in the countries with the deepest crisis, whereas important differences between sectors can be observed. Also, in the last few years, with the crisis and the related budgetary pressures being largely over, we can observe a certain recovery of employment and/or job quality, in particular in healthcare and primary education.

3.1 Job losses related to the crisis

Where job losses are concerned, in Spain, public sector employment fell from 2,408,020 in 2009 to 2,253,268 in 2014, a decline of 6.4 percent, to then rebound to 2,372,880 in 2016, reducing the overall decline to 1.5 percent (Molina and Godino 2018). In both health and education, by 2016, employment was slightly higher than in 2009. At the same time, employment in the Spanish municipalities plummeted from 629,505 in 2009 to 555,720 in 2014 and 543,110 in 2016, presenting a continuous decline and resulting in a total reduction of municipal employment of no less than 13.7 percent.

In Italy, the other country with very severe budgetary problems, total public sector employment declined by some 220,000 jobs or 6.2 percent of public sector employment between 2007 and 2015 (Pedaci, Betti and Di Federico 2018). Again, it was in the municipalities where the decline has been most severe, amounting to 15.3 percent in this period, compared to 4.6 percent in primary education and 4.5 percent in healthcare. Similarly, in the UK, it has been especially in the local government, where budgets have not been ringfenced, where employment has suffered. The main response of local authorities to the budget constraints imposed by the central government has been a reduction in the workforce by some 10 percent since 2008 (Hopkins and Simms 2018).

In France, public sector employment was reduced substantially under the Sarkozy administration. Decreasing the number of public service jobs became a key target to address budgetary pressures and reduce public expenditure. As Ramos Martín (2018: 10) shows:

A second reform adopted during the Sarkozy's government, was a drastic reduction of the number of civil servants through reorganisations and the decrease of the replacement rate of retiring civil servants (by the non-replacement of one in two retiring civil servants). This austerity measure was based on the above mentioned process of administrative reorganisation called a "general public policy review". This reduction of public service jobs was as follows: 75,000 jobs cut in 2008; 45,000 in 2009, (representing 5% of jobs in the public sector over those two years). This led to a fall in staff costs in the national budget from 43% in 2008 to 36.5% in 2010.

However, with the Hollande administration coming into power in 2012, reducing the number of civil servants ceased to be a core objective and in the education sector some 60,000 new jobs were created. They did however not make up for the around 100,000 education jobs eliminated under Sarkozy (ibid.).

Also in the Netherlands, municipal employment declined the most since the crisis, by 15 percent between 2008 and 2015, whereas in primary education employment fell by 8.2 percent (Stiller and Boonstra 2018). On the contrary, employment in general hospitals increased over this period by 6.4 percent and in academic hospitals by 9.1 percent.

In all these cases, employment reductions were mainly achieved through the non-renewal of temporary contracts and the non-replacement of employees going on pensions or otherwise leaving their job, instead of straightforward redundancies. Also, a decline in public sector employment does not always mean a decline in total employment related to public budgets. Through outsourcing and other constructions to involve private sector companies in the delivery of public services the change in total employment may be tempered. This phenomenon can be observed especially where municipalities are concerned.

In the remaining countries, employment developments have been much less dramatic or even positive. Slovakia job losses have been much less severe and adjustment centred more on wages than jobs as will be discussed below. In the case of Germany, public sector employment actually increased since 2007 by some 3 percent, following the country's good economic situation but also because a consensus has been emerging that the public sector suffers from underinvestment, which affects the availability and quality of public services (Schulten and Seikel 2018). Indeed, this increase comes after an enormous decline of public sector employment in Germany between 1992 and 2007, amounting to 32 percent or 2.1 million jobs. Also in Czechia, which was hardly hit by the crisis, public sector employment rose between 2007 and 2015, by 5.3 percent (Martišková 2018).

Also, not all employment developments are primarily related to economic circumstances or austerity policies but are sometimes rather spurred by demographic developments. For example, between 2010 and 2015, the number of teachers employed in the Danish schools has decreased by 4.7 percent, largely in line with decline in pupils of 4.4 percent in the same period (Mailand and Larsen 2018). On the contrary, employment in Danish eldercare decreased by 2 percent between 2010 and 2015, while the number of elderly (over 80 years of age) increased by 6 percent. Also, although between 2007 and 2017 expenditure on Danish eldercare

increased, when we account for the growing number of users, inflation and wage development, expenditure per elderly person was actually reduced by 25 percent (Mailand and Larsen 2018).

3.2 The quality of employment

Apart from the number of jobs, also several elements of the quality of jobs have been at the centre of debates and reforms in the public sector across Europe. From our study two elements of job quality emerge as key concerns. One is wages which in many cases have been used as a means to limit public expenditure, resulting in years of slowly growing, stagnating or even declining wage levels. The other is an increased workload as it is experienced by the majority of public sector workers across the cases.

Wages

Wages, like employment, have been used in most country cases as a way to deal with budgetary difficulties. Freezing or reducing the funds available for wage payments has been a widely-used government strategy aimed at limiting public expenditure. Indeed, also in terms of their earnings, public sector workers have carried an important part of the crisis adjustment burden. In the countries with the deepest crisis, wages have been most important in this respect. In Italy, between 2009 and 2014, public sector wages declined slightly in nominal terms, by 0.5 percent; however, in real terms they lost substantial purchasing power (Pedaci et al. 2018). Also, there have been significant differences between sector, with primary education being one of the main losers, suffering a nominal decline of 4.8 percent in this 5-year period (ibid.).

In Spain, wage decline was even much more severe. In the period 2008-2014, public sector employees experienced an accumulated decline in the average nominal wage of between 15-20 percent, often achieved to an important extent through the elimination of the thirteenth and fourteenth month of pay (Molina and Godino 2018). In real terms, the decline of wages was even more severe. Indeed, although employment suffered in this period, wages have been an even more influential austerity instrument. Only in 2015, when the economy had returned to growth, the government agreed to negotiate (limited) real wage increases again, including the reversal of some of the cuts imposed in the previous years (e.g. the fourteen month) (Molina and Godino 2018). In 2017, wages remained however clearly below their pre-crisis level and continue to be a tense issue in government-trade union relations.

Also in the UK, the government tried to limit public expenditure by limiting wage growth, among others through the capping of wage rises to 1 percent nominally since 2010, with inflation running around 2 percent (Hopkins and Simms 2018). In 2017, this cap was still in place for most of the public sector, leading to a significant accumulated real wage decline over the 2010-2017 period. In a similar fashion, in Slovakia, wages were chosen by the government as the main adjustment instrument, whereas employment cuts remained limited (Kahancová and Sedláková 2018). Wages were largely frozen in the period 2010-2012 in education

and pre-education, while in the hospital sector wages increased minimally in the corporatized hospitals and more substantially in the non-corporatized hospitals. Since 2013, however, very significant wage increases have been achieved in the Slovak public sector, largely as the combined result of the withering away of the crisis, widespread discontent of public sector workers with low wage levels, and extensive industrial action (see below) (Kahancová and Sedláková 2018).

