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**THE ROLE OF NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS IN EU POLICY COORDINATION:
THE CASE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AFFAIRS COMMITTEE OF THE
ESTONIAN PARLIAMENT**

MA thesis

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Tartu 2025

Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere have been cited.

Word count of the thesis: 21,886 words

Markus Meier, 19/05/2025

Abstract

This thesis examines the role of the European Union Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament (ELAK) in shaping Estonia's EU policy, focusing on the committee's influence over government positions in EU affairs. Despite ELAK's formal authority to approve negotiating positions and ensure compliance with subsidiarity, its practical impact appears limited. The study employs a quantitative analysis of over 3,200 committee decisions from 2010 to 2024, combining descriptive statistics and logistic regression to assess ELAK's assertiveness in scrutinising governmental positions. The findings reveal that while ELAK possesses significant formal powers, its effectiveness is shaped primarily by issue salience and procedural factors. Assertive decisions, such as amendments or rejections of government positions, are more likely in specific policy areas (e.g., environment and education) and when formal voting procedures are used. However, there is no significant evidence that ELAK's assertiveness has increased over time since the Lisbon Treaty, nor that opposition-led sessions yield more assertive outcomes. The study concludes that ELAK functions primarily as a watchdog rather than an active policy shaper.

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Acknowledgements

Completing this thesis has been a journey filled with learning, growth, and invaluable support from many remarkable individuals and institutions. None of this would have been possible without the encouragement, wisdom, and generosity of those who believed in me and contributed to this process in both big and small ways. It is with deep appreciation that I acknowledge the people and organisations that have made this achievement possible.

First, I am grateful to the University of Tartu and Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies for granting me an opportunity to study in programmes that have permanently broadened my horizons and shaped my understanding of the world.

Secondly, I thank my family, who have always stood beside me and supported me in my dreams and morally in writing this thesis.

Next, I extend my gratitude towards the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which awarded me a Master's scholarship. This gave me the chance to keep focused on writing the best possible thesis.

Lastly, I thank my supervisor, professor Piret Ehin, who has guided me throughout this process and given me valuable feedback to get this thesis into its current form.

Thank you!

1. Introduction

National parliaments are foundational institutions in democratic systems, tasked with ensuring government accountability. However, with the expansion of the European Union's competences, its roles have faced significant challenges. As a result of this, almost one-third of Estonian legislation directly comes from the EU legislative proposals (Justiits- ja Digiministeerium, 2025), marking a significant influence on the national policy-making. Nonetheless, this multi-level institutional framework has resulted in a democratic deficit, meaning European integration has strengthened and empowered the executive branch (Goetz & Meyer-Sahling, 2008, p. 6). At the same time, much decision-making and policy-making has migrated from the national to the European level (Cozzolino, 2020). The role of national parliaments has traditionally served as the cornerstone of democratic accountability in EU member states, scrutinising executive actions and shaping legislative agendas. Thus, this has brought increased attention to democratic control, which role is traditionally fulfilled by the legislative branch. The central topic of these debates surrounding this power balance are discussions about the role of national parliaments in EU affairs. Most of the EU member states' national parliaments have specific committees (EACs) for European affairs, meaning the burden and responsibility have been taken from the plenary level to a smaller one (Raunio, 2009). However, these committees have unique institutional designs in each member state, as their structure, practices, political dynamics, and access to information vary. These conditions raise questions about their broader effectiveness in influencing EU policy. Despite these debates, little is known about how smaller EU states like Estonia navigate executive-parliamentary dynamics in EU policymaking, particularly after the Lisbon Treaty, which aimed to mitigate the concern of executive dominance. The objective of this thesis is to examine how the European Union Affairs Committees (EAC), or more particularly Estonia's equivalent *Euroopa Liidu Asjade Komisjon (ELAK)*, influences EU policy positions, particularly in light of the broader Europeanisation and deparliamentarisation dynamics.

Moreover, Mon (2014) pointed out that the existence of European Affairs Committees (EAC) is a phenomenon that is a further centralisation process in national parliamentary powers. As the EACs bear the responsibility of either confirming or forming the position of a respective member state, depending on their formal capability, the committees are dealing with wide variety of issues from fishery to digital market (Högenauer, 2021), meaning that the committee has to be "an expert in every field", which is in contrary to the operation logic of

national parliaments, where every policy area has set up a dedicated committee for the related matters. This mixing of different topics into one may result in the deterioration of parliament's influence on the discussed questions. Nevertheless, comparing EACs to traditional parliamentary committees is unjustified due to their special position and formal rights. Hence, this background would preferably offer more of a case study approach for this research problem to be solved. Existing research highlights three trends: (1) stronger parliaments correlate with government resistance to EU decisions (Hagemann et al., 2019; van Gruisen & Huysmans, 2020); (2) influence peaks during crises (Hallerberg et al., 2018; Randour, 2021); and (3) executives often retain autonomy despite scrutiny (Crum, 2018; Miklin, 2009). However, these studies focus predominantly on larger states or crises, leaving smaller states like Estonia underexamined.

