ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990’s, there has been a general trend in corporate restructuring towards a ‘concentration on core activities’ and outsourcing of tasks in a range of business functions. These restructuring processes involve a decomposition and re-composition of sectors, companies, workplaces and jobs. They have far-reaching consequences for employment levels, job security, work organisation and the quality of work life.

At the level of industrial relations the above-mentioned processes have entailed a vertical disintegration of Multinational Companies (MNCs) contributing to the disorganisation of in-plant and sectoral negotiations. Suppliers and subcontractors at the lower levels of the supply chain hierarchy, subsidiaries, and temporary agencies often have no collective bargaining institutions, weaker firm-level agreements, or are covered by different sectoral agreements. As core employers move jobs to these firms, they introduce new organisational boundaries across the production chain and disrupt traditional structures of interest representation. In many cases the fragmentation of structures of interest representation has a negative impact on processes of information, consultation and participation, especially in companies positioned at the lower levels of the supply chain hierarchy.

Against the background of increasing outsourcing processes and the consequent tendencies of decomposition of sectors and companies one of the main challenges for trade unions consists in overcoming the fragmentation of employee representation. Thus, in recent years in different sectors and countries employee representatives and trade unions have started to develop new approaches in order to establish representation across the boundaries of firms and sectors. So far, these attempts have already partly been successful in re-building coordinated interest representation along the value chain, although they still represent isolated best practice cases. Having a closer look at the approaches to re-building coordinated interest representation along the value chain it is possible to distinguish between strategies focusing on the territorial dimension and transnational strategies centred on MNCs. With regard to the latter approach Transnational Company Agreements (TCAs) represent a strategy at transnational level to strengthen working conditions and rights of interest representation.

In the recent past TCAs have gained a growing importance in the global automotive value chain. With regard to contents and scope we find all types of TCAs in MNCs belonging to the automotive value chain. MNCs having signed TCAs include car producers as well as global supply companies. With regard to the re-building of coordinated interest representation TCAs that have to be applied also by the supply companies are of particular interest.

The paper will present the results of a research project carried out between 2011 and 2013 on the role of TCAs with regard to the re-building of coordinated interest representation along the automotive value chain. The project that was carried out in Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Poland analyzed the implementation and application of TCAs and their concrete impact on working conditions and rights of interest representation. The research activities were based on quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (in-depth interviews, focus groups) research methods.