Also in Czechia low public sector wages have been considered as a serious problem for many years. This was used as an argument during the crisis not to reduce wages across the board (Martišková 2018). In fact, primary education was excluded from wage freezes or wage cuts (except for a small dip in 2010 caused by declining bonuses), and wage increases reached quite significant levels since 2014. Also the hospital sector remained largely exempted from wage cuts or freezes, although to a lesser extent than education. Post-crisis wage increases in hospitals have also been more limited than in education. In both sectors, extensive protest helped to prevent more drastic measures. Serious wage adjustments were however made in central and local government, amounting up to 10 percent of nominal wages in 2010 (Martišková 2018).

In the Netherlands, since 2010, the various governments have implemented austerity policies that severely affected wage developments in the public sector by not increasing or by reducing the funds available for wages in the various public sectors (Stiller and Boonstra 2018). Limiting wage growth in the public sector was explicitly forwarded as one of the solutions for the crisis-induced budgetary pressures and the governments active in the crisis period have had explicit policies of wage restraints or wage freezes. As a result, in the Dutch hospital sector, wage increases were limited to between 1 and 2 percent annually in the period 2009-2016, barely making up for inflation. The situation has been somewhat worse in the municipalities where it also included two years with small nominal wage declines (2011 and 2013), overall resulting in real wage decline. Also in education wage increases have been below inflation since 2010, again resulting in real wage decline (Stiller and Boonstra).

In Denmark, there have been no reductions of nominal wages and no formal wage freezes in 2008-2014, but wage increases did not always make up for inflation, leading in some cases to real wage decline (Mailand and Larsen 2018). Whereas the government abstained from active interventions, the so-called “Regulation Mechanism” (which ties wage-development in the public sector to the wage development in the private sector) has functioned as a hidden austerity measure in that it led to an automatic downward adjustment of wages in the public sector (Mailand and Larsen 2018). In 2015, wage bargaining resulted again in real wage increases although it also included a tightening of the Regulation Mechanism to prevent public sector wages from increasing more than private sector wages (ibid.).

In France, the Sarkozy government not only reduced employment substantially, it also targeted wages as a means to reduce budget pressures. Among others, it stopped indexing public sector wages to the development of retail prices. As a result, in the period 2008-2011, real wages in the sector, on average, declined by 1.6 percent (Ramos martin 2018). And also in subsequent years wage freezes occurred regularly. One of the

most affected sectors has been the hospital sector, where employees experienced “... a loss of their purchasing power of 8% since 2010 due to stagnation of wages. This decreasing trend has been only partially counteracted by a general wage raise of 1.2% achieved by an agreement in 2016 (ibid.: 32).”

The situation in Germany differs from the other countries. German public sector wages have been growing steadily, without any noticeable highs or lows, since 2007 (Schulten and Seikel 2018). In the period 2007-2017, public sector wage growth amounted to 23.5 percent, or some two percent per year. This, combined with the fact that public sector employment increased in the same period by some 3 percent clearly shows that Germany was not subject to the crisis-related austerity trap and the potential negative effects thereof on employment and wages.

Workload

A striking similarity across the country and sector cases is that large parts of public sector workers report a high and often increasing workload or an intensification of work. Also, public sector trade unions invariably point to high workloads as one of their main concerns. High and increasing workloads are reported to negatively affect both the physical and mental well-being of workers as well as their ability to do their work properly and deliver the public services the citizens expect from them. To illustrate the seriousness of this issue, Hopkins and Simms (2018) report on a survey in the UK that showed that no less than 90 percent of teachers had considered giving up their profession in the previous two years, largely due to the excessive workload, including 60-hour working weeks during term time. This high workload is also reported to lead to high staff turnover.

The causes of the high and increasing workload are multiple and may differ across countries and sectors and over time. In very general terms they are related to (i) the intensification work, i.e. increasing workloads per worker; and (ii) the extensification of work through reduced dead time or rest time and extended working time or increased overtime. Both these processes can be observed extensively in the countries and sectors under study here.

In a long-term and abstract perspective increasing workloads to an important extent originate in NMP-inspired approaches that aim to progressively increase efficiency and productivity of the public sector and see public sector workers as the main (and almost unlimited) source of such increases. Hence, increasing effective working time as well as the number of tasks performed by public sector workers has become a core management strategy, often imposed by governments through adding new tasks, reducing resources and/or raising performance targets. In addition, increasing workloads can in many instances also be related directly to the crisis and the resulting austerity policies. As was shown in section 3.1, in many countries and sectors public employment was reduced during the crisis. However, the work to be done often remained the same or increased, resulting in the growing use of overtime and more pressure to work harder and perform more tasks for the workers that remained. In this way, there is a clear link between the quantity and the quality of work. NMP- and crisis-related causes for high and increasing workloads cannot be fully separated from each

other since they originate in the same attempt to make more intense use of labour. Of course, in theory the workers can avoid the increase of workloads by simply not performing all the tasks they get on their plate. In practice this is often very difficult as workers have substantial professional and occupational pride and motivation and often report that they above all want to avoid that their patients get less or less quality care or that their pupils see their learning opportunities decline.

Here is not the place to discuss the workload issue in much detail, extensive detail is provided in the country studies. However, a few examples will be given to illustrate the general points. As Ramos Martín (2018) shows, in the French public sector, there has been an increase in stress and burnouts in the public sector during the crisis period. She states that:

A main conclusion is that work-intensity has clearly increased during this period. Employees in the public sector in France are facing increasing pressure at work in the form of stress-related complaints derived from having to work more quickly, work in a pressurized way, and assuming additional tasks, as staff numbers have been declining. The interviewees mentioned that work pressure and work intensity increased dramatically in the last decade and linked that development to the NPM reforms, organisational changes, and greater job insecurity in the public sector, due to crisis/ austerity policy related reforms. They also mentioned the lack of properly functioning Human Resources structures able to cope with increasing work-related stress complaints, especially in the education and hospitals sectors (Ramos Martin 2018: 42).

Whereas the increasing workload is a general phenomenon, it seems most pronounced in the hospital sector. In this sector, care has become more complex in recent years due to the ageing of the population and to the fact that in most countries patients spend less sick time in the hospital (and more sick time at home) but need more intensive treatment in the days they do spend in the hospital. But rarely the number of workers is sufficiently adjusted to these increased needs, leading to rapidly increasing productivity requirements for workers, as illustrated by this quote on the Danish hospital sector (Mailand and Larsen 2018: 22):

In a large-scale independent survey of all Danish employees including work environment issues, members of DSR (the nurses union, MK) score their work environment as clearly more problematic than the average Danish employee on all dimensions, including psychological burdens, time pressure and work load. Also with regard to 'increasing demand for documentation in recent years', the difference is substantial: 90 % of DSR members agree on this statement compared to 63 % of all employees (Caraker et al. 2015).

According to DSR the most important explanation is that although the number of employees at the public hospitals (and the number of nurses) has increased rather than decreased the last 15 years, the workload has increased substantially. Taking 2001 as a point of departure, the index of the budgets for hospitals had increased to index 130, whereas the activity index had increased to 150. The resulting average productivity increase has been 3,9 % p.a. The work load increase in the health care sector (including the hospital sector) has been 40 % for each employee. The reasons for this increase include also that each patient is hospitalised for shorter periods than previously and therefore is in worse shape and demands more care. Moreover, each health employee has to do more tasks now than before. On the

background of this, DSR finds the cuts have now reached the bone and that the current demand of a 2 % yearly productivity increase is counter-productive and the time-pressure a threat not only to the health and safety of the employees but also to the security of the patients.

This quote is illustrative for most of the hospital cases. They combine more complex and intensive treatment of patients, more demands in terms of time registration, performance indicators and administration, and no respective increase of staff. Again, to some extent this is a general long-term strategy of governments to reduce the rapidly growing costs of care across Europe, while it has been further intensified because of the crisis. As part of the increased workloads, in particular the increased requirements concerning time registration, performance indicators and administration are reported to have negative effects on the satisfaction of hospital workers.

Another example comes from the Dutch primary education sector (Stiller and Boonstra 2018). A new system for the suitable education of children with special needs in regular schools was introduced in 2014. It imposes on all schools the “duty to care” for all children, also those with special needs. All schools have to reserve teachers’ hours for this complex task regardless of the number of children with special needs. However, both the workers and the employers in the sector stress that this process is insufficiently facilitated by the government, that not enough funds are made available to hire additional capacity and that the measure therefore has resulted in a strong intensification of the work in the schools.

High and increasing workloads also affect the municipalities in most countries, in particular where job losses during the crisis have been extensive. This is illustrated by the Italian study (Pedaci et al. 2018: 39), which shows that one of the important change in the working conditions of municipalities’ employees has been the increase of work intensity and workloads. They sum up a number of causes for this process. One is widespread understaffing linked to budget cuts and the related difficulties to hire workers and to reorganize and innovate work organization and service delivery. Second, the crisis has led to a growing demand for municipal services from the side of the population, resulting in the increase of the amount of work to be done, but with a declining number of employees. Third, there are insufficient and rapidly diminishing resources for training, even though there is a strong need for upskilling to respond to the demands of the population and to use the possibilities offered by new technologies. And fourth, these three developments have a strong negative effect on the satisfaction and motivation of municipal workers (Pedaci et al. 2018).

It remain to be seen to what extent the fact that the crisis is over will lead to improvements in wages and workloads in the public sector in the coming years. In terms of improving public finances there might be space for such improvements. At the same time, this may also require a more philosophical turn in the way governments and international organizations are approaching the public sector, away from NMP-type of views and towards more attention for the key role the public sector plays in social and economic development and the respective investments the sector as such as well as its workers require. What is very clear,

though, is that austerity and reforms have strongly affected the public sector workers and have resulted in turbulence and changes in terms of industrial relations. This is the subject of the next section.

4. Changing industrial relations

Obviously, public sector industrial relations have not remained untouched by the public sector reforms of the past decades, the more recent ones related to the crisis, as well as by their effects on the number and quality of public sector jobs. In particular since the start of the crisis public sector industrial relations have been in turmoil as governments turned to austerity while public sector workers started to feel the effects thereof on public sector employment and job quality. With the countries having quite different industrial relations regimes, also during the crisis years they have followed distinct trajectories. At the same time, we can discern several broad trends that are then shaped according to national and sectoral circumstances. They concern (i) a turn to more unilateralism on the side of governments in the initial crisis years; (ii) the emergence of new industrial relations actors; and (iii) the rising level of protest of public sector workers.

4.1 Years of unilateralism

The crisis and the pressures it caused on public budgets spurred many a government to reduce or suspend previous practices of social dialogue and collective bargaining, and, in some cases to redesign the regulatory framework for public sector industrial relations. On the one hand, in many cases the financial pressures were considered as inescapable and as making more unilateral decisions on the budgets, employment, wages and working conditions of the public sector unavoidable, at least in the short term. On the other hand, the crisis was in some cases also taken as an opportunity to redraw the rules of the industrial relations game. This unilateralism is not necessarily equal to a dominance of employers over workers and their unions. Indeed, the (central) government in many cases does not directly act as the employer. The employer is often the municipality, the hospital or the school board. The government does however generally determine the available budgets, may set wages and working conditions, and may to some extent determine the way work is organized. Collective bargaining and social dialogue in the public sector have always to an important extent been conditioned by this role of the state. However, with the crisis, the available space for bargaining and dialogue was strongly reduced in a number of countries.

In Italy, the Brunetta Reform of 2009, reduced the role of collective bargaining in the public sector, "...embedding it within stricter legal rules and constraints and re-juridifying to some extent employment relation and personnel practices (Pedaci et al. 2018: 10)." The issues that were open to bargaining were strongly reduced (e.g. many organizational and HRM issues), especially at the decentralized level, stricter performance assessments were introduced conditioning wage increases and career advancement, stricter control and penalisation in case of sick leave were introduced, time off for union activities was reduced, etc. (ibid.). In 2010, national level bargaining was simply stopped by a government decree and would not resume until 2017 (ibid.). In the meantime the government unilaterally decided on terms and conditions of employment. Also, national-level social dialogue was severely weakened or entirely suspended, again at the

initiative of the government. In this period, the successive Italian governments actively undermined the position of public sector unions, arguing that they were obstacles to innovation, adverse to change and defending the interest of privileged groups of workers. Dialogue with these unions was then argued to be unnecessary and ineffective (ibid.). Again it was only in late 2016 that the then new government was open to re-establish dialogue. At decentralized level there were better conditions for the continuation of social dialogue in the crisis period but within a much more problematic context.

In Spain, after a temporary continuation of traditional social dialogue and collective bargaining in the first years of the crisis, "... With the implementation of the first austerity package in 2010, social dialogue and collective bargaining in the public sector entered into a period of paralysis, as the government imposed these measures unilaterally and trade unions have contested them (Molina and Godino 2018)." Prioritizing austerity objectives over social dialogue, the government largely ignored the trade unions and pushed through its own plans. Social dialogue was not entirely blocked but its role was severely limited. It was until 2015 that, with the strengthening of the economy, the situation returned almost to pre-crisis normality and a new momentum for social dialogue and collective bargaining, including an agreement to again raise real wages (2015) and an agreement to improve the quality of public sector employment and to again replace all employees that retire (2017) (ibid.). This does not mean however that everything is back to routine; the unions argue that it will take a lot of time and effort to make up for the losses suffered during the crisis, both in terms of wages and working conditions, and in terms of cooperation and dialogue between the government and the workers and their representatives.

In the UK, austerity led the government to challenge the authority of the pay review bodies (Hopkins and Simms 2018). These bodies are comprised of independent experts who, based on information they get from unions, employers and economist, recommend national pay settlements for certain sectors (e.g. the teachers, the National Health Services, etc.). The pay review bodies represent a form of collective regulation of employment, which is preferred over collective bargaining (ibid.). Their recommendations used to be accepted by the respective Ministries without much ado. However, since the start of the crisis these recommendations are more and more often rejected or only adopted in part (ibid.). According to Hopkins and Simms (2018: 83):

"... This is a dramatic shift of approach to public sector pay management, and industrial relations in general. Pay review bodies are widely regarded to be a mechanism to provide an independent assessment of what is a necessary and affordable pay rise within a specific sector or occupational group. In this regard, it is seen as a mechanism to 'depoliticise' the pay setting process by placing the responsibility for making recommendations into the hands of an independent panel that takes evidence from stakeholders. By rejecting the recommendations of pay review bodies, Ministers risk 're-politicising' public sector pay as well as undermining the role of the bodies.

