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WHY AND TO WHAT EXTENT ARE GLOBAL FORCES LEADING TO A CONVERGENCE IN PUBLIC POLICIES

The study of cross-national policy convergence is at the centre of political science research. This trend is linked to an increased interest in globalization and in the domestic impact of European integration. The paper provides a comparative study of responses of the United Kingdom and France to the common stimulus of structural changes in the telecommunication industry. During the 1980- 1998s these two countries implemented liberalisation and privatisation policies. It will examine how the similarities in outcomes and differences in the process can be explained. The paper will try to find answers for the following question: how do global forces direct policy convergence? To what extent do countries respond for these forces? Does the strong growth of economic and institutional interrelationship between countries lead to increasingly similar policies across countries? What explains the implementation of similar policies across countries? Under which circumstances can we expect that domestic policies converge or diverge?

Key words: policy convergence, globalisation, European integration, cross-national policy convergence, liberalisation, privatisation.

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Мемлекеттік саясат конвергенциясына ғаламдық күштер неге және қаншалықты ықпал етеді

Мемлекеттік саясаттың конвергенция құбылысы экономикалық саясат зерттеушілерінің жіті назарында тұр. Бұл факті жаһандануға деген асқан қызығушылық пен еуропалық аймақтың басқа елдерге ықпалына байланысты. Ғылыми жұмыста Ұлыбритания мен Францияның телекоммуникациялық индустриядағы құрылымдық өзгерістеріне арналған салыстырмалы талдау көрсетілген. 1980 – 1998 жылдары бұл елдерде ырықтандыру мен жекешелендіру механизмдері енгізілген болатын. Жұмыста осы елдердің айқындамасындағы ұқсастықтар мен айырмашылықтардың себеп-салдарына талдау жасалған. Ғылыми жұмыста саясат конвергенциясына ғаламдық күштердің қалай әсер ететіндігі, мұндай ықпалға елдердің қалай әрекет ететіндігі, саясаттың өспелі ұқсастығына деген елдер арасындағы экономикалық және институционалдық өзара ықпалдасудың күшейтілген өсуі жүріп жатыр ма, елдердің ұқсас саясаттарын іске асыру қандай себептермен түсіндіріледі, қандай жағдайларда ішкі саясаттың жақындауын немесе керісінше дивергенциясын күтуге болады деген сияқты сұрақтарға жауап табу жолдары қарастырылған.

Түйін сөздер: саясат конвергенциясы, жаһандану, Еуропалық бірігу, саясаттың кросс-ұлттық конвергенциясы, ырықтандыру, жекешелендіру.

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Почему и насколько глобальные силы способствуют конвергенции государственной политики

Явление конвергенции государственной политики находится под пристальным вниманием исследователей экономической политики. Данный факт связан с повышенным интере-

сом к глобализации и воздействию европейского региона на другие страны. В научной работе представлен сравнительный анализ реакций Великобритании и Франции на структурные изменения в телекоммуникационной индустрии. В 1980-1998 гг. данными странами были внедрены механизмы либерализации и приватизации. В работе проведен анализ причин сходства и различий позиций данных стран. В научной работе предпринята попытка найти ответы на следующие вопросы: как глобальные силы воздействуют на конвергенцию политики, как страны реагируют на данное воздействие, ведет ли усиленный рост экономического и институционального взаимодействия между странами к возрастающей схожести политик, какими причинами объясняется реализация схожих политик в странах, при каких обстоятельствах можно ожидать сближения или, напротив, дивергенции внутренней политики.

Ключевые слова: конвергенция политики, глобализация, Европейская интеграция, кросс-национальная конвергенция политики, либерализация, приватизация.

Introduction

The study of cross-national policy convergence is at the centre of political science research. This trend is linked to an increased interest in globalization and in the domestic impact of European integration. As a result, investigations of the origin and main driving forces of cross-national policy convergence are increasing. However, there is still limited understanding of the causes and conditions of convergence [1].

There are numerous studies that modify and to some extent challenge the expectations of cross-national policy convergence through analysis of the extent of policy convergence across countries over time [2], [3]. Underlining the significant differences in national institutions and structures and the varying opportunities for domestic actors, these studies find differences rather than convergences in policy developments in different countries [4].

In the 1980s significant changes in European telecommunications occurred when markets, structured developments in technology and international regulation, together with Europe's lack of competitiveness in high-tech industries *vis-a-vis* the USA and Japan presented a challenge that required an appropriate policy. This challenge resulted from structural developments, for instance "technological innovation, "increasing demand for competitive and specialised services", "globalisation of business", "international deregulation" and "European integration" [5].