Although these previous studies have advanced the understanding of parliamentary influence in EU policymaking, they have faced challenges in assessing this influence. Moreover, with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, the relative power in effecting the EU policy of member states' legislative branches, with the characteristic of the relationship between the national parliaments and governments, has changed, but the overall assessment of whether it has been rapid or gradual, has not been done. In 2009, the Treaty of Lisbon amended the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Treaty on the European Union (TEU). TFEU (2012) has directly named the roles of national parliaments in the EU, contrary to the executive powers of the EU member states, which have a common institution to coordinate their efforts. TFEU Protocol No. 1 outlines the framework for national parliaments in EU policy-making. Although TEU also sets out the role of national parliaments in case of treaty revisions, the parliaments' role as scrutinisers in more traditional EU law-making has been more continuous and differentiable (Auel & Christiansen, 2015). While previous studies have explored the general influence of national parliaments in EU policymaking, there remains a lack of longitudinal, case-specific research focusing on smaller member states, such as Estonia, and their parliamentary bodies' roles in scrutinising and influencing government positions in EU affairs. Existing literature often neglects the evolution of parliamentary influence over time, particularly in relation to the Treaty of Lisbon; the relationship between national parliaments and governments, specifically how parliamentary committees like the EAC exercise control and influence in shaping national EU positions, and in-depth analysis of parliamentary roles in smaller states, where unique political and institutional contexts may yield different dynamics compared to larger member states. In summary, three gaps persist:

(1) limited longitudinal analysis of post-Lisbon impacts; (2) neglect of smaller states like Estonia; (3) insufficient focus on EAC-government dynamics.

Thus, the objective of this thesis is to assess and measure ELAK's influence on EU policy-making in relation to the national government and puts it onto a timeline, and whether the effect of the Treaty of Lisbon has contributed to that. To do so, the author establishes the following research questions:

- 1) What is the role of the EU Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu in the formulation of Estonian EU policy and in EU affairs more broadly?
- 2) How much control does the role of the EU Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu exercise vis-à-vis the executive: to what extent does it scrutinise and influence the negotiating positions and activities of the Estonian governments in EU affairs?
- 3) How has the role of the EU Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu evolved during the 15 years since the taking effect of the Lisbon Treaty?

These questions will be analysed through the conflict of deparliamentarisation, which examines the diminishing role of national parliaments in EU policymaking due to executive dominance, and Europeanisation, which analyses the adaptability of national parliaments to EU integration and the empowering effect of the Lisbon Treaty. However, as later stated in the research design part, the paper will use the case study of Estonia to solve the research problem with quantitative analysis. Estonia's case is suitable for this research for several reasons. Firstly, most of the previous research has concentrated on the comparison and contrasting of different legislative solutions, which are then illustrated by the examples of member states' national parliaments. This work would set the focus point on the case itself and then draw parallels and differences with previous findings. Secondly, the thesis attempts to describe the role of the EU Affairs Committee in the Estonian Parliament over time, rather than just giving an evaluation of the latest situation.

The empirical part of the thesis relies on a dataset of over 3,200 meeting minutes from the Estonian EU Affairs Committee (ELAK) between 1 December 2009 and 31 December 2024. The data are analysed using descriptive and logistic regression to assess when and why the committee modifies government positions. The dependent variable under research in this thesis is described by the assertiveness of a decision taken by the ELAK in relation to the governmental positions. The analysis is divided into two parts: the first one deals with all

decision taken by ELAK and their division into different natures of decisions, and how independent variables relate to them. The latter allows for to identification of the factors that contribute to the disagreement, which results. For those parts, the author conducts a descriptive analysis based on the dataset and gives initial explanations for the findings. Secondly, the author employs a logistic regression analysis, using binomial outcome and odds ratio methods for independent variables in relation to the dependent variable.

The thesis is divided into three parts: 1) theoretical framework; 2) research design and methodology; and 3) empirical analysis. The theoretical framework aims to construct the context within the national parliaments and their respective European Affairs committees, by explaining two main concepts from the literature: deparliamentarisation and Europeanisation. These subchapters are followed by a description of the mechanisms of national parliaments' influence in EU affairs, and how using those mechanisms determines their role in categorisation. At the end of the theoretical framework, hypotheses are constructed in accordance with research questions. Secondly, the research design introduces case selection, the operationalisation of different variables, derived from the theoretical findings, how the data is gathered, how the dataset is constructed on it, and what methods are employed to answer the research questions. Lastly, the empirical analysis will start by outlining the principles of how ELAK operates, which is followed by the descriptive and logistic regression analysis.