In the Netherlands, during the crisis period, unilateralism also increased as evidenced by the earlier-mentioned wage restraint or wage freezes imposed by the various governments that were active during

this period (Stiller and Boonstra 2018). Collective bargaining did continue but became more difficult, especially in the municipalities. Also, industrial relations in the public sector continued to be relatively consensual, however, in recent years they have become more conflictual as will be discussed below. In Denmark, no wage freezes have been imposed and collective bargaining has continued to give unions and employers strong influence on the developments in all three subsectors (Mailand and Larsen 2018). However, austerity policies did condition bargaining in an important way and unions and employers did not have much influence on these policies (ibid.).

In France, again an increased unilateralism can be observed since the start of the crisis (Ramos Martín 2018). It includes wages freezes, employment cuts and others. And while social dialogue in France seemingly continued, in practice it was sometimes less multilateral and consensual than it seemed. For example, in the education sector, according to union representatives, "... the teachers were confronted with a 'pseudo social dialogue' to give the appearance that measures were jointly adopted, when they were in fact unilaterally imposed (Ramos Martín 2018: 23). In Germany, the issue of increased unilateralism because of the crisis is simply less relevant because of the much better economic conditions compared to the rest of the countries.

In Slovakia, the situation has been somewhat different. On the one hand, collective bargaining structures have remained stable in the past decades, with the municipal sector being engaged mainly in decentralized single-employer bargaining, while in education and healthcare both sectoral and decentralized bargaining takes place (Kahancová and Sedláková 2018). On the other hand, however, the role of collective bargaining is being undermined, both by the social partners themselves and by the government. Kahancová and Sedláková (2018) show that there is a trend to increasingly regulate working conditions, and especially wages, via legislative solutions and that the Slovak social partners have successfully lobbied for this as such regulation now applies to healthcare and education. Also, increasingly, the government and the public sector unions sign memoranda, agreements in which, for example, the unions agree not to engage in industrial action aimed at additional wage increases for a specific period, in exchange for an agreed wage rise. These memoranda endanger collective bargaining in the public sector and undermine the capacity of unions to strike and to react to developments in the economy (Kahancová and Sedláková 2018). The result is a very central role for the government in wage setting, not entirely unilateral but with a clear dominance.

In Czechia, collective bargaining in the public sector, if it takes place, happens almost entirely at the establishment level. Like in Slovakia, wages setting is done mainly by the government at the central level and is therefore not a core element of collective bargaining (Martišková 2018). The social partners therefore address the government directly on the wage issue, be it through social dialogue or through various types of protests. Low wages are the core issue in public sector industrial relations. However, this has been a long-term problem that only in the municipal sector suffered additionally from the (relatively mild) crisis. As Martišková (2018) shows, it depends largely on the colour of the government how much influence social partners, and in particular the unions, have on wage setting and related policies. Rightwing governments have taken a clear unilateral approach, resulting in limited social dialogue and weak inclusion of unions in the

policy making process. This was compensated for by the more intensive use of various types of protest. Under social-democratic governments social dialogue and union influence have been much stronger, reflected in the strong reduction of protest (Martišková 2018).

4.2 Trade unions and the emergence of new actors and alliances

Years of austerity and reforms, crisis-related or not, have resulted in strong dissatisfaction at two fronts. In most countries and sectors, public sector workers are dissatisfied with (certain aspects of) their employment conditions. In some cases low wages are seen as the main problem, in others workload and in again others uncertainty stemming from flexible contracts. And in some all apply. Public sector workers also often voice feelings of unfairness, as they feel they are treated as disposable when budget pressures mount. And they express serious concerns about the effects austerity and reforms have on their ability to deliver good quality public services. They have increasingly been looking for (old and new) representatives to voice their concerns and to try and remedy the problems they face.

Dissatisfaction has also emerged among the general public, the consumers of public services. Increasingly, they worry about the quality and availability of public services. Concerns may range from the size of school classes, to the quality of home care, to waiting lists in hospitals, to attention to patients, to the affordability of childcare, etc. Also, the public is more and more aware of the conditions in which public sector workers work and the important thereof for the quality and availability of the public services they require. The dissatisfaction at these two fronts has resulted in a series of developments in industrial relations, including the emergence of new actors and alliances that defend the interests of public sector workers, of consumers, or of both, but in some cases also a strengthening of the traditional unions.

In the area of workers' representation, in many cases the traditional trade unions and trade union confederations dominating workers' representation in the public sector before the crisis, have not been able to obtain the results their members or supporters expected during or after the crisis. Often they have been blamed for being too accommodating towards austerity politics. At the same time, the differences between groups within sectors have been getting more pronounced, for example between doctors and nurses, while in some cases bargaining has been decentralised over time, for example differentiating between subsectors like primary and secondary education, or increasing the role of establishment-level bargaining. As a result of these developments, the emergence of new actors of representation can be observed, to represent occupational groups or subsectors. They cause a fragmentation of the union landscape. Another type of new actors rather represents an alternative to trade unions as such and takes the form of social movements. They further fragment the representation landscape, although new alliances emerge between unions and social movements. In some cases, we also observe fragmentation on the side of the employers. Fragmentation does however not happen everywhere and in several cases workers' dissatisfaction rather results in increased membership of traditional unions.

Let's look at a number of illustrative examples. In Slovakia, in the context of a series of teachers' strikes, a new trade union has emerged – the New Education Trade Union (NŠO), while there is also another influential new actor that is not a trade union, i.e. the Initiative of Slovak Teachers (ISU) (Kahancová and Sedláková 2018). They are not official partners to employers for collective bargaining but they are very vocal and do organise industrial action. The two collaborate frequently but do not cooperate with the large traditional union, the Union of Workers in Education and Science of Slovakia (OZPŠaV), among others because they see them as a puppet of the government led by the social-democratic party SMER-SD (ibid.).

In the Slovak hospital sector, the traditional union is the Slovak Trade Union Federation of Healthcare and Social Work (SOZZaSS). Already in 1996, the doctors in the sector established their own union, the Medical Doctors' Trade Union Federation (LOZ) to defend the specific interests of doctors and to improve their working conditions and remuneration (Kahancová and Sedláková 2018). More recently, in 2012, the Trade Union Federation of Nurses and Midwives (OZSaPA) was established as this occupational group was also dissatisfied by the way SOZZaSS defended their interests. LOZ and OZSaPA often cooperate but both tend not to work with SOZZaSS. Also, the former two follow more militant strategies while the latter rather uses the established bargaining channels and national social dialogue (ibid.).

In Italy, in education, two trends are combined. Trade union membership and density have increased in the period 2007-2015, among others because of the workers' increased perception of uncertainty and need for protection (Pedaci et al. 2018). At the same time, fragmentation of the union front took place because of the growing presence of professional/occupational organisations that are not affiliated to the large confederations and that are radically representing the interests of specific groups (ibid.). The trade unions have also established alliances with parents' associations to jointly oppose government reforms of the sector. In the hospital sector, interests' representation was already extremely fragmented before the crisis and has remained so, with at least 700 different organisations active in public hospitals and health care structures. These include the organisations affiliated to the major Italian confederations, organising the majority of members, as well as a plethora of small occupational unions, representing professions such as medical managers, nurses, technical professions (ibid.). Union density has been quite stable over time, around 52-53 percent during 2007-2015, however, the smaller unions have increased their share while the large confederation-affiliated unions have lost membership. The municipal sector seems to go counter the general tendency, considering that unions density in 2007-2015 actually declined from 48.3 percent to 42.9 percent and fragmentation of the union landscape did not increase. However, in particular the decline in density can be explained by the very large employment losses in the sector, the related changing composition of the workforce and the difficulties to organise young workers on flexible contracts (ibid.).

In France, an emergence of new actors can be observed. One has been the establishment by law, in 2010, of an occupational association for nurses. However, the nurses were not necessarily happy with this imposition and criticisms have been voice concerning the fact nurses are obliged to pay fees to this association as well as calling into question the representativeness of this newly created organisation (Ramos Martín 2018). An-

other type of new actors concerns associations of parents in education and in childcare, and associations of patients and care services users in healthcare (Ramos Martín 2018). These new actors are on the one hand increasingly included in social dialogue processes and participate in ministerial consultative bodies like the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation and various technical committees in the education sector, and in the National Health Conference, a body established in 2006, which is consulted by the government on public health objectives and improvements to the health care system, and which is composed representatives of the social partners as well as associations of patients and users (ibid.). On the other hand, these new actors also team up with the trade unions in (temporary) protest alliances against government austerity and reform programmes.

In Denmark, the public sector industrial relations system has been quite stable in the past 15 years. It comprises strong actors and a near 100 percent bargaining coverage, and no important new actors have emerged. In the hospital sector, no major changes have taken place in the union landscape but it is quite complex, fragmented and yet centralising more in recent years. As Mailand and Larsen (2018: 16) explain:

The Health Care Cartel includes 11 trade unions, none of which are trade unions for doctors. Many of these 11 trade unions organise employees at the hospitals. The trade union for nurses (DSR) is by far the largest. The Health Care Cartel negotiated until recently general working conditions and some more occupation-specific conditions, whereas other occupation-specific conditions are negotiated by the individual trade unions. However, the Health Care Cartel became in mid-2014 part of a new broader cartel, Forhandlingsfællesskabet, together with the bargaining cartel for employees in the municipalities, KTO, among others. Forhandlingsfællesskabet is now the only bargaining cartel regarding the hospital's group of employees.

In the Danish education sector, the situation is stable and much simpler with three major unions representing, respectively, the teachers, the early childhood and youth educators, and the school principals. In the municipally-organised elderly care there is only one major union (FAO), while collective bargaining is done by the same broad cartel the healthcare unions are part of (*Forhandlingsfællesskabet*). Membership in all three sectors is very high and decreasing only slightly over time.

In the Netherlands, the traditional unions, mostly belonging to the large union confederations, maintained their leading position during most of the crisis and post-crisis period. However, in February 2017, in primary education, a protest movement emerged under the name Primary Education in Action (Stiller and Boonstra 2018). The movement was started by two teachers on Facebook and within no time they got over 40,000 teachers to sign up to the movement. Also, within 2017 they managed to organise a one-hour and a one-day strike with around 90 percent participation, showing their mobilisation power. Primary Education in Action presents itself as an alternative to the traditional unions whom they argue do not represent the teachers' interests sufficiently in collective bargaining and towards the government. However, it is not hostile to the traditional unions and advocates cooperation with them as well as with the employers in the sector, to present a common front towards the government. They see the low wages and high work pressure as the

main problems in the sector and demand a substantial expansion of the government's education budget. Recently, the movement is turning itself into a new trade union and wants to have a say as well at the collective bargaining table.

The example of Primary Education in Action has inspired workers in secondary education, universities as well as the healthcare sector to start similar initiatives. Hence, also here the dominance of the traditional unions is being challenged. It remains to be seen to what extent these initiatives will lead to similar success as the one in the primary education sector.

In Spain, as Molina and Godino (2018: 18) argue:

One of the most interesting developments in relation to public sector actors is the emergence, in the context of the crisis, of the so-called Mareas (Tides). These movements, bringing together a diversity of civil society actors (including trade unions), were born with the objective of defending public services. These movements served to create synergies between social movements and trade unions' activists to the extent that both organised jointly public assemblies, demonstrations or symbolic occupations of public buildings.

They discuss the Marea Verde (Green Tide) corresponding to the education sector, and the Marea Blanca (White Tide) in the healthcare sector. The Marea Verde emerged in 2011-2012, out of a series of mobilizations against the non-renewal of teachers with temporary contracts, but also made larger claims against austerity and reforms in the sector. It became the focal point of protest against austerity politics and in favour of better wages and working conditions for teachers as well as good quality education (Molina and Godino 2018). The Marea Verde consisted of student organisations, parents' associations, groups of teachers and other civil society organisations, hence uniting students, workers, unions and consumers into a broad coalition. They cooperated with the trade unions and mutually supported each other. It remained active over the entire crisis period and subsequently created a platform (Plataforma Estatal por la Escuela Pública) to continue to influence the development of the education sector in Spain, having under its umbrella trade unions as well as civil society organisations.

The Marea Blanca in the healthcare sector also emerged from a series of protests, in first instance in the Madrid region and then all over the country (Molina and Godino 2018). However, in the Marea Blanca, trade unions organising nurses and doctors had a much more central place than in the Marea Verde, as shown by the two general strikes they organised 2012 and 2013 in Madrid. But they also built a broader social coalition with other civil society organisations to create a stronger front, gain visibility and get more social support. Again similar to the Marea Verde, also the Marea Blanca created a series of regional platforms to give continuity to their efforts, including, most importantly, the Platform in Defense of Public Health in Madrid (MEDSAP), composed of neighbourhood associations, user groups, social movements, trade unions, civil society platforms, health professionals and popular assemblies of the "indignados" movement (ibid.).

But changes took pace as well in the union landscape see (ibid.). Even though the three confederations that traditionally have played a dominant role in the public sector maintained their leading position, at the same time, a growing fragmentation of the trade union camp can be observed, in particular in education and healthcare. This fragmentation takes place mainly at the regional level and is caused by the growing significance of occupational and professional unions, defending first of all the interests of particular groups. This has resulted in more tensions within the trade union camp and sometimes a lack of cooperation between unions, which has weakened their position in collective bargaining (ibid.)

In the UK, trade union membership in the public sector is high and relatively stable: in 2008, 57.2 percent of public sector workers were trade union member, compared to 54.8 percent in 2015 (Hopkins and Simms 2018). In comparison, in the private sector the respective figures were 15.6 percent and 13.9 percent. This high level of membership has already for long time been combined with high fragmentation, in particular in education and healthcare, and no further fragmentation seems to have taken place in the crisis years.