The paper provides a comparative study of responses of the United Kingdom and France to the common stimulus of structural changes in the telecommunication industry. During the 1980-1998s these two countries implemented liberalisation and privatisation policies. It will examine how the similarities in outcomes and differences in the

process can be explained. The paper will try to find answers for the following question: how do global forces direct policy convergence? To what extent do countries respond for these forces? Does the strong growth of economic and institutional interrelationship between countries lead to increasingly similar policies across countries? What explains the implementation of similar policies across countries? Under which circumstances can we expect that domestic policies converge or diverge?

The paper is structured as follows. First, the paper will give overview of the theoretical discussion regarding policy convergence and causes of leading global forces. Second, it will address empirical examples deriving hypotheses on the convergence degree and some extent on comparative institutional analysis of two countries in order to understand the degree of converging process. Third, the countries' strategic responses will be analysed. The final section will present conclusions summarising arguments and finding.

I. Theoretical framework

The definition of policy convergence as the rising similarity of policies provides a range of options for evaluating and analysing similarities [6]. According to Colin Bennett's [3], convergence is the emergence of similar definitions of problems, policy goals, instruments, and outcomes across nations, ultimately leading to increasing similarities between nations' policies. A given definition of a problem is considered established, given solutions effective and legitimate, and hence it is understood these 'best practices' ought to be widely diffused adopted. Globalisation and European harmonisation and integration have made domestic politics and international issues more intertwined, further forcing a convergence of national responses to economic issues [5].

There is some question about the extent of convergence between nations. Despite globalisation, research such as the national diversity studies argue for the importance of the national level, where both public and private actors are deeply embedded in and reliant on domestic networks. Each country has its unique mix of economic, political, social, and historical elements. Therefore, each has its own particular legacy in terms of economic organisation, interests and decision-making [5].

Convergence has two possible causes. On the one hand, it is expected that governments with similar ideologies will introduce similar policies. On the other, external circumstances for instance, changes in the global economy may force governments with dissimilar ideologies into similar policies. Concerning telecommunications, in the first situation, one would expect 'neo-conservative regimes' to adopt similar policies. In the second case, technology and markets would be independent variables forcing governments into similar decisions.

Two key factors in evaluating processes of policy convergence are 'causal mechanisms triggering the convergence policy changes across countries' and 'facilitating factors which affect the effectiveness of these mechanisms' [4]. For the causal mechanisms, five main factors have been selected in various literatures [3], [7], [8], [2], [9], [1], [4]. First, cross-national policy convergence can be the result of similar but independent responses of different countries to parallel problems [3]. Second, some studies highlight how countries or international organisations may force other countries to adopt particular policies through use of asymmetries in political or economic power, resulting in convergence. Third, international or supranational law can countries have consciously agreed to multilateral negotiations in the harmonisation of national policies. Fourth, competition emerging from increased economic integration of European and world markets may drive the mutual adjustment of policies across countries. Finally, cross-national policy convergence can be caused by transnational communication [1], [4].

Global forces and domestic responses. There is a lively discussion on whether 'nations matter' in an internationalising political economy with respect to the policy options for public and private strategies pursued by leading domestic actors [9], [10]. Two different ways to compare public policies across nations and across sectors have been introduced [11], [12]. Studies on the cross-national convergence or policy sector specify a differentiation in individual countries by sector and rapprochement between the

countries across sectors, while studies on national diversity specifies differentiation within individual sectors across nations and convergence across sectors. Two conflicting trends are analysed in the technology industry, which seemingly represent a dilemma for both governments and national corporations, namely the choice between *techno-globalism* and *techno-nationalism* [13].

Since the 1970s, nationally oriented telecommunication sectors in Western Europe have been challenged by 'the impact of technological development', 'the emergence of global and differential communications markets', 'increasing international deregulation', and 'European integration'. These four structural forces push countries to retreat from the heavily protected and politicized monopoly of public services, in favour of an emerging model where there are more opportunities for competition and foreign participation and less government interference [5].

The first challenge to the well-known Post Telegraph and Telephone (PTT) system came from technological developments which led to technology transfer and to the 'upgrading' of the basic telecommunications infrastructure. A second challenge came from business and professional users who complained that their demand for appropriately priced, highly advanced and individual services would not be satisfied in a monopolistic market. International users claimed that the monopolistic control of the public telecommunication services and limitations on developing private networks in Europe prevented the development of new "global" one stop shopping and seamless services. A third reason for restricting the national telecommunications polity in Europe was the challenge posed by the decision of the American government to deregulate its domestic equipment and services market. The fourth structural force was the process of European integration, which pushed for an overhaul of the established PTT-centred system.

II. Introduction to telecommunications

The process of restructuring in European telecommunications started in the early 1980s as national policy makers began to realise that the challenge from structured changes in technology, markets and international norms, together with the lack of European competitiveness in high-tech industries vis-a-vis the USA and Japan required a policy response [5]. The technology, institutional arrangements and decision making in telecommunications had been stable and well organised. The function of the telecommunications systems in West European countries was wholly controlled by government departments or was a

public enterprise, usually known as the PTT, and they were responsible for the postal, telegraph and telephone monopolies, and sometimes also for the public services [5].

In order to identify response levels it is important to examine the strategy of each country. The British strategy of industrial restructuring is market-oriented, with flexible policies of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation and free trading strategies in the international field. The French response to far-reaching structural changes in the markets and technologies is a strategy of state-controlled adjustment, in which the Government acts as an entrepreneur and executive management in the modernisation of the economy. French government relies on large-scale infrastructural investments, controlling money flows and ownership rights to rationalise its key sectors and create national champions, and protecting the domestic market from foreign investment.

Wim Hulsink [5] points out similarities in the responses of the two countries. For instance, they both abandoned the traditional monopoly and replaced it with a more competitive model. On the other hand, there were significant differences in the degree of implementation and the timing of the structural changes. These differences are the subject of the 'comparative public policy' approach, which Heidenheimer et al. [14] defines as 'the study of how, why and to what effect different governments pursue particular courses of action and inaction'. This approach focuses on how policy outcomes are shaped by each country's distinctive arrangement of political and institutional structures, as for example study cabinets, parliaments, political parties, public bureaucracies, independent regulatory agencies, or courts of law [15].

Liberalisation and privatisation in Britain. Before discussing the established structure and the institutional changes in telecommunication policy in Britain, it is important to draw a picture of the institutional environment and economic situation before the implementation process. The British economy is traditionally described as having an 'international perspective': focus on foreign markets, globally oriented sector, major international investment and domestic and foreign investment. However, its service industries and production is characterized by poor overall economic performance and its foreign competitiveness has been reduced. Britain's industrial and technological base lacked innovative flexibility and suffered from asset sales and short-term profit maximisation [16].

The British political system presents a

majoritarian model of democracy, characterised by the concentration of executive power, fusion of power and cabinet dominance, in a one-party government. The economic approach of the UK combines a centre 'liberal' doctrine, leaving most important decisions to markets and companies, with relatively centralised political system. Another economic goal of the government is the promotion of free trade [5].

In the 1980-90s when the 'Thatcherite' Conservatives realized their 'big bang programmes' to reduce barriers to free enterprise, liberal market-oriented policies were enacted. Before 1979, the UK economic policy alternated between market-led and interventionist adjustment strategies, as promoted by 'modest' Conservative and Labour governments. The Thatcherite telecommunications policy is considered a radical privatisation, particularly interesting because the country has played 'the role of policy laboratory for the world' [17].

Extensive deregulatory reform began in 1984. The Post Office and British Telecom (BT) were separated, and BT became a legally independent corporation with shares sold on the stock market. An independent body named Oftel was established and tasked with regulating the liberalised telecommunications market. Most telecommunication market segments were liberalised, with competition introduced in such segments as equipment, enhanced services, mobile communications, voice telephony and basic telephony and basic networks. Market liberalisation was more limited for voice telephony and network provision, with BT competing with the smaller Mercury/Cable & Wireless. In the cellular market, BT's subsidiary Cellnet competed with the new entrant Vadofone. After 1991, however, these markets were further liberalised, and BT, Mercury and Vadafone met with competition from newly licensed operators, including utilities, cable companies, cellular service providers and others [5].

Telecommunications market reform was pushed by a coalition that included the Thatcherite Conservative government, large business users, as well as the administrations of the privatised British Telecom and Cable & Wireless. Supporters argued that reform would result in a favourable business environment, efficiency, choice, market responsiveness and technological innovation. This would strengthen the UK's competitiveness internationally and attract large businesses that were dependent on strong, flexible telecommunications facilities. Further support came from BTTT employees and the public, all of whom took advantage of BTT's stock sales [5].

Liberalisation and privatisation in France.

With telecommunication policy, the French government has followed a 'go-it-alone' strategy aimed at promotion of technological autonomy while catching up with international market leaders. France has been described as a 'strong state' society, where central government plays an important role in determining global activities of large industries. The public bureaucracy plays diverse roles in the economic area, described as 'tutor, patron and main risk taker' [18]. Competition, however, is not considered an important element of industrial policy. Traditionally, the economy of France is relatively protected and the French government has kept foreign investment to a minimum, utilising state enterprises to achieve economic goals. French companies have been protected from both national and international market forces throughout protectionist measures and government subsidies.

However, the French government has had to accept increasing international economic flows that limit the national government's manoeuvrability in the domestic market. France also had to implement more market oriented and deregulatory policies and respond to EU directives to liberalize markets. The integration of the French economy with Europe and the globalisation of markets for equipment and services demonstrated the role of the state and the size of the public sector had to be diminished in favour of free trade, competition and privatisation [5].

Since the 1980s, it had been clear that France would have to liberalise its telecommunications sector in order to keep pace with the reforms carried out in the USA, the United Kingdom, and Japan. Relevant actors at the agenda-setting stage ranged from the EC and the Council of Ministers through employees of France Telecommunication. Reforms accelerated when conservative politicians led by Prime Minister Jacques Chirac took power. Cable TV was opened to private competition, and in 1987, the terminal market was liberalised and a private mobile phone company opened. France Telecom (FT) was separated from the postal service and became a public corporation and some of its shares sold on the stock market. Meanwhile, the mobile services and value added services markets were progressively liberalised. When the Socialists came to power again in 1988, they publicly criticized the liberalisation plans while simultaneously enacting laws that continued those reforms, although at a slower pace [19].

III. Strategic responses of the UK and France

According to Wim Hulsink's [5] analysis, national strategies had a considerable role in shaping and implementing telecommunication policies

between 1980-94th. The UK, with its governance regime characterized by market-led adjustment and a relatively open and pluralist political system, has implemented liberalisation and privatisation policies more fully and more speedily than France has. The configuration of political institutions and actors, however, plays an equally important role. As Wim Hulsink [5] writes, a "country's particular response to international techno-economic restricting is shaped by the strategies of key actors and constellations of interests at the sectoral level and institutional 'filters' that select certain issues, arrangements and policy paths, thereby excluding others."

The UK's large-scale reforms were enacted because a coalition of supporters, including both government and industry leaders, united in their conclusion that such reformers were necessary to secure the UK's competitiveness. Large international companies demanded improved telecommunication services, and Conservative party officials supported wide-ranging reforms as an answer to those demands. Meanwhile, the financial services industry in London benefitted from stock sales and other business that came from privatisation. The telecommunications companies, including BTT, Mercury/Cable & Wireless, Vodaphone, etc., also supported reform. This coalition excluded, however, unions, residential consumers, the Labour party, and domestic manufactures, who demanded but did not receive such policies as lower tariffs, better labour relations, and domestic manufacturing protections.

Ultimately, the UK became one of the first countries who adjusted its telecommunication regime to new techno-global market conditions. As a result, the early stage of adaptation provided the UK business community comprehensible competitive advantages over France and service industries has strengthened their position vis-a-vis other world centres [5]. This reflects the UK's policy tradition of supporting competition and free markets. The result was the appearance of three multi-national companies in the British telecommunications sector, each of which joined with multiple foreign partners in order to pursue international growth.

France had a more limited response to the international market, attempting to secure national interests, motivate of domestic innovation, and support the international expansions of national champions. The coalition in support of reforms was also weaker in the UK. French businesses had fewer complaints about France Telecom than companies had had about BTT. Large companies were not as united in their awareness of the costs of telecommunication in France. The most important

actor was the Ministry of Economic Affairs, which takes the lead in determining technology policies. The French tradition of deferring to the state in enacting policy helped determine how policy reform would take place. Furthermore, the French did not prioritise competition, but instead favoured state-intervention. The French attempted to turn their own companies into internationally competitive companies through state support, rather than by pursuing partnerships with private foreign companies as the French had.

As argued, the policy responses of the two countries were on different levels due to different variables, including 'sectoral system variables' and 'national institutional variables' [5]. Sectoral system variables refer to the structure of the domestic telecommunication sector and to deliberate choices of leading actors. The national institutional variable refers to the persistent routines and rules of policy-making in telecommunications, economic approach, the economic approach and ideology in telecommunication policy, and position of individual countries in the international political economy.

IV. Discussion

The question can be asked whether the two countries exhibited convergent or divergent approaches in their telecommunications policy. Here we consider the evidence in the field of telecommunications for the idea that the approach of various countries is becoming similar or vice versa, country differences still matter in formulating appropriate policy responses. Despite structural forces pushing for the adaptation of converging and similar adjustment strategies, the UK and France followed individual strategies that reflect different national policy preferences along with different domestic interests and strengths.

While there are a number of similarities between the countries, there are also notable differences in timing and implementation degree of structural reform measures. Britain was a 'first mover,' with a strategy of privatisation and liberalisation in the 1980s, while the French followed with a more patient and less radical approach. The Thatcherite agenda prioritized competition and free trade, and had the goal of making the UK more competitive internationally. The French followed behind the British, with policy goals of 'catching up' with them but without harming the country's own industrial-technological base and with safeguards for France's public service obligations and protecting domestic employment. France continued to combine policy controlled monopoly infrastructure provision and voice telephony with the promotion of competition at all other segments of the market. Although the

British chose the path of "creative destruction", stressing the overhaul of existing technologies, markets and regulations, France chose socially acceptable competition, in which the government would protect the vital interests of national stakeholders and internal markets to achieve public policy objectives apart from open competition and free trade.

Despite this, the two countries present an example of economic convergence. The main conclusion was that various economic indicators have been characterized by similar trends in the UK and France. In addition, major differences that existed between the two countries in the 1970s had narrowed by the mid-1990s. Analysis of network operation shows strong similarities in the direction of change in both countries. These findings are key features of national operations – size, modernisation, investment, quality, financial performance and tariffs. For instance, both countries experienced enlargement and modernisation in the telephone networks, implementation of high level of investment, rise in labour productivity and qualitative improvement in the services [20].

Large investments in new technology occurred in both countries. Employment levels in both countries did fall, but worker productivity and service quality rose. Although there differences in how far each country had gone in implementation, several indicators show, the two countries had converged between 1970-97th, with overall differences in their telecommunication sectors, smaller than they had been in 1970. In 1970, the French system had been smaller and less advanced than the British system, with high prices and limited investment in technology. By the end of the 1990s, the two systems were comparable in size, investment levels, technology, and quality of service [20].

Despite each country's particular understanding of the state's role, once each country had begun reforms, those reforms largely continued. Reforms begun in each country in the 1980s continued through the 1990s without major shifts in government policy. The two countries do not seem to show Institutional 'path dependency' [22], as the two countries' policies actually began to converge. France was able to adopt reforms earlier enacted in Britain and successfully implement them domestically despite France's different political situation.

The process of world market integration has reduced the ability of national governments to control their domestic industries. On the other hand, in heavily regulated markets such as telecommunications, financial services and

high technologies, it is almost impossible for foreign firms to gain entrance without joint ventures with domestic partners [22]. Increased economic interdependence at the world level has led to major transnational corporations with branches, agreements and alliances around the world. For example, after the deregulation of the internal market in the USA, leading US firms have acquired minority stakes in a number of European firms in the field of communications and electronics.

The question could be asked, are diverging responses in international telecommunications based on styles of national policies or technical economic problem? The first difference is a country's comparative advantage based on natural resources, level of available skills, technology and capital; especially relationships between the nation's competitive industries, and various macro-economic variables [10]. A second difference is the dimension and openness of the domestic economy [23].

When we analyse process of policy change, a controversial question arises: is it convergence or national divergence that matters most? Wim Hulsink [5] says that they both play a considerable role, but they do so at different stages in the policy process. Convergence is relevant because all countries feel the impact of international restricting in telecommunications; however, every country meets problems in adjusting new policies and institutional structures to radical changes in technology. National diversity can be distinguished in the implementation stage, when national governments, firms, labour unions, and other actors help determine the actual enforcement of adjustment programmes.

Conclusion

Overall, it is identified to a certain extent, global competition in the telecommunication sectors was considered as pressure to structural adaptation, which later all countries have become forced to change their telecommunication sectors toward privatisation and liberalisation. The techno-economic and international environment may strongly motivate to regulate on national telecommunications regimes, but these do not essentially lead to immediate and identical policy responses as it has happened in the UK and France.

Question arises, what kinds of approaches have been attained by two countries in policy implementation on telecommunications. Despite structural forces, pushing for the adaptation of converging and similar adjustment strategies, moreover the UK and France could follow individual strategies, which reflect different national policy preferences and additional different domestic interests and strengths. Notwithstanding dissimilar institutional mechanisms in the telecommunications sector and political-economic environment in Britain and France economic outcomes resulted by similar trends and developments. The main contrasts were differences in timing and implementation degree, but even so, most differences narrowed later.

Approaches of different countries in telecommunication sectors may become similar or vice versa, and country differences still substance in formulating appropriate policy responses. However, convergence does not mean 'humanisation'. The introduction of competition, the exclusion of market barriers, and the privatisation of former governmental administrations does not mean that in all countries similar market structures will emerge [19].

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