2. Theoretical Framework: Role of National Parliaments in EU Affairs

The role of the EACs in EU policy shaping can be analysed through Europeanisation and deparliamentarisation. The theoretical part of the thesis will be divided into four different subchapters. Firstly, Europeanisation is introduced, which refers to the EU's influence on the domestic institutions and policies. Secondly, the next subchapter contrasts the first one with deparliamentarisation by examining if and how Europeanisation has mitigated the effects of deparliamentarisation. The third subchapter describes the mechanisms, how national parliaments empower their scrutiny. This is followed by a subchapter, which categorises their influences and roles. Lastly, it puts forward five hypotheses based on the previous theoretical framework. For clarification, the abbreviation EAC will refer to European Affairs Committees in general, which have been established in every EU member states' parliaments. ELAK notes specifically the European Union Affairs Committee within Estonia's Riigikogu.

2.1. Europeanisation and Its Effect on National Parliaments

Europeanisation refers to processes of change in domestic institutions, policies, and political practices resulting from the increasing integration and influence of the EU. This theoretical concept describes the complex relationship how EU-level developments shape national structures. Europeanisation implies both adaptation to and interaction with the evolving supranational framework of the EU. Combining Ladrech (2002) and Radaelli (2002) definitions, Europeanisation can be examined as the incorporation of EU-originated norms and procedures into domestic systems, resulting in institutional and behavioural changes at the national level. This can be illustrated with the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, which aimed to strengthen the role of national parliaments in the EU legislative process, to address the member states' shared concern of democratic legitimacy. By introducing mechanisms such as the Early Warning System (EWS), the treaty aimed to enhance parliamentary involvement and counterbalance trends of deparliamentarisation. Nevertheless, the effects of Europeanisation remain ambivalent. While national parliaments have undergone institutional reforms and now engage more actively in EU scrutiny, their actual influence on EU policy outcomes remains limited (Cygan, 2021). The overall assessment is that Europeanisation of national parliaments has led to mixed results, both a marginalisation and adaptation of their roles, with increased scrutiny and involvement in EU affairs, yet without

significantly enhancing their influence within the EU's institutional framework (Auel, 2019; Auel & Benz, 2006). This process is dual: Europeanisation can be either top-down, where the EU itself identifies problems in policy adoption on the member state level and finds a common solution for all or bottom-up, where member states can still influence the union to adapt their national level solutions for the union as a whole.

The theoretical concept of Europeanisation emerged in the 1990s in response to the deepening integration of the European Union and its increasing impact on domestic political systems. Originally, it served as an analytical framework to explore how national institutions, policies, and identities were being reshaped by European-level developments. Scholars began to recognise that European integration was not just an international or supranational process but one with tangible domestic consequences. This initiated the need for a distinct concept to capture these internal dynamics. One of the earliest and most widely cited conceptualisations comes from Ladrech (1994), who defined Europeanisation as a reorientation of domestic politics and policymaking resulting from European Community dynamics becoming embedded in national political structures. His contribution established the foundation for understanding Europeanisation as a domestic-level process, rather than solely a macro-European one. Building on this, Radaelli (2000) offered a more comprehensive and widely applied definition. He conceptualised Europeanisation as the process through which EU-originated rules, procedures, and norms become institutionalised in national contexts, shaping political behaviour, administrative practices, and public discourse. His work importantly expanded the focus beyond formal institutional adaptation to include informal norms and identity changes. Thus, this phenomenon has developed over time and includes Europeanisation of informal norms, and recognises member states' role more visibly in shaping EU-level policies.

Over time, Europeanisation theory has evolved into a multi-dimensional framework encompassing institutional, normative, and policy-level change. It became increasingly relevant for analysing not only how EU policies are implemented at the national level but also how domestic actors resist such changes. A central concept within this literature is the idea of "misfit" or "goodness of fit" (Börzel & Risse, 2002), which posits that the extent of domestic change depends on the degree of misalignment between existing national structures and EU requirements. Where significant misfit exists, the pressure for adaptation increases, though actual change depends on the presence of so-called "mediating factors", such as domestic

institutional capacity, political culture, or actor preferences. As the EU's competencies expanded following treaties such as Maastricht (1992) and Lisbon (2009), Europeanisation research began to focus more specifically on its impact on national legislatures, including how parliamentary oversight, accountability mechanisms, and scrutiny procedures adapt in response to EU integration (Auel, 2019). In this sense, the development of Europeanisation theory closely parallels the evolving role of national parliaments in the EU governance system, providing an angle through which to evaluate institutional transformation.

Europeanisation can be analytically divided into two interrelated processes: top-down and bottom-up dynamics. These reflect the direction in which influence flows between the European Union and its member states. Top-down refers to the adaptation pressure by the EU on domestic institutions, policies, and practices. A prerequisite for Europeanisation is to have a misfit between the European and national policies, institutions or identities, creating a demand for a change to harmonise the system (Börzel & Risse, 2002, p. 5). Secondly, there must be an actor who responds to the pressure to reform those same institutions. However, this can not be viewed as a binary condition as this is more of a gradual process, which is described by the term 'goodness of fit' (Börzel & Risse, 2002, p. 5). This means that when European and domestic processes, policies, and institutions are less compatible, the demand to change pressure for adaptation increases. With the European integration process in the 2000s, the national parliaments felt that their relative importance in decision-making was deteriorating (Terrinha, 2017). Therefore, the demand for protecting against the effects of deparlamentarisation was evident. This is illustrated by the result of the Lisbon Treaty and its tool of EWS. EWS allows national parliaments to scrutinise draft legislation and issue reasoned opinions when they believe a proposal breaches the subsidiarity principle (Cooper, 2018). Thus, the Lisbon treaty institutionalised a top-down approach by integrating national parliaments more firmly into the EU's multi-level governance framework.

Bottom-up Europeanisation, in contrast, refers to situations where member states or domestic actors shape EU-level developments by exporting national norms, practices, or preferences upward into the EU policymaking process. However, as TEU does not give national parliaments legislative initiative rights, meaning that direct policy change is not possible, the change can be indirect via other means. This empowerment can be seen in three ways: 1) increased cooperation through institutionalised committees; 2) enhanced information exchange between national parliaments and the EU; and 3) the activation of the EWS on

subsidiarity infringement grounds (Finke & Melzer, 2012). Although the first two mechanisms often rely on soft institutional arrangements and informal dialogue, the third, rooted in Article 5(3) TEU and Protocol No. 2, is legally grounded. This provision empowers national parliaments to participate in the EU legislative process by ensuring that action at the EU level does not overstep what can be effectively handled at the national level. While this does not give parliaments agenda-setting power, it represents a channel through which bottom-up influence is exercised and institutionalised within the EU framework (*European Parliament*, 2024).

While Europeanisation has become a central lens for understanding domestic change driven by EU integration, its effects on national parliaments remain ambivalent and structurally constrained. On one hand, the process has led to institutional adaptation, with parliaments reforming procedures, enhancing committee structures, and engaging more actively in scrutiny of EU affairs (Auel et al., 2015; Raunio, 2009). On the other hand, these developments have not fundamentally reversed the marginalisation of national legislatures within the EU decision-making architecture. This phenomenon is often referred to as deparliamentarisation. This ambivalence stems from both structural and functional limits. Structurally, the EU remains primarily an executive-driven system in which the European Council, the Council of the EU, and the Commission dominate agenda-setting and legislative processes. Although EWS granted national parliaments limited and reactive roles, the Lisbon Treaty still has failed to give proactive influence over EU policymaking (Cooper, 2018). Moreover, EWS has rarely resulted in legislative change, and reasoned opinions rarely reach the thresholds required to trigger legislative review.

From another perspective, national parliaments' capacity to engage in EU affairs is often constrained by domestic factors, including limited resources, time constraints, and executive dominance at the national level (Auel, 2019). Even parliaments with formal powers often lack the political will or institutional capacity to systematically influence EU legislation. This conflict between formal empowerment and practical influence illustrates a key limit of Europeanisation: the presence of mechanisms does not guarantee their effective use or political relevance. Moreover, Europeanisation does not proceed uniformly across member states or institutions. The extent and mode of adaptation depend on national constitutional structures, political culture, and parliamentary traditions. This is illustrated by how member states themselves can implement directives into their legislative system based on the

subsidiarity principle. Some parliaments have embraced the opportunity for deeper EU engagement, while others have treated European affairs as peripheral or symbolic. As a result, Europeanisation may lead to divergence as much as convergence in parliamentary behaviour and influence (Crum & Fossum, 2009).

2.2. Deparliamentarisation

Originally, deparliamentarisation refers to the phenomenon in which the legislative branch's importance and role in policy-making has decreased (Van Gestel, 2013). The relative power is either transferred to the executive or to supranational bodies. Traditionally, parliaments serve as the basis of democratic legitimacy by debating legislation and holding the executive to account. Deparliamentarisation challenges this function by reducing the scope and efficacy of parliamentary control. This phenomenon can arise from various sources: constitutional changes, political centralisation, technocratic and or global governance, or internationalisation of policy domains (Kabasakal, 2019, p. 173). In particular, deparliamentarisation is not synonymous with parliaments becoming entirely irrelevant or inactive; rather, it signals a qualitative transformation in their role, often towards rubber-stamping executive decisions rather than actively shaping them. The concept gained prominence in European political discourse in the 2000s when scholars began to observe national parliaments' diminishing legislative authority due to increased executive autonomy and globalisation (Bellamy & Kröger, 2012, p. 2). Deparliamentarisation is thus both a descriptive and normative term, describing institutional change and raising concerns about democratic accountability. While the concept is well-documented in national contexts, its transposition to the EU level introduces a new layer of complexity, especially under the processes of Europeanisation and integration.

To put it into the context of this thesis, deparliamentarisation reflects the central paradox in EU governance as a tradeoff: deepening integration weakens national, while strengthening national executive branches and supranational bodies. Hence, this phenomenon is strongly related to the process of Europeanisation, particularly its top-down dimension, where EU-level legislation and norms constrain domestic political institutions (Cygan, 2021). This is supported by an ongoing debate of federalisation, deepening and widening the union, with the demand for swift actions, for example in crisis, by the union and higher codependency of the government. Moreover, this puts additional pressure on the transfer of relative

decision-making power from the legislative branch to the executive (Zalewska & Gstrein, 2013). This can be seen in different ways: a decrease in the ability of national parliaments to scrutinise EU legislation, limited participation in the legislative process, or an erosion of their role in holding the executive to account on European issues (Gattermann et al., 2016). This outcome translates into the national parliaments' inability to be an effective actor in European policy-making, with an increased relative importance of other institutions, such as the national governments and the supranational institutions (European Commission, European Parliament). As a consequence, national parliaments often find themselves as implementers of EU directives rather than active shapers of policy (O'Brennan, 2007b). Hence, deparliamentarisation is evident in the case of the EU, but its extent poses a question.

The extent of it varies by member states' internal conditions, meaning that the level of it is not universally shared by them. There are several mechanisms contributing to that. One of its symptoms can be described as information asymmetry between the domestic actors, where the parliament might be dependent on the information provided by the European Commission or the national government in decision-making (Jans & Piedrafita, 2009). This limits their ability to perform independent analysis and scrutiny. In the traditional approach, the information asymmetry would be between the legislative and executive branches, but with the EU dimension, this puts national parliaments at an additional disadvantage, creating an information asymmetrical triangle. Moreover, the information itself may require higher expertise to comprehend the EU legislation, which poses another obstacle for national parliaments, as they often rely on executive summaries and interpretations. Although there have been taken measures to reduce the technical complexities of the EU legislation, it still continues to rise (Marcus & Kamil, 2024). In addition, national executives, through their participation in EU decision-making bodies, often negotiate and make commitments without prior parliamentary approval, reducing legislative oversight (Curtin, 2013). This executive dominance contributes to a perception that governments, rather than parliaments, are the primary actors in EU affairs (O'Brennan, 2007b). In summary, all these factors are inherently dependent mostly on each member states' own legislative and executive dynamics, which determine the degree of deparliamentarisation on the national level in relation to Europeanisation.

The degree of deparliamentarisation at the national level is influenced by a combination of resource allocation, political dynamics, institutional model and strategic choices unique to

each country. O'Brennan (2007a) has used a member state's investment in resources as a basis for measuring a member state's involvement in EU matters. As each of the EU's national parliaments has formed an EAC to enhance its legislative role, their effectiveness of its system is dependent on the ability to scrutinise the government on European matters. The literature has found that the institutional capacity and parliamentary resources contribute to it. National parliaments lacking these resources may find it challenging to engage effectively, leading to increased deparliamentarisation (Akbik, 2022; O'Brennan, 2007b; Raunio, 2007). After the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, national parliaments increased their administrative personnel, which impacted policy-making in terms of EU legislative proposals (Högenauer & Neuhold, 2015).

Moreover, the internal interests of national political parties play a role. The research has found that the national parties are not ideologically united on EU integration, which illustrates that they are avoiding plenary debates on these issues as it may backfire on national parties' electoral success (Hix, 1999; Raunio, 2007). Within this, public Euroscepticism further contributes to parliamentary engagement; in countries where scepticism is higher, the parliaments may intensify scrutiny to reflect the electorate's concerns or avoid EU debates. Based on this, as the domestic political situation and election cycles vary by member state, making the legislative branch's interest in EU affairs rather dynamic, the parliaments themselves adopt certain measures in order to combat the effects of deparliamentarisation via cooperation. In addition, different institutional models affect how parliaments engage with EU affairs. Some parliaments employ a mandating system, where the government must obtain a parliamentary mandate before EU negotiations, enhancing oversight. Others use a document-based approach, focusing on reviewing EU documents without binding mandates. The choice of the former model improves the depth and effectiveness of parliamentary scrutiny (Knutelská, 2013).

In summary, deparliamentarisation is linked to the broader process of Europeanisation. As EU integration advances, national political systems adapt to the emerging supranational context, often resulting in the reconfiguration of domestic institutions and power dynamics. While Europeanisation can lead to the strengthening of certain national institutions, like the executive branch, it can simultaneously contribute to the weakening of national parliaments and EACs within it. How the Lisbon Treaty gives instruments and national parliaments themselves find ways to combat the effects via formal and informal mechanisms against

deparliamentarisation is described in subchapter 2.3, and how member states' effectiveness using them is categorised is examined in subchapter 2.4.

2.3. Mechanisms of National Parliamentary Influence in EU Affairs

National parliaments, once considered marginal players in the EU decision-making, have gradually acquired a range of institutional tools designed to strengthen their involvement in EU affairs. This development reflects a broader effort to counterbalance the increasing executive dominance associated with European integration, particularly following the perceived democratic deficit of the early 2000s. The purpose of this subchapter is to provide a systematic overview of the mechanisms available to national parliaments for influencing EU policy-making, with particular emphasis on post-Lisbon institutional reforms. Rather than focusing on how parliaments actually behave, which is a topic addressed in the next subchapter, the goal here is to map out the legal and procedural instruments through which parliamentary influence is enabled or constrained.

European Affairs Committees (EACs) are central institutional mechanisms through which national parliaments organise the scrutiny of EU affairs. The scrutinising competencies of these committees vary in how they give a mandate to the government to represent the country at meetings of the Council of the EU and their opinion on the European Commission's legislative proposals. As mentioned before, the structure, powers, and effectiveness of these committees vary considerably, reflecting divergent constitutional traditions, political cultures, and degrees of institutional adaptation to Europeanisation. The Danish Folketing EAC has been recognised as one of the most effective scrutinisers of EU law proposals by possessing the authority to issue binding negotiation mandates, which require collective decisions supported by a majority of MPs (Finke & Melzer, 2012). With this approach, the Danish EAC provides the parliament with an option to limit governmental discretion in negotiations, ensuring that the interests of various political factions are considered. This institutional design ensures that government positions reflect broad parliamentary consensus, giving opposition parties a formal role in shaping EU policy. Moreover, the Danish design has been a model for the member states' national parliaments, which joined the EU in 2004, for shaping their institutional design (Raunio, 2007).

By contrast, other parliaments show weaker forms of EAC involvement. In Italy, for instance,

both chambers maintain separate EACs, but the scrutiny process suffers from institutional fragmentation and under-resourced support structures. These weaknesses have led to information asymmetries between the executive and legislative branches and have postponed effective parliamentary input (Nesti & Grimaldi, 2018). Hence, it is illustrated how legal competences, staff support and access to information directly shape a parliament's capacity to influence EU affairs. However, the categorisation of other national parliaments based on their influence is worth further exploration and is done in subchapter 2.4.

The Early Warning Mechanism (EWM), introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, provides national parliaments with a formalised instrument to scrutinise the subsidiarity compliance of EU legislative proposals. It exemplifies how national parliaments can exercise a collective, bottom-up influence within the EU legal framework without requiring institutional reform. Under the EWM, parliaments may issue "reasoned opinions" within eight weeks, asserting that a proposal violates the subsidiarity set by Art. 5(3) TEU (Matei & Dumitru, 2020). This results in either a yellow or orange card procedure, with the former being used three times and the latter never, and on one occasion, with the result of the EU legislative proposal being withdrawn (Borońska-Hryniewiecka, 2021). However, EWM's direct effect is limited by two factors. Firstly, the thresholds for initiating yellow or orange card procedures are relatively high for fulfilling the actual role of national parliaments (Fromage & Kreilinger, 2017, p.143). Secondly, national parliaments' non-triggering opinions can impact the Commission in amending the original initiative, meaning that EWM's soft power is stronger than that of the formal design (Auel & Neuhold, 2017). Thus, the EWM serves as a symbolic and procedural tool for reinforcing the legitimacy of EU decision-making. While it may fall short of enabling robust parliamentary control, it does provide national legislatures with a channel to express concerns and potentially shape policy outcomes, particularly when used strategically and in coordination with others (Gasparini, 2022; Orlando, 2014, p. 446).

However, national parliaments seek other forms of cooperation outside of the traditional EU institutional framework. National parliaments have formed an interparliamentary body to enhance their role as scrutinisers. The forum is called the Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union (COSAC), which mainly exchanges information between the EACs of each national parliament biannually (*COSAC - IPEX.Eu*, n.d.). Thus, the function of this forum is to reduce information asymmetry. However, even as a coordinative body, the level of efficiency is relatively low compared to

the Council of the EU and the European Parliament (Cooper, 2012). Cooper (2012) claims that this is due to national parliaments finding it hard to form a common identity, thus not being a viable "Virtual Third Chamber" for addressing the democratic legitimacy of the EU. For example, during the Convention, the national governments stood up for adding the orange card system into EWM, not national parliaments. Research suggests that national parliaments primarily perceive their role as controlling their own governments rather than directly shaping EU policy outcomes at the supranational level (Fromage, 2018; Winzen, 2017). Therefore, the COSAC, as an interparliamentary body, is a valuable platform for dialogue but fails to strengthen its role in balancing executive dominance. Its contribution lies more in fostering transparency and mutual awareness than in enabling collective parliamentary agency.

Lastly, the influence can be drawn to the level where a member of the national parliament itself is an actor in the EU governance. However, then the assumption is that the national position is formed through the sum of the members of the parliament's opinions and behaviour, meaning that even on the intra-party level, the opinions are diverse and create a complex process. Kinski (2021) has found that MPs see themselves as scrutiniser of EU initiatives and controlling the government actions in relation to the EU due to party strategic and institutional factors, with an additional role of communicating EU affairs to the voters, which has become more important in an era of politicised European integration. Hence, one can see an attempt to balance these two roles. Moreover, Auel & Raunio (2014) have emphasised that Eurosceptic parties are more likely to favour the communication aspect over the role of being scrutinisers. Thus, this illustrates the communication aspect prevailing over the scrutinizer one. This further proves the relationship of how national parliamentary influence in EU matters remains mediated by domestic political dynamics and individual mandate priorities. Therefore, while individual MPs still have a slight impact on the EU governance by scrutinising, it is still constrained by communicative responsibility and internal party division. However, this poses a question about how MPs use EAC as their platform to pursue roles, whether as either scrutinisers of EU legislation, communicators to the national electorate, or agents of party-political strategy within the EU policymaking context.

2.4. Debates About the Role and Influence of EU Affairs Committees

While subchapter 2.3 focused on the institutional mechanisms through which national parliaments can influence EU affairs, this section shifts attention to how those mechanisms

are actually employed in practice as individual MPs engage with these structures. This leads to the question of how parliamentarians interpret and perform their roles within the EAC: are they primarily legal scrutinisers, channels of communication between the EU and national public, partisan actors advancing party agendas or something else? Understanding these role conceptions is crucial to explaining the variation in parliamentary assertiveness and impact across member states. It also helps uncover the motivations behind assertive versus passive committee behaviour, which cannot be accounted for by institutional design alone. Hence, the following section explores these behavioural typologies.

There have been attempts to describe and compare the influences of national parliaments in regard to EU affairs. More specifically, Auel et al. (2015) have identified five different roles: 1) policy shaper; 2) government watchdog; 3) public forum; 4) expert, and 5) European player, which are then described by six different dimensions: 1) timing (in relation to the EU policy cycle); 2) sources of information; 3) (bindingness of) instruments; 4) parliamentary body; 5) transparency, and 6) audience. This framework uses both formal institutional engagement and informal political practice to offer an understanding of EACs' influence in reality. The first role, the policy shapers, are proactively influencing the formulation of EU policies through *ex ante* activities before the EU decision-making level by issuing mandates and binding opinions to the executive representatives. They depend mostly on the information provided by the governments, EU institutions, and complement it with independent sources, decreasing their potential information asymmetry. In terms of transparency, the policy shaper is most likely to work behind closed doors because such powers are delegated to the committee level. However, this does not exclude the plenary from discussions, meaning that this would still be public in some cases. Moreover, this defines the audience as national decision-makers, who can feel less pressure in bargaining than in doing it in public.

Description of government watchdogs suggests that they lack formal powers to mandate the executive in EU-level negotiations, meaning that political control prevails over policy shaping. The timing of scrutinising processes focuses on *ex post* through the committee hearings or plenary debates. Information is sourced from explanatory memoranda from the government. Hence, the dialogue or audience is between national decision-makers. The third role of the public forum is to promote the idea of being available to the citizens. The main instrument for doing so is plenary debates that are openly broadcast. Although the book suggests that timing is both *ex post* and *ex ante*, it focuses more on promoting the policies

rather than shaping them. Hence, meaningful involvement of other groups is relatively weak. Fourthly, national parliaments can focus more on the creation of more specific expertise, providing alternative positions about EU initiatives. So-called EU Experts' reports are thorough as they rely more on expertise outside of the traditional sources of government and EU institutions. Other parliamentary committees' engagement is required to form a detailed report. Reports are available to citizens, national decision-makers, and other national parliaments. Lastly, the European player type of role takes initiative in exercising its influence directly on an EU proposal with the Commission. These parliaments use their unofficial ties in networking and contacting the key decision-makers. Forementioned roles are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Models of parliamentary scrutiny of EU affairs

Model	Timing	Sources of information	Instruments	Parliamentary body	Transparency	Audience
<i>Policy shaper</i>	Ex ante	Government, EU institutions, independent sources	Mandates, binding opinions	EAC + other committees	Intermediate	National decision-makers
<i>Government watchdog</i>	Ex post	Explanatory memoranda from the government	Mainly oral	Plenary	Open door	National decision-makers
<i>Public forum</i>	Ex ante and ex post	From government	Oral	Plenary	Open door	Citizens
<i>Expert</i>	Early in the process	Comprehensive	Comprehensive reports	EAC + other committees	Intermediate	Various
<i>European player</i>	Early in the process	From the EU level	Opinions to the Commission and meetings with the EP	EAC + NP Representatives	More closed doors	EU decision-makers

Source: modified by the author based on Auel et al. (2015, p. 30)

Having outlined the conceptual typology of parliamentary roles in EU affairs, the following subsections explore how these roles are shaped in practice. While national parliaments may possess similar formal mechanisms, such as the ability to issue mandates or scrutinise government positions, their actual performance depends on a combination of institutional effectiveness, structural organisation, political incentives, and crisis resilience. These factors influence whether EACs function primarily as policy shapers, watchdogs, or play more symbolic roles, such as public forums or European players.

Firstly, the effectiveness of EACs in fulfilling their intended roles, particularly as policy shapers or watchdogs, varies significantly across member states and depends on the principal objective of institutional design. Although many parliaments possess formal tools for influencing EU policy, such as scrutiny reserves or mandates, their impact often hinges on how those tools are employed within national political contexts. For instance, the Danish Folketing is considered highly effective due to its strong mandate system and institutionalised procedures that enable early and binding influence over government negotiation positions

(Finke & Melzer, 2012, p. 14) On the other hand, sceptics have argued that executive dominance has limited the formal powers of national parliaments (Winzen, 2017). The Italian EACs illustrate the limited influence that national parliaments can have in EU affairs. For instance, the Italian Chamber of Deputies has never regarded the political dialogue as a primary tool to influence EU decision-making, focusing instead on scrutinising the government and selectively reviewing documents (Fromage & Fasone, 2017, p. 1256). Thus, this imbalance suggests that institutional design itself is not sufficient. Resource allocation (O'Brennan, 2007b) and internal-political dynamics (Raunio, 2007) further contribute to the actual influence.

Secondly, the structural design of parliamentary scrutiny also affects how EACs engage with EU policymaking. A key debate contrasts centralised EACs, where a single committee holds responsibility for EU affairs, with more decentralised models involving sectoral committees, which indirectly address the resource allocation question. Centralised EACs often ensure procedural coherence and timeliness, supporting roles like watchdog or policy shaper. However, they may lack sector-specific expertise and depend on information from specialised committees. In contrast, fragmented models can offer more detailed scrutiny, aligning with the expert role, but risk inefficiency or delay in responses (Gattermann et al., 2016; Jensen & Martinsen, 2015). Hence, this results in a more decentralised structure with a more significant administrative burden, which should provide deeper insight and technical analyses into the proposals. However, differences between unicameral and bicameral parliaments make the institutional design more complicated. Jensen & Martinsen (2015) have stated that in bicameral parliaments, such as the UK, the lower chamber's subcommittees are less engaged than the upper chamber's EAC. Furthermore, Karlas (2012) has supported this with the observation that committee strength correlates with parliamentary control and its formal means. This reflects the structural asymmetry with a dilemma. Centralised EACs ensure coherence but may lack sectoral depth, while more fragmented systems risk duplication, with a result of delay in decision-making. Hence, institutional design often poses a trade-off between coherence and specialisation, reflecting structural constraints that condition whether EACs can move beyond symbolic oversight toward substantive policy engagement. Moreover, these dynamics can contribute to issues with varying levels of salience

Thirdly, beyond structural design, political dynamics play a crucial role in shaping how assertively EACs operate. Whether a parliament acts as a public forum or policy shaper may

depend on the partisan composition of the committee and the strategic behaviour of opposition parties. In this case, the focus should be on the oppositional behaviour as their role is to present an alternative to the governmental positions. Karlsson et al. (2025) have found that this behaviour is multi-dimensional, combining both EU and left-right matters with the relative differences from political competitors. In terms of the coalition-opposition divide, the findings are mixed, as some research has found that opposition is more likely to initiate debate on the EU because of information asymmetry, and others have found that coalition probability is higher because of information advantage (Palau, 2021). Moreover, the governing parties' success in driving the scrutiny behaviour is influenced by opposition control (low party cohesion among the ruling parties, minimal winning coalitions) and coalition control (ministerial drifts, intra-coalition dissent) (Finke & Herbel, 2015). Palau (2021) has found that hard Euroscepticism has increased partisan conflict over EU affairs, as it offers a way for parties to differentiate themselves and force mainstream parties to adopt a more polarised stance. Contrary to this belief, Karlas (2012) found that Euroscepticism is not a strong driver of parliamentary control. Hence, political dynamics have revealed a sort of divergence between rhetorical politicisation and institutionalised scrutiny practices with political motives.

Lastly, it is worth exploring the potential future challenges for national parliaments in crises. Higher engagement of national parliaments in the crisis response ensures that citizens' needs and concerns are better represented (Murphy, 2020, p. 65), meaning that the oversight mechanism further improves the state's resilience to future crises. However, during a crisis requiring rapid response, the national parliaments show resilience by flexibly using scrutiny procedures, depending on pre-existing domestic practices, without formal institutional changes (Griglio, 2022). This frames a potential conflict of speed vs. scrutiny, which describes the imbalance between national parliaments. This conflict was evident during the financial crisis of 2011-2012. While parliaments with centralised systems, like Denmark, adapted scrutiny for involvement in economic governance, weaker parliaments, like Spain, faced lesser involvