



*Routledge Advances in Sociology*

# **HORIZONTAL EUROPEANISATION**

**THE TRANSNATIONALISATION OF DAILY LIFE AND  
SOCIAL FIELDS IN EUROPE**

Edited by  
Martin Heidenreich



# Horizontal Europeanisation

European integration has transformed the social life of European citizens. Daily life and work no longer take place primarily in a local and national context, but increasingly in a European and transnational frame – a process of ‘horizontal Europeanisation’ which, while increasing the life chances of European citizens, also brings about conflicts among them. This book focuses on processes of Europeanisation in the academic, bureaucratic, professional and associational field, as well as on the Europeanisation of solidarity, networks and social inequalities. Drawing on detailed empirical studies and attending to the reinforcement of centre-periphery structures in Europe, it analyses the dynamics of horizontal Europeanisation processes, highlighting the crucial role of national practices and perceptions in a transnational context, as well as the related conflicts between the winners and losers in this process. As such, it will appeal to scholars of sociology and political science with interests in European integration, social change and social stratification.

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# **Horizontal Europeanisation**

The Transnationalisation of Daily Life  
and Social Fields in Europe

**Edited by**  
**Martin Heidenreich**

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# 6 The contested Europeanisation of collective bargaining fields

*Susanne Pernicka, Vera Glassner, Nele Dittmar and Klaus Neundlinger*

## 6.1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) allows capital, goods, services and people to move freely across national borders whereas employment systems and their rules, norms and cultures have largely remained embedded within the nation-state. Industrial relations and collective wage bargaining are still firmly established within national boundaries. Because the opening of markets has not been accompanied by a corresponding shift of collective wage bargaining towards the European level, a spatial incongruence has emerged between European markets for capital, goods, services and workers, on the one hand, and the fields within which organised labour and business negotiate and conclude collective agreements over wages and the conditions of employment, on the other hand.

However, the relative national closure of collective wage-bargaining fields does not mean that European forces do not influence the structures and the legitimacy of national collective bargaining fields. The EU's single market and the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) have increased the economic, political and social interdependencies and interrelations between national and regional fields of collective wage bargaining and their agents who interact and position themselves within these fields. Europe's common currency has put an enormous pressure on wages and wage-bargaining institutions because currency devaluation can no longer improve a particular country's international competitiveness. European policy actors such as the European Commission's Directorate General Economic and Financial Affairs (DG ECFIN) have regarded the real deflation of labour costs an obvious alternative means to improve the EU Member States' international competitiveness (Müller et al., 2015). Trade unions have attempted to prevent a race to the bottom in wages and working conditions by seeking, across national borders, to coordinate wage-bargaining processes and outcomes. However, these Europeanisation processes have turned out to be uneven and polycentric in their regional scale and scope (Pernicka and Glassner, 2014). The political responses to the most recent financial and economic crisis that led to the creation of a European Economic Governance Regime in 2011 and invasive measures taken by the Troika (consisting of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International



Monetary Fund) further damaged the preconditions for cross-country collective bargaining coordination by weakening coordination and centralisation in wage determination at sectoral and national levels (see the discussion in this chapter and Schulten and Müller, 2015). Trade unions in Southern Europe, including Italian labour organisations, in particular, who contributed jointly with Austrian and German trade unions to the Europeanisation of collective bargaining norms and practices during the 1990s, have lost power. Furthermore, the eurozone crisis brought the already dominant understanding of how wage determination should be governed (i.e. by economic competition) to the fore and reconfigured industrial relations in Europe in a way that made transnational coordination based on solidarity between trade unions even harder to achieve let alone ensure its effectiveness.

This chapter seeks to better understand the contested Europeanisation of collective bargaining fields and focuses on the precarious legitimacy of the norms and practices of autonomous collective wage bargaining<sup>1</sup> within the European field of power. By drawing on Bourdieu's political sociology, the European field of power is conceived of as the arena of struggle among the different forms of power (or capitals) for the power to be recognised as the most legitimate and thus a struggle between fields and their respective capitals (e.g. economic, cultural and social capital) for domination throughout the social order (Swartz, 2013). *The contested Europeanisation of collective bargaining fields is viewed as being shaped by increasing competitive pressures (economic mode), a shift of competencies and decision-making power to the European level (political mode) and struggles over the relative symbolic value and legitimacy of collective bargaining fields within the European field of power (cultural-cognitive mode).* These struggles are viewed as being mediated by the fields' own power structures, legitimacies and habitus.<sup>2</sup>

Given the symbolic dominance of market logic in relation to collective solutions when it comes to governing the economy within the EU, and wage setting being a competency of national bargaining institutions and actors, we expect weak horizontal Europeanisation processes of collective bargaining fields. At the same time, strong trade unions and employers' associations might be willing and able to mobilise domestic national resources (associational power, etc.) and defend the relative autonomy of the national collective bargaining field vis-à-vis European interventions and the intrusion of the dominant logic of economic competition.

This chapter draws on research on collective bargaining and its (transnational) coordination in the metal industry in Germany, Austria and Italy, with an emphasis on their pre-crisis and post-crisis states (mid-2000s until 2017). With regard to collective bargaining, the metal industry encompasses subsectors such as the automobile industry, metalworking and machinery construction; it also includes the electronics industry in Germany and Italy and the steel sector in Austria. The countries have been selected according to the relative positions of their collective bargaining fields in the European field of power. As will be elaborated further in this chapter, a powerful position of national economic fields, such as is the case with Germany and Austria (during the period of empirical investigation), is

considered supportive to national collective bargaining fields within the European field of power. The opposite is true in the case of Italy.

In Germany, we conducted 13 interviews with 18 representatives of the employers' association Gesamtmetall and its regional associations and the union IG Metall (Interviews 1–18). In Italy, we conducted seven interviews with eight representatives of the employers' associations Federmeccanica and Unindustria and the trade unions FIOM and FIM (Interviews 19–25). We conducted 12 interviews with 15 representatives from the Austrian employers' association WKÖ, the national industry association IV, and the PRO-GE and GPA-djp trade unions (Interviews 26–40). For Germany and Austria, interview numbers throughout the text refer to individual interviewees, for Italy to the interviews.

This chapter starts by presenting the state of the art and our own approach of analysing the contested Europeanisation of collective bargaining fields. We then outline the struggles over the legitimacy of collective bargaining within the European field of power, before turning to the question of the relative autonomy of national collective bargaining fields. To illustrate this, the collective bargaining fields in the metal industry of Germany, Austria and Italy will be examined in more detail. Finally, we draw our conclusions.

## **6.2. State of the art and own approach**

In this chapter, we draw on Pierre Bourdieu's 'constructivist structuralism' (Bourdieu, 1977) and posit that national collective bargaining fields are woven into the structures of a European field of power within which ongoing struggles for domination between fields and over the value and shape of fields take place. Social fields are conceived of as relatively autonomous societal spheres with a broadly shared, historically created understanding of the issue at stake; the fields are structured by the distribution of social positions occupied by collective and individual actors who attempt to improve their positions within the field according to the field's specific rules and patterns of sense-making (Chapter 2).

In highlighting the relative autonomy of social fields and their contested constitution, collective bargaining fields are conceived of as spheres within which practices of bargaining, conflict resolution and distribution between organised business and labour have been established and maintained on the one hand, and arenas of contention over the very legitimacy and social recognition of the practices and boundaries of collective bargaining on the other hand. The struggles over the legitimacy of collective bargaining fields historically took place within the framework of the nation-state with its overarching power structure where all social fields were embedded and each field occupied a more or less dominant or dominated position (Bourdieu, 2005: 223). After the Second World War, many Western capitalist democracies created social welfare politics and collective bargaining institutions that differed from market logic in economic fields and contributed to the de-commodification of labour (Polanyi, 1944). However, struggles over the purposes and practices of collective wage setting have challenged and partly transformed the fields of collective bargaining. For instance, solidaristic

wage policies to narrow wage differentials and stimulate economic demand had been firmly established in Western European countries until the 1970s. From the 1980s onwards, these goals of collective wage bargaining have largely lost their normative and cultural strength and have been widely substituted by a strong belief in supply-side, wage-moderating institutions of collective wage bargaining aiming at improving a country's international competitiveness (Traxler, 2004). With the expansion of markets and the corresponding shift of economic, political and judicial powers towards the European level, the European field of power has exerted its (often hidden) symbolic violence on collective bargaining fields and their actors, also reflecting a form of cultural-cognitive Europeanisation of a symbolic hierarchy of fields (economic fields are perceived to dominate collective bargaining fields).

In the next section we outline the struggles over the legitimacy of collective bargaining within the European field of power vis-à-vis an economic mode of wage determination, including trade unions' efforts to establish European norms and practices of bargaining coordination based on transnational solidarity (social mode of Europeanisation).

### **6.3. Struggles over the legitimacy of collective bargaining within the European field of power**

In stark contrast to liberal market economies, from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, the European Commission under Jacques Delors played a leading role in establishing a system of multi-level industrial relations in Europe in which unions and employers had influential voices, and autonomous national collective bargaining on wages and working conditions was not questioned. Besides these indicators for Europeanisation of industrial relations via the political mode, the completion of EMU put enormous pressure on wages and collective bargaining fields. Also, transnationally integrated value chains and a strong export orientation of many companies in the metal sector make them especially sensitive to wage related expenditures and, thus, increased the pressure on collective bargaining practices and outcomes. Finally, the Europeanisation of collective bargaining took place via trade union efforts to counter a possible downward spiral of wages due to international economic competition by establishing transnational norms of wage bargaining coordination. While the economic effectiveness of transnational wage bargaining coordination by trade unions has been put into question (Höpner and Seeliger, 2017), it can still be viewed as a contribution to the protracted symbolic struggle over the legitimacy and autonomy of collective bargaining fields by the means of their Europeanisation.

Since the mid-1990s and in anticipation of EMU, which would rule out currency devaluations, cross-border coordination of collective bargaining among trade unions was comparatively well developed within the European metal sector. Already in 1993, the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) issued a European collective bargaining guideline aiming at maintaining workers' purchasing power by referring to inflation and overall productivity as common parameters

for national unions' wage bargaining (Henning, 2013). Such unilateral trade union initiatives on Europe-wide wage-bargaining coordination functioned quite well until 2008 when the crisis hit Europe and trade unions refocused their activities and resources towards the national level. In addition, after the merger of the EMF and the European Mine, Chemical and Energy Works Union in 2011, for the newly founded European multi-sector union IndustriAll the issue of transnational collective bargaining coordination lost in relevance (Interview 34).

Austrian and German trade unions have also engaged in interregional and bilateral transnational networks and cooperation. In the late 1990s, the IG Metall, Dutch and Belgian metal sector unions established an interregional network for bargaining coordination; it was followed by inter-union cooperation initiatives in other European regions (Gollbach and Schulten, 2000). However, most of this cross-border cooperation seems to lie dormant. Some networks are more durable, such as the network in North Rhine-Westphalia, and the Benelux countries and the 'Vienna Memorandum Group' of trade unions from Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and the IG Metall district of Bavaria. Besides annual meetings, a few bilateral cooperation initiatives have sprung off this trade union network (Interview 34). However, transnational labour cooperation has to overcome competitive pressures, which are particularly intense in sectors such as automotive production. International solidarity requires considerable efforts of labour actors at national, local and transnational levels (e.g. Greer and Hauptmeier, 2012; Pernicka et al., 2017).

Also, after the introduction of the EMU in the early 2000s and, even more pronounced, since the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, the EU has notably changed its position concerning the legitimacy and perceived value of collective bargaining. The European Commission (in particular the DG ECFIN) and the European Central Bank (ECB) have begun to primarily see trade unions and collective bargaining as obstacles to market coordination (Keune, 2015: 284). Moreover, unlike trade unions, employers' associations have been reluctant to embark on any collective bargaining coordination initiative. The employers' associations of Germany, Italy and Austria (Gesamtmetall, Federmeccanica and WKO) belong to the European umbrella organisation CEEMET (Council of European Employers of the Metal Engineering and Technology-Based Industries). But in all cases, contacts to other European employers' associations seem rather concentrated on those few persons responsible for international or European relations within their association. In the metal sector a forum for European social dialogue was established in 2006. CEEMET and IndustriAll have made some non-binding joint declarations and one social partner agreement together with social partners from the chemical and mining sector (Degryse, 2015). However, in general, both union and business representatives perceive European social dialogue in the metal sector as weak and lacking support by the European Commission (Interview 35).

Overall, one can observe a shift in the patterns of sense-making and legitimisation within the European field of power toward attributing a higher value to dynamics of competition than to the compromise-seeking orientation of collective bargaining actors.

#### **6.4. The (lack of) legitimacy of collective bargaining and economic fields within the European field of power**

Given the relatively weak symbolic position of collective bargaining fields in relation to economic fields within the European field of power, national employers' associations (not necessarily their members, i.e. employers) and trade unions might be expected to defend national field autonomy against forces of Europeanisation. In this endeavour, they might be more or less successful depending on the specific power positions, dispositions and behaviour of collective bargaining fields and their actors respectively.

The de-legitimisation of organised labour and collective bargaining by European political and administrative agents did not affect all national fields in the same way. For instance, the Troika and the European economic governance regime imposed structural reforms on the collective bargaining fields of eurozone Member States that needed financial bailouts (Greece, Portugal, Ireland, Cyprus and Spain) and on further Member States whose wage increases did not meet EU expectations, such as Italy. These top-down policies can be interpreted as a continued attempt of 'incorporation through subordination' within the European field of power of the currently dominated political economies in Southern Europe and hence their national fields of collective bargaining (Bourdieu, 2005: 231). Since, under the single currency regime currency devaluations can no longer compensate for a country's lower level of economic competitiveness, their wage bargaining actors have been accused of contributing to macroeconomic imbalances within the eurozone by producing inflationary tendencies. However, few sanctions were placed on countries like Germany that probably also contributed to these imbalances within the eurozone because its wage growth has been below the rates of change in productivity and inflation between 2001 and 2008 (Koll, 2013; Müller et al., 2017). An important explanation for this refers to the performance of the economic fields and the perceived contribution of collective bargaining to this. The existence of a collective bargaining field hinges more clearly upon economic fields than any other field and, sometimes, vice versa. The international economic competitiveness of the German and Austrian metal industry, for instance, can at least partly be explained by collective bargaining fields and their restraining effects on wage developments. As elaborated in the introduction to this chapter, European integration has very much meant economic integration. Within the European field of power, collective bargaining fields, which are still mainly constituted at national scale, are evaluated with regard to their perceived – promoting or inhibiting – contribution to international economic competitiveness (Schulten and Müller, 2015). Collective bargaining fields and their agents can also draw power from their disruption potential within the economic field. Among unions and employers' associations, those in the metal sector are among the biggest in the three countries examined in this chapter. Thus, before taking a closer look at struggles to maintain the autonomy of national collective bargaining fields, the economic position of the metal industry of Germany, Austria and Italy shall be presented in the next section.

#### **6.4.1. The position of national economic fields in the European metal industry**

In a European comparison of the national metal industries, Germany clearly has an overwhelming economic dominance. According to an expert, the European metal industry before the financial crisis can be characterised – very broadly – as a duopoly structure with a Franco-Italian cluster and a German cluster including Austria. This was transformed into a monopoly structure with Germany as the only dominant actor in a post-crisis economic order (Interview 33). German companies account for 34% of turnover and 30% of employment of the EU's metal and electronics (M+E) industry (Eurostat, 2018). While the German M+E-industry severely declined during the crisis of 2008, it reached the pre-crisis level again in 2014 and employment has continuously increased to 3.8 million in 2015 (Gesamtmetall, 2016). According to interview partners, many of the smaller enterprises in German M+E are highly specialised and sometimes lead the world market in their niche of manufacturing. The same holds true for the Austrian steel and metal industry, which has specialised leaders in technological niches, such as in machinery, plant construction and process engineering. Likewise, automotive suppliers are highly specialised, above all, in motor engineering and construction of other components, especially for German car manufacturers like BMW. In a European perspective, Austrian metal sector companies are perceived to be well-positioned to implement new production technologies. However, mostly smaller and crafts-oriented firms profoundly differ from larger companies (Interviews 26, 34). Industrial output is highly dependent on global macroeconomic developments. In 2008–2009, industrial output shrunk by over 14% (WKO, 2011). The car-supplier industry was first affected by the recession, while machine construction and plant engineering were hit later. Thus, industrial output in metalworking and machine engineering grew only more recently (WKO, 2016; Interviews 26, 35, 36).

Unlike Germany and Austria, after the crisis, Italy has had a radical transformation of its situation within the European metal industry. A *Federmeccanica* representative uses the expression 'post-war scenario' (Interview 19) to describe the fact that the sector has lost 25% of its production capacity. Employee numbers fell from 1.8 million in 2007 to 1.5 million in 2015 and productivity is at the pre-crisis level. Many small and medium enterprises have not survived the crisis, so that the internationalisation of the value chains has been intensifying (Interviews 24, 25). At the other end of the spectrum, the low net-equity base of many small enterprises has limited their capacity to invest in machines, production systems and organisational processes (Interview 19). While the macro level developments in Italy's economic field point to a lack of international competitiveness, the pattern is more complex. Although many smaller entities have not survived the crisis, some medium and large businesses in the metal and electronic sector have even succeeded to enter important positions in international value chains (Barbaresco, 2016).

Overall, the relative positions of German, Austrian and Italian economic fields in the European metal sector have fundamentally changed since the financial and economic crisis to the detriment of the Italian field.



#### **6.4.2. *The relative autonomy and legitimacy of collective bargaining fields***

As elaborated earlier, the position of national or sectoral economic fields within the wider European (and global) economic field has repercussions on the position of collective bargaining fields within the European field of power. Good economic performance and recognition for the perceived contribution of collective bargaining to this may reinforce autonomy of national collective bargaining fields also vis-à-vis the European political-administrative field, which has shifted from supporting collective bargaining to supranational and international interventions to decentralise national collective bargaining fields with the aim to enhance economic competitiveness (see section 6.3).

The German and Austrian collective bargaining fields with their moderating effects on wage developments presently enjoy a comparatively high legitimacy within the European field of power (as is expressed for example in the Country Specific Recommendations issued by the European Commission as part of the European Semester). Also, during the global financial crisis of 2008–2009 the Austrian as well as the German field of collective bargaining helped the countries come through the recession rather unscathed by adopting measures such as flexible wage setting allowing for temporary wage restraint, short-time work and flexible working time arrangements. The Austrian field of collective bargaining has maintained its autonomy and has remained relatively isolated from influences of European and global institutions and actors. The same holds true for the German field where interviewees rejected any interventions by EU institutions into national fields of collective bargaining as well as the proposals of the European Commission for a stronger coordination of wages in the name of increased competitiveness that were seen as an attack on the principle of free collective bargaining (Interview 1).

By comparison, EU interventions had more direct material and symbolic effects on the Italian field of collective bargaining. During the 1990s, Italian governments were respected partners within the process of European integration and Italian trade unions contributed jointly with Austrian and German trade unions to the Europeanisation of collective bargaining norms. However, this autonomy has come under pressure with the international financial crisis and, especially diminished in 2011, when the ECB sent the famous ‘secret letter’ to the Italian government, demanding, amongst other reform measures, a further decentralisation of the bargaining system (Recchia, 2017: 459).

Even though a number of different factors including European monetary policies, the state and innovation capacities of a country’s metal industry and the levels of productivity and unit labour costs explain the relative positions of national economic fields within the transnationalized European metal industry, European economic policy actors regard national collective bargaining fields as the major culprit in producing macroeconomic imbalances within the eurozone. Against this background, collective bargaining actors in the examined countries are expected to uphold the autonomy of the national (or sectoral) collective bargaining fields

to varying degrees. The strong economic position in European markets and a high level of legitimacy in the European field of power might strengthen collective bargaining fields and their actors in Germany and Austria, while the Italian collective bargaining field might be more likely to face a further disruption of its boundaries by economic or political challenges.

### **6.5. The relative autonomy and dependency of collective bargaining fields in relation to transnationalized economic and political fields**

This section therefore sheds light on the practices and boundaries of collective bargaining fields in Germany, Austria and Italy and their own power structures, norms and legitimacies which will be more or less able to mediate or even fend off field-external interventions arising from economic, political and cultural Europeanisation processes. It will be shown that the collective bargaining fields of Germany and Austria have, by and large, been able to maintain their field-specific norms and rules of the game, although political interventions and economic competition (e.g. via the introduction of atypical forms of employment and shrinking coverage of collective agreements) threaten field autonomy to varying degrees. With regard to the Italian field, more fundamental struggles over the rules of the game can be observed.

#### **6.5.1. Germany**

The collective bargaining field in the German M+E-industry shows a high degree of relative autonomy. Although the IG Metall is a member of IndustriAll, German interviewees perceive the wage coordination rule of IndustriAll as playing a minor role for those engaged in collective bargaining within the IG Metall (see also Rüb, 2009: 283). However, in contrast to Austrian unionists, the responsible IG Metall official finds that the exchange of information on collective bargaining between unions in the European M+E industry via the 'Eucoban' information system of IndustriAll is going well again after it had been impaired by the consequences of the economic crisis (Interview 12). While perceptions about the relevance of the wage coordination rule differ slightly, all interview partners find that the European perspective does play an important role at the beginning of the collective bargaining rounds when economic indicators are examined. In Germany, Gesamtmetall regularly provides an overview for its members over collective bargaining outcomes in selected countries and employers' representatives draw on indicators from other countries to urge the IG Metall to follow a moderate line in collective bargaining to prevent offshoring of production by member companies (Interviews 4, 5).

Despite the high relevance of European and international economic competition in M+E, collective bargaining practices are described as rather constant by field actors and the legitimacy of the 'rules of the game' seems to be rather uncontested at present (although the collective bargaining coverage rate has decreased



considerably, see the discussion later in this chapter). This might be explained by the interrelation of the industry's dominant position within the German as well as the European economy and the strength and perceived contribution to this of the collective bargaining parties. The IG Metall is the biggest union in Germany with 2.26 million members in 2017. Gesamtmetall, organising 7,009 firms in their 22 regional member associations, is the biggest member of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA). The tight interrelationship between economic and collective bargaining fields also becomes clear in a historical perspective. Against the background of the tense economic situation in the early 2000s, when Germany was widely considered the 'sick man of Europe' (Sinn, 2003), the boundaries and practices of the collective bargaining field in German M+E had been contested and under pressure. A case in point refers to the German government's announcement to introduce statutory opening clauses (Bispinck and Dribbusch, 2011: 30). Sectoral collective bargaining coverage in M+E declined from over 70% of employees in 1991 to 48% in 2015.<sup>3</sup> Between 1990 and 2004, Gesamtmetall's regional associations lost almost half of their members. In 2005, Gesamtmetall began to include as members the so-called 'OT-associations' that offer companies a 'third option' between being bound by the sectoral collective agreement and completely leaving the employers' association. In 2015, 3,483 firms belonged to these OT-associations, while 3,526 firms belonged to those associations still party to the sectoral collective agreement (T-associations) (Gesamtmetall, 2016). The possibility of OT-membership seems to have stabilised the employers' association. Decoupling membership from applying a sectoral collective agreement did, though, not halt the erosion of collective bargaining coverage. However, with regard to the number of represented employees the T-associations are still almost four times larger than the OT-associations (Gesamtmetall, 2016).

The boundaries of the collective bargaining field are also contested by employer practices, such as outsourcing employment to other firms with other or no collective agreements, or using atypical forms of employment, such as temporary agency work (TAW). Besides these phenomena of external erosion, derogations from the sectoral collective agreement at the company level had become widespread by the end of the 1990s (Haipeter and Lehndorff, 2014). With the 'Pforzheim Accord' of 2004, the collective bargaining parties reacted to this development, accepting local derogations under certain conditions but at the same time reintegrating them into sectoral level collective bargaining.

Despite the decline in collective bargaining coverage, field effects can be observed even beyond the actual purview of the M+E collective agreement. The interview partners believe that because of the competition for (qualified) staff the wages set in the M+E agreement serve as a benchmark to M+E-companies not bound by the agreement (see also Berwing, 2016; Addison et al., 2016). Also, interview partners still see the M+E-industry as a model for collective bargaining policy innovations (Interviews 7, 14), although its signalling effect for other sectors seems to have decreased somewhat.

Most interviewed employers' representatives (notably, full-time officials) position themselves clearly in favour of the sectoral agreement. They see collective

bargaining as their ‘core business’ (Interview 2) and the aforementioned OT-associations as a makeshift solution (Interviews 4, 7). However, some observe a rather fundamental change in values among employers. Practices such as membership in an employers’ association or applying the sectoral collective agreement can no longer be taken for granted (Interviews 7, 16). It is becoming harder to convince member firms to accept the concluded collective agreements (Interview 5). To retain membership and win new members, both union and employers’ associations have abandoned a policy of representation in favour of a more intensive involvement of their constituencies. The enormous heterogeneity of the M+E-industry (with regard to subsectors and sizes of firms) makes it difficult for both parties to develop a consensus within their organisations.

Overall, although field boundaries are contested, interview partners on both sides of the capital-labour divide still perceive the collective bargaining practices in M+E as relatively constant and unchanging over the past years. Even if collective agreement coverage has decreased, field practices and the rules for companies who intend to (temporarily) deviate from these agreements still seem to affect employers’ dispositions in a way that differ from short-term market interests. Compared to other countries, both bargaining partners see the German system of industrial relations as an asset. All interviewees point out the collective bargaining autonomy guaranteed by the German constitution.

### **6.5.2. Austria**

As in Germany, the Austrian field of collective bargaining in the metal sector has maintained a high degree of relative autonomy. Austria’s collective bargaining fields feature collective agreements covering 96% of employees (Bauer, 2010), mostly due to the compulsory membership of companies in the Austrian Economic Chamber (WKO). Social partners in the metal sector are the branch associations of the WKO and, on the employees’ side, the Union of Production Workers (PRO-GE), organising mainly blue-collar workers and being a member of IndustriAll, and the Union of Private Sector Employees, Graphical Workers and Journalists (GPA-djp), representing white collar workers. Trade union organisation is comparably strong in the metal sector where union density is highest in the steel industry (around 95% of blue-collar workers), automotive (almost 80%) and lowest in metalworking and machine construction (around 60%) (Interview 34).

Collective bargaining actors typically also play an important role in the political field in the Austrian model of corporatism and social partnership (Karlhofer and Sickinger, 1999; Pernicka and Hefler, 2015). However, in December 2017, a right-wing government took office and severely limited the influence of social partners in the legislative process. In addition, the right-wing government questioned (but did not abolish) compulsory membership of companies in the national employers’ association WKO. The social partners’ autonomy has been maintained for setting wages. Both trade unions and employers’ organisations reject direct state intervention in the collective regulation of wages and working conditions.

From a longer-term perspective, increasing integration of the Austrian economy into European and global markets went along with a change from redistributive, Keynesian demand-side policies to a wage-moderating, supply-side approach. As in Germany, the important role of the metal sector for the overall economy and the perceived contribution of collective bargaining to economic performance strengthen the position of the collective bargaining actors. The metal sector accounts for approximately 10% of total gross value-added and around 7% of total employment (Statistik Austria, 2017). The metal sector employs 292,319 persons; the largest part (129,000) is in metalworking/machine construction (Statistik Austria, 2017). The Austrian metal sector is also deeply integrated into transnational markets and production chains and features a strong export-orientation. Thus, wage setting takes place in the context of high international competition, but is relatively independent from political influences, in contrast to the public sector and some private services that depend on public funding and policies.

Austrian wage negotiators, like bargaining agents in Germany, do not consider the wage policy guideline of the European union IndustriAll. However, they refer to a benchmark established within the national collective bargaining field, which stipulates the same criteria as the European guideline (Pernicka and Glassner, 2014). The trade unions orient their demands according to three basic parameters: economic growth, inflation rate and productivity growth in the sector and general economy (Interviews 38, 39). Employers usually refer to overall economic growth and inflation, and tend to disagree with unions on the productivity indicator (Interviews 26, 36).

Employers' practices to introduce more elements of economic competition into the employment relationship and thus to exert pressure on the boundaries and practices of the collective bargaining field are more limited than in Germany. Despite the increasing use of non-standard forms of employment in the general economy, the metal sector's employment practices have had limited change. During the 2008–2009 economic crisis, temporary agency workers were most affected by dismissals. However, since 2009, TAW has been growing again. In the metal sector, it has not yet reached pre-crisis levels (Interview 34). Trade unionists view regulation, which is relatively favourable for employees, as the reason for the restricted use of TAW (Interviews 34, 35, 36). Furthermore, employers' strategies to circumvent standards set by collective bargaining, such as outsourcing, are limited due to the encompassing agreements and the dense interrelatedness of trade unions and work councils that ensure the swift detection of infringements of terms (Interview 37). However, trade unions report that some fast-growing metal sector companies have tried to apply the collective agreement for the metal crafts sector, which tends to stipulate lower standards than the collective agreement for the metal industry (Interviews 35, 36).

In recent years, collective bargaining became more conflictual and employers increasingly questioned the established practices of sectoral bargaining. Paradigmatic for this development was dissolving the 'bargaining platform' in the metal sector, when the metalworking and machine construction subsectors ended the practice of joint negotiations in 2011 and now conclude separate agreements. After

the association of metalworking and machine construction companies repeatedly rejected the unions' wage demands, workers began to organise warning strikes in large parts of the metal sector. Negotiations were finally resumed after intervention by the presidents of the peak organisations of labour and business. In the following years, the metalworking and machine engineering sector continued to take the lead while the other subsectors, such as non-ferrous metals, automotive, iron and steel, take over the wage increases settled in metalworking. Although wage increases have remained equal in the entire metal sector since 2012, regulation of some qualitative issues became more diverse between sub-branches.

Both labour and business representatives underscore that setting a wage increase for the whole sector becomes increasingly difficult because companies have varied export-strengths, profitability, competitiveness and integration into transnational markets. Negotiators perceive a change in the climate since the metal sector's bargaining platform has been split up. With continual intra- and inter-organisational coordination, trade unions seek to maintain collective bargaining for the entire metal sector and work hard to develop joint demands. This contrasts to some employers in the metal sector, particularly companies in metalworking and machine construction, who press for decentralised wage setting. However, full-time officials of employers' associations, particularly those at the peak-level, unequivocally support the Austrian system of sectoral collective bargaining and note that collective agreements help ensure social peace and stable conditions for production.

Overall, as in Germany, the relative autonomy of the Austrian collective bargaining field in the metal sector has remained high. Although social partners have lost influence in national policymaking, wage-setting fields remained comparably autonomous and unaffected by political influence. Despite the splitting up of the bargaining platform, wage setting within the metal sector has remained highly coordinated. In spite of the more conflictual nature of negotiations, employers and union representatives in the metal sector largely agree that their relations are trust-based and cooperative. Many, at least at the level of full-time officials, affirm the practice of sectoral collective bargaining. In contrast to Germany, collective bargaining coverage also remained high.

### **6.5.3. Italy**

As pointed out in previous chapters the Italian collective bargaining field has been the subject of interventions by European-level political actors in the aftermath of the economic and financial crisis. In 2011, under EU and ECB pressure (Bordogna and Pedersini, 2015), the Berlusconi government passed a law-decree that allowed 'proximity contracts' that deviate from collective agreements as well as from existing labour legislation (D'Amuri and Giorgiantonio, 2014: 10). Notwithstanding this increasing external pressure, the Italian collective bargaining field has taken a different path compared to Spain and Portugal, where bargaining coverage and practices have been significantly reduced under the regime of new European economic governance (Cruces et al., 2015). In reaction to the 2011 law-decree

that undermined multi-employer bargaining (Caruso, 2014; Perulli, 2013), social partners released a joint statement insisting on their right to determine the relation between the two tiers of bargaining and signalling that they considered the government's legislative provision (executing the will of ECB, European Council and Commission) as an illegitimate interference in their autonomy.

Hence, the dispositions, interests and position takings of Italian employers' associations and trade unions in collective bargaining fields do not merely reflect their weak symbolic position in the European field of power but demonstrate the actors' strong belief in, and commitment to, the maintenance of collective bargaining practices. Moreover, even new elements of collective agreements were invented in order to respond to what an interviewee called the 'emergency situation' of the Italian metal sector (Interview 19). Yet, the evolution of bargaining practices in the metal sector demonstrates that, against the background of decreasing legitimacy for collective bargaining at European level, the relative autonomy of national collective bargaining fields must be maintained by deliberate efforts.

In the most critical period for Italy's collective bargaining field between 2009 and 2011 (Caruso, 2014), divisions between trade unions and tensions between social partners – especially in the metal sector – culminated in a conflict that almost dismantled the entire field of collective bargaining (Carrieri and Feltrin, 2016: 113–115). The trade union confederation CGIL refused to sign an inter-sectoral framework agreement in 2009 and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles decided to leave the national metal employers' organisation Federmeccanica and to apply a single-employer agreement (Interview 25).

Against this background, it could not be taken for granted that in November 2016, after one year of negotiations, a sectoral agreement would be signed by Federmeccanica and the three major trade unions FIOM-CGIL, FIM-CISL and UILM-UIL. Representatives on both sides stressed that the possibility of failure jeopardised the whole bargaining process (Interviews 19, 20, 21). It is therefore striking that Federmeccanica representatives depict the negotiation process as developing a 'sense of community' that enabled bargaining actors to set up a novel form of understanding how to practice industrial relations (Interviews 19, 20).

In any case, trade unions (FIOM, FIM, UILM) and the employers' association (Federmeccanica) were united by the interest of re-establishing 'representativeness' in their field, i.e. in containing the process of proliferation of interest associations and competing collective agreements and in reacting to pressures from the national and European field of power. Yet this field-specific *illusio* of defending the two-tier system of multi-employer bargaining against the decentralisation towards single-employer bargaining, supported by the European institutions and initiated by the country's largest employer FIAT, entailed different position takings and positions within the national bargaining field. While for the trade unions, especially for FIOM, it was important to maintain the national sectoral bargaining level as the symbol of a collective agreement that aims at guaranteeing more or less equal conditions for all workers covered (Interviews 23, 25), for the employers' association Federmeccanica the principal aim was to strengthen the additional

firm level bargaining as an instrument of modernising the production system that had lost enormous capacities and, from the point of view of the technological evolution as well as of the managerial knowledge and competences, is to be considered uncompetitive (Interviews 19, 20). The 2016 metal agreement can be seen as a compromise between these two position takings in that it integrated novel elements, like the right to individual training, company pension funds and welfare measures, into the first tier of the collective agreement (national sectoral level) while continuing the delegating of wage increases to the second tier, i.e. to firm level bargaining (Interviews 19, 20, 21, 24).

Yet, the higher degree of ‘representativeness’ and symbolic legitimacy deriving from the conclusion of the agreement does not necessarily mean a higher degree of effectiveness, insofar as the novel elements agreed upon at the first tier require bargaining competences that many small firms do not have. Overall, in contrast to Germany and Austria, struggles concerning the Italian collective bargaining field seem to question field autonomy not only with regard to the comprehensiveness of the field, while leaving field-specific rules and practices mostly intact, but also in relation to the existence of the field as such.

With a view to relations within the European field of power, Italian trade unionists express a strong commitment to international union activities (Interviews 21, 22, 23). Although a lack of resources limits their possibilities to engage in exchanges and coordinate with other labour unions in Europe, Italian labour representatives continue to participate in and also organise meetings where the diverse national union confederations inform each other on the issues and dynamics of bargaining processes at the national level (Interview 23). However, Italian union pluralism has generated two interpretations of the significance of European integration for the field of industrial relations. A pragmatic point of view stresses the modernising effect of opening up the bargaining system with higher participation at the firm level and proposes a coherent, common European strategy of industrial policy (Interview 24). A political perspective refers to Europe rather as a field of conflicts and political action in which the ECB and the Commission, in accordance with the IMF, have taken up position in favour of a decentralisation towards firm level and single-employer bargaining to the detriment of national collective bargaining institutions. According to an interviewee, the underlying conflict between market-oriented and collective forms of wage determination must be resolved also at the European level, not only by a preservation of national institutions and practices (Interview 23).

## **6.6. Summary and conclusions**

This chapter aimed to better understand the contested Europeanisation of collective bargaining fields. These were conceptualised as embedded within a European field of power where struggles over the legitimacy of different fields and capitals take place. Given the higher appreciation of market competition in relation to collective solutions in governing the EU economy and wage setting being a competency of national bargaining actors, we expected weak horizontal Europeanisation



processes of collective bargaining fields. These processes were viewed as being shaped by increasing competitive pressures, a shift of competencies and decision making to the European level especially against the background of the eurozone crisis, and struggles over the relative value and legitimacy of collective bargaining fields (German and Austrian ‘competitive corporatism’ compared to Italian ‘uncompetitive associational pluralism’). Against this background the creation of European trade union coordination norms is viewed as an attempt to defend national autonomy of collective bargaining fields in response to the dominance of the economic mode of Europeanisation. Given the distinct positions of collective bargaining fields and their agents within the European field of power, we expected the outcomes of these processes (i.e. the form and extent of Europeanisation or national closure and reinforcement of collective bargaining fields) to differ between the German, Austrian and Italian cases. Our empirical findings confirm this assumption and also provide evidence for a basic field-theoretical assumption that external challenges do not directly affect the logics and practices of collective fields but are mediated by their own, historically created positional structures, legitimizations and habitus of field actors. Table 6.1 summarises our empirical findings.

*Table 6.1* Collective bargaining fields in the metal industry

	<i>Germany</i>	<i>Austria</i>	<i>Italy</i>
Relative autonomy of the field	High degree of relative autonomy with a temporary state of contestation between the mid-1990s and 2000s	High degree of relative autonomy	Low degree of relative autonomy because of EU and national political interventions from 2011 onwards
Spatial and social boundaries and divisions	Decreasing level of inclusiveness, ‘opening clauses’ and erosion of employers’ association; national reinforcement of field logics with limited Europeanisation of bargaining norms	High level of inclusiveness because of compulsory membership in employers’ association; national reinforcement of field logics with limited Europeanisation of bargaining norms	Two-tier system of sectoral bargaining (national/sectoral and firm level) since 1993; enforced opening up of national boundaries by political interventions at EU and national level
Field-specific practices and logics	Norms of coordination and negotiation of collective agreements still firmly established but with more limited effects and challenged by logic of economic competition	Norms of coordination and negotiation of collective agreements prevail but employers’ pressure towards more decentralisation	Fragile logics of coordination challenged by European and national pressures towards decentralisation

*Source:* Own compilation.

In all three countries investigated, the interests and strategies of collective bargaining agents on both sides of the capital-labour divide still show a relatively high degree of commitment towards collective bargaining instead of economic competition in labour markets. This is the case even if collective bargaining agreements in Germany have shrunk to covering less than 50% of all employees in the metal sector and Italian metal sector agreements at the national level have only limited effects on wage developments. Although Italian collective bargaining agents had to make enormous efforts to compensate for their very weak position within European fields of power, they reached a nationwide metal sector agreement in 2016. Unlike associational actors in Portugal or Spain, Italian agents could mobilise domestic resources (including the still relatively strong dispositions in favour of collective bargaining among trade unions and employers' associations) to avoid the complete decentralisation of collective bargaining in the metal industry. German wage bargaining actors, by comparison, benefited from their outstanding material and symbolic positions before, during and after the eurozone crisis. The German collective bargaining field in the metal industry enjoyed high levels of legitimacy among EU policy actors for its ability to alleviate the effects of the crisis and to achieve international competitiveness by moderating wage increases. However, also within German collective bargaining fields protracted struggles over the legitimacy of collective bargaining in relation to market competition in wage setting took place and led to new cleavages among employers and, hence, to a shrinking coverage of collective agreements in the metal industry.

## Notes

- 1 The term 'collective bargaining' relates to organised business and labour that negotiate and conclude binding collective agreements to regulate and standardise wages, working conditions and benefits (Sisson and Marginson, 2002).
- 2 'The habitus informs agents on how to orient their actions to relate to the familiar, and to adapt to new, situations. It "translates" the structured relations of the field into schemes of perception, thought, and action (dispositions) that enable the individual to function in the field' (Townley, 2014: 46).
- 3 Including only establishments with more than 20 employees.

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# Appendix

Interviews 1–9: Employers’ associations, Germany; Interviews 10–18: Trade unions, Germany

Interviews 19–20: Employers’ associations, Italy; Interviews 21–25: Trade unions, Italy

Interviews 26–33: Employers’ associations, Austria; Interviews 34–40: Trade unions, Austria