4.3 Increased protest

Closely related to the what was discussed in the previous paragraphs, what in terms of industrial relations possibly has been the most noticeable development, has been the increased protest from the side of public sector workers and their (old or new) representatives. The increased dissatisfaction of public sector workers has resulted in increased tensions and conflict between public sector workers and their employers, but especially with the respective governments. Indeed, sometimes workers have acted in coalition with employers, jointly addressing the state for more funds or different regulations. In a number of cases, as discussed above, protest has also been in conjunction with organizations of citizen or customers, i.e. patient organizations, parent groups and others. Protest has taken variety of forms ranging from information campaigns to demonstrations to strikes. They have been directed against the deterioration of wages, working conditions and workloads, as well as the underlying mechanisms like austerity politics, privatization processes or lack of voice. Also, much more than in previous periods, a strong link is made consistently between the workers' conditions and the quality of public services. Indeed, often it has been this argument rather than the conditions of public sector workers as such that have resonated with the broader public and with politics. It underlines the importance of good workers' conditions for good public services and emphasizes the responsibility of governments to facilitate public workers in providing good services. Increased protest in most countries also constitutes a response towards the increased unilateralism of governments in setting budgets, wages and working conditions for the public sector and the increasing difficulty for public sector workers to achieve results at the collective bargaining table. By increasing protest and firmly including the quality of public services argument, public sector workers have moved their struggle (partially) from the bargaining table into the public debate, hoping to achieve their objectives in this way. As we will see below, they have not been without success.

A good example is the Slovak case. Kahancová and Sedláková (2018) show that across the three sectors under study the mobilization of workers increased and so did the use of protest actions, strikes and demonstrations, in particular by the new industrial relations' actors discussed above. They crowded out peaceful collective bargaining on wage claims following the dissatisfaction of public sector workers with the many years of wage moderation or limited wage increases, also in the post-crisis years. Possibly the clearest example is the Slovak education sector (ibid.: 21):

The first significant strike of teachers was organized by OZPŠaV in 2003 as a response to changes in the system of financing, and resulted in 7% increase of wages in the public sector. Following the successful campaign by medical doctors ..., in 2012 teachers entered into one of the biggest strikes that gained considerable public support and resulted in a 5 % wage increase. Similarly, in January 2016, ISU, with the support of the Slovak Chamber of Teachers organized one of the largest waves of strikes in education, which enjoyed broad public support. The strike not only called for higher wages in education, but aimed at opening a broader debate about quality of education in Slovakia and reforms. Contrary to other strikes organized by the main trade union OZPŠaV, the 2016 strikes was not supported by OZPŠaV whose representatives collectively agreed on wage increase with social partners at the end of 2015 and thus felt that entering into strike in early 2016 would undermine the established institution of collective bargaining.

In the Slovak hospital sector, the Doctors' Union LOZ, from the late 2000s onwards became more militant, criticizing the reforms in the sector, speaking out against corruption and engaging in public protest (ibid.). In 2011, LOZ organized a doctors' resignation campaign "...in which about 2,400 of the 6,000 hospital doctors committed themselves to resigning if union demands were not met by the centre-right government (ibid. 48). This campaign put the basic provision of healthcare in danger, finally resulting in the government agreeing to legislating a wage increase for this occupational group and to refrain from further corporatization of hospitals. The Slovak nurses intended a similar resignation campaign but with less success in 2015-2016.

In Czechia, in 2011, after the government announced steep austerity measures, the trade unions organised a massive demonstration under the motto 'Democracy looks different', which attracted some 100,000 people and sent a serious message to politics (Martišková 2018). The Czech doctors organised a resignation campaign in 2010-2011 similar to the Slovak doctors and indeed managed to achieve an important wage increase, although only for themselves and not for example for the nurses, underlining the fragmentation of the sector. Most protest took possibly place in the education sector, in the years of the right-wing governments (2007-2012) (ibid.). In these years, characterised by budget cuts and the absence of social dialogue, the teachers' union organized a series of strikes, strike alerts, demonstrations and other protest events, often symbolic happenings but with a clear message that the already low wages should not be touched. In this sense, they were successful as budget cuts focused on reducing non-wage expenditure and investment in the sector. With the entry of a provisional government in 2013 and then a social-democratic government in 2014, protest was reduced while social dialogue was re-established. Protest mainly concerned the campaign "End of cheap teachers", which demanded yearly wage increases of 10, 10 and 15 percent in 2015-2017, and

a strike alert in 2017 related to the same demand. They were reasonably successful considering that in this period wages were increased by 6 percent for teachers and 4 percent for non-teachers in 2015, 8 percent for teachers and 6 percent for non-teachers in 2016 and 15 percent in 2017, all in all a very substantial cumulative increase (Martišková 2018).

Also in Italy, the level of conflict and protest increased across the public sector since 2010 (Pedaci et al. 2018). With the governments in this period downplaying social dialogue and collective bargaining as obstacles and unnecessary activities, the unions resorted to other instruments to defend the interests of public sector workers and to protest against reforms that they considered detrimental to the functioning of public services. In education, the unions organized a series of national-level mobilizations but with limited participation and weak inter-union cooperation, and hence with limited effects. An exception was the strike in May 2015, which counted with the participation of 65 percent of the sector's workforce. The unions also launched a number of campaigns, making use of a variety of instruments. For example, the FLC-CGIL campaign "Fai la scuola giusta" (Make the school fair), launched in September 2014 used a website, a blog, an online game, an online survey on union proposals, a YouTube video explaining reform and union positions, together with flash mobs, manifestations and information points at local level. Still, the unions had only very limited influence on the government's reform policies. Pedaci et al. (2018) argue that possibly the most effective types of protests have been organized by unions at the local level, targeting specific schools, often in cooperation with parents' associations and sometimes accompanied by community assemblies (ibid.). In this way, unions effectively campaigned against schools implementing the reduction of school hours the national government promoted.

Similarly, in the Italian hospital sector, trade unions have engaged in a variety of initiatives to protest against and trying to redirect national reforms, but with limited success. Also here they have achieved more at the regional level, where regional governments play an important role in the organisation and financing of the health care system (Pedaci et al. 2018). And also in the municipalities, the trade unions achieved limited results in influencing the reforms designed by the national government, but were more effective in influencing the implementation of reforms at the local level (ibid.).

In Spain, with the unilateral introduction of the first austerity package by the government in 2010, collective bargaining and social dialogue in the public sector broke down. In the subsequent years, the Spanish trade unions "... have vacillated between reliance on traditional strategies and the use of new forms of contestation and protest repertoires (Molina and Godino 2018)." They have continued to use the channel of dialogue but also engaged in all kind of other types of protests like public awareness campaigns, demonstrations, and others. An important part of the increased protest have been a series of public sector strikes in 2010-2015:

At national level, there have been two general strikes in the public sector. In 2010 a general strike of all public workers was organized by the three most representative unions in the public sector (CCOO, UGT and CSIF) to protest against cuts in public employees' pay imposed by the Zapatero government. In September 2012, the public sector union CSIF

organized a national-level public sector strike without the support of CCOO and UGT. In 2012 and 2013 two general strikes of the education sector were organized by the most representative unions together with students' associations. Moreover, several strikes were called at regional level in sectors like education and health. Particularly important in this regard were the strikes in the Autonomous Community of Madrid against cuts and attempts further to privatize the health system (Molina and Godino 2018: 19-20).

These strikes were framed in two ways (ibid.). One was that they were meant to defend the jobs, wages and working conditions of public sector workers. The other was that they were organised in defence of the welfare state and to safeguard the quality and coverage of public services, and hence against budget cuts and further privatisation. In this way, they raised the concern of the population on the erosion of public services as well as on the number and quality of public service jobs.

Also the earlier-mentioned Mareas used this type of framing to make their points on the education and healthcare sectors. Through such framing and through the participation of many civil society organisations and movements, they managed to broaden the base for protest against austerity policy and privatisation. They applied a wide variety of methods, including participation in or supporting of the earlier-mentioned strikes but also all kinds of demonstrations, flash mobs, rallies, events, human chains, etc. (ibid.).

These protests have not been able to stop austerity policies in the 2010-2015 period in Spain. However, Molina and Godino claim that they have been able to avoid even more radical budget cuts and privatisation policies. Also, they have been able to raise the awareness among the general public on the dangers for the quality and accessibility of public services, hereby making them a core political issue. And finally, they have helped to construct broad coalitions between unions, civil society actors and the public.

In France, social dialogue and collective bargaining were fairly stable during and after the crisis, showing a strong element of continuity. However, for trade unions it did become more difficult to achieve their objectives through these processes (Ramos Martín 2018). As a result, extensive protests against public sector austerity and reform took also place in the past decade, even though unions have faced difficulties to mobilise civil servants (Ramos Martín 2018). Still, a series of strikes was organised, including cross-sectoral strikes against general government policies and sector-specific strikes addressing sectoral problems (ibid.). For example,

... on January 2008, widespread strikes and demonstrations took place in public sector. In a joint action public service federations (CGT - FO - FSU - CFDT - CFTC - UNSA - Solidaires) organised nation-wide strikes and demonstrations expressing their dissatisfaction over wages and employment in the public sector. ... The actions continued on May 2008, when the main unions joined in demonstrations and strikes against public sector reform. The abovementioned public service federations jointly organised a day of demonstrations and strike actions on 15 May 2008, in protest against the government proposals to reform the public services (Ramos Martín 2018: 24)

Also, in May 2014, the main trade union confederations organized a strike demanding better pay for public workers and an end to austerity. Tens of thousands of public sector workers joined the strike, which affected schools, hospitals, airports, city transport, police stations and government buildings around the country. Still, the government refused to grant wage increases until the economy was growing again.

In education, several strikes against reforms were organized. For example, in November 2009, the teachers went on strike to protests against Sarkozy's reforms and again in September 2011, public and private education unions organised a nationwide strike against the budget cuts in the sector, with the support of parents' associations (Ramos Martín 2018). Also in the healthcare sector, several national strikes were organized to protest against the impact of austerity policies on the working conditions of healthcare workers, against the plans to reorganise public hospitals as if they were enterprises, against the reforms of the pension system, etc. And also in day care, strikes emerged. For example,

To protest against the increase of their tasks, the deterioration of their working conditions, and the stagnation of their career prospects, the Atsem (specialized territorial agents of nursery schools) association and several unions representing workers in the sector organised a strike in December 2016. The collective Atsem of France, supported by the CGT, the CFDT and FO, launched the strike claiming for a reduction of their tasks, a decrease in work pressure and an improvement of their wages (Ramos Martín 2018: 37).

Germany is the country least affected by the crisis. This has however not meant that there has been less protest. Indeed, also here a revival of protest can be observed in the past decade or so (Schulten and Seikel 2018). It did not so much address current austerity policies like in many of the other countries, but rather the outcomes of the earlier reforms and austerity in the 1992-2007 period and the related needs of the sector to function well in the future. As Schulten and Seikel (2018: 42) argue:

“... in all three sectors trade unions ran relatively successful campaigns for the improvement of pay and working conditions or – in the case of hospitals – for more staff. These campaigns have explicitly articulated the link between working conditions and service quality. Hereby, the unions received large support by a broader public and were able to create new strategic alliances with consumers of public services such as parents or patients. Moreover, in all sectors the campaigns went more or less along with an offensive plea for care and educational work as a public service and, in the case of hospitals, with a fundamental critique of commercialisation.”

In day care, already in 2007, the trade unions started a campaign (“Promote chances – demand esteem!”) in which they argued that better day care requires better paid care workers with better working conditions. This was followed in 2009 by the first nation-wide strike of care workers after their wage demands and demands concerning improved health and safety conditions were rejected in the collective bargaining round (Schulten and Seikel 2018). Such offensive tactics were possible since the public sector in Germany was not really experiencing a budget crisis. And the strike was successful in that care workers got wage increases of between 100-400 Euro. Again in 2015 the unions demanded a substantial wage increase of some 10 percent, and again they went on strike when their demands were rejected. For most workers the 10 percent increase

was not achieved however, as “...a final agreement was reached which led to wage increase of about 3 per cent for child care assistants, 4.4 per cent for skilled day care and up to 11 per cent for heads of day care centres (ibid.: 17).”

The unions put a lot of effort in arguing that their interests related to better pay and working conditions as well as a professionalization of day care work coincided with those of the parents that wanted better quality day care, and were quite successful in getting public support. This support has strengthened the position and confidence of care workers and may well lead to more industrial action in the future.

In the primary education sector in Germany, three-quarters of workers have civil servant status, which means they cannot engage in collective bargaining and strikes and that their wages and working conditions are largely set by law at the level of the *Länder*, the main regulatory level for primary education. Hence, their possibilities for industrial action are limited (Schulten and Seikel 2018). This is not the case for the employed teachers and they increasingly engaged in industrial action in the past decade. They did so mainly to address their two-fold disadvantage, that is, the fact that they are paid substantially less than secondary school teachers and than primary education teachers with civil servant status. These strikes were accompanied by a number of campaigns demanding higher wages and more recognition (ibid.). As a result, a number of *Länder* has already upgraded the status and wages of this groups of teachers.

Also in the German hospital sector protest has been important and has not only addressed wages and working conditions or the quality of services, but the logic of commercialisation that has been key to the reform of the sector as well:

Considering the influence of industrial relations, the development of the German hospital sector is a clear example how disputes and struggles for good working conditions have a major impact not only on the quality of the services but also on the more fundamental driving forces of the sector. As commercialisation has been the main driving force in the German hospital sector for more than 20 years, it has neither produced adequate services nor acceptable working conditions. Therefore, the struggles within hospitals have always been linked immediately with a more fundamental critique on the logic of commercialisation (Décieux 2017). The various union campaigns for more staff and better working conditions made a major contribution in reversing the trend and bringing more resources into the hospital system. Thus, industrial relations became an important driver for the necessary modernization of hospital services. As collective bargaining in the sector is rather fragmented and divided among different groups of hospital providers it could only set good examples and practices which, however, have to be universalized through new regulation by the state (Schulten and Seikel 2018: 41).

In the UK, reforms in the public sector since the crisis have resulted in some remarkable conflicts between public sector workers and the government as well as to important changes in public sector industrial relations (Hopkins and Simms 2018). In general, the highly unionized public sector has become more conflictive in recent years. This was demonstrated for example by the 30th November 2011 public sector strike, involving members of 29 different trade unions, over proposed changes to the pensions of public sector

workers to the detriment of the workers. As Hopkins and Simms (2018: 67) note, "... The dispute formed part of wider discontent amongst public sector workers about the effects of the austerity agenda on pensions, pay increases, workforce size and job quality." Indeed, also in the UK austerity led to discontent which then resulted in increased protest. Still, the protests have had little effect as pensions were indeed reformed in most of the public sector, employment was reduced, and workloads increased (ibid.).

At the sectoral level, in the education sector, industrial relations have been tense in the past decade, resulting in, among others, a series of local strikes in 2016-2017 by teaching assistants who were in danger of suffering pay cuts to up to 25 percent (ibid.). Possibly the most significant sectoral case was the dispute with junior doctors in England in 2015 and 2016, "... one of the most notable examples of a breakdown of collective regulation in the NHS, and hospitals in particular, for many decades (ibid.: 54). The dispute emerged because of the attempts of the government to reform the contract for junior doctors, as part of a broader attempt to create a 'seven-day NHS' (ibid.). This resulted in strikes of the junior doctors for the first time in 40 years, altering industrial relations in the sector profoundly:

The dispute escalated through the end of 2015, with junior doctors demanding in October that there would be "concrete assurances" that the new contract would not be imposed. On October 17th, over 20,000 people protested in London. On November 19th a ballot for industrial action was held by the BMA (British Medical Association, MK). There was a turnout of over seventy percent for the strike ballot which is notably high for voting of this kind. 98% of those voting supported strike action. Strikes were planned for three days in December 2015, although they were called off when the government agreed to suspend its threat to unilaterally impose the new contract without collective agreement from the union. Both sides agreed to continue negotiations, but further talks in January broke down within an hour, and the first doctors' strike in forty years occurred on January 12th 2016, an indication of the unusualness of strike action in the sector, with the level of concerns put forward by the BMA regarding patient safety leading to this action being taken.

Over 40,000 operations and procedures were cancelled during the 24-hour strike. A new offer was received from the government on January 16th 2016 which extended the number of hours that would be eligible for premium pay. Further plans for a 48-hour strike in January were suspended by the union, but talks again broke down towards the end of the month, and a second 24 hour strike occurred on February 10th. 48 hour strikes occurred on March 9th and 10th, and April 5th and 6th. On May 18th, ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, MK) announced that a new contract had been agreed. 68% of BMA members voted in a referendum on whether to accept this, with 42% accepting. The health secretary then announced that the new contract would be phased in over twelve months, starting in October 2016. The BMA announced further strikes in response, but these were suspended. Despite the support for the action, the new contract was imposed. In practice, this means that the new terms and conditions have been integrated into junior doctors' contracts without negotiation and agreement of the relevant professional association. This is a major shift in approach to public sector industrial relations and is a direct challenge to the power of the BMA (Hopkins and Simms 2018: 56-57).

These examples shows how reforms have spurred protest and strikes also among actors usually not engaging in such activities. It also shows how difficult it is to achieve results for those protesting and going on strike, in the UK but as we have seen, also in others countries.

The case with the least changes in industrial relations, and with only few significant signs of protest caused by the crisis and/or austerity and reform policies, is Denmark. As mentioned above, the Danish industrial relations system in the public sector is a strong one with strong actors and near 100 percent bargaining coverage, and traditional ways of bargaining and interaction seem to be sufficient for most actors involved. Mailand and Larsen (2018) argue that the strengthening of the management prerogative is possibly the most important change during the crisis period. Employers have successfully pushed for a stronger management prerogative, for example where working hours are concerned, pushed also by the Ministry of Finance to increase control. At the same time, it remains unclear to what extent this is only a temporary phenomenon or how much changes it may cause (ibid.):

Moreover, employers have strengthened the management prerogative, likely under the influence of the crisis, although there were no radical changes in wages, working conditions, employee rights, or any other basic qualitative features of the public-sector employment regulation system as a response to the crisis (the possible exception of primary and lower secondary education will be discussed below). Trade union membership is declining, but only marginally and less so in the public than in the private sector. Membership-related protests, among them a one-day large-scale manifestation on June 8, 2010, were organized by the largest Danish trade union confederation (LO) and a number of their member-organizations against the Conservative-Liberal government's austerity measures. But in general, manifestations and other forms of protests have been few in number and there was no calls for general strikes (Mailand 2013a). The crisis and austerity policies did not lead to important qualitative changes in public sector IR (Mailand & Hansen 2016).

5. Conclusions

Long-term NMP-inspired reforms as well as shorter term austerity pressures related to the crisis have had profound effects on the quality and quantity of jobs in the public sector across Europe. In most countries included in this study, in the past decade, public sector employment declined, in particular in the municipal sector. Exceptions are Germany, where employment actually increased after the strong declines before 2007, and Czechia, where the crisis was only very mild. And again with the exception of Germany, in all countries the quality of jobs suffered, with the main quality dimensions affected being wages and workloads. In this way, public sector workers have shouldered an important part of the impact of the crisis reflected in less and lower quality jobs.

Obviously, these developments have had their effects on public sector industrial relations. In almost all countries, governments have resorted to unilateral decision making on employment and/or wage cuts to deal with budgetary pressures. They either ignored or gave much less weight to traditional social dialogue or collective bargaining processes in this process, considering that the austerity pressures had to be addressed as a priority and that the related policies affecting employment quality and quantity were unavoidable. And in cases like the Netherlands or Denmark, where social dialogue and collective bargaining did continue to an important extent, the trade unions and employers had little influence on government policy.

As a reaction to these developments, we discussed two main changes in the landscape of workers' representation. On the one hand, there is an increasing fragmentation of the union landscape, with more occupational unions emerging at the defense of the interests of particular groups (doctors, nurses, primary school teachers, etc.). On the other hand, we see the emergence of social movement type of actors and of organizations of users of public services (parents, patients, etc.) that address issues related to work in the public sector, mainly from the angle of their importance for the availability and quality of public services. Also, unions, movements and user organizations frequently enter into alliances to jointly defend their interests.

Related to the emergence of new actors and alliances, with the possible exception of Denmark, there has been a very significant increase in protest by public sector workers, user organizations and social movements against government policy. Most noticeably, there has been a surge in public sector strike across the board and even by unlikely groups like doctors. But there have also been many campaigns aimed at improving working conditions, demonstrations, and other types of protest. Unions, movements and user organizations again often cooperated in these activities or declared their support for each other's protests. To strengthen their position towards the public and indeed get the support of the other groups, the trade unions have been very careful in linking their struggle for more and better jobs to the quality and availability of public services.

The success of protests is mixed. They have achieved little when governments considered that the financial pressures were high and austerity unavoidable, as expressed by the increased unilateralism discussed above.

However, as successful protests in Czechia, Slovakia and Germany show, in economically less disadvantaged circumstances much can be achieved. Also in the other countries we see that when the crisis was getting less intense, protests did have more effect, especially if based on broad alliances and on arguments not only about the quantity and quality of jobs but about the quality and availability of public services.

The present situation of public sector workers and the concerns about public services as such show that NMP and austerity politics have ran into their own limits. The increased dissatisfaction of workers and citizens point to the need to revalue the importance of good quality public services in our societies, as well as the role of public sector workers in delivering these services. In the past decade, public services and public sector workers have suffered greatly. A slight recovery can be noticed in recent years but, as demonstrated by the German experience, it will take a lot of time, resources and protest to get the public sector and public sector workers to recover fully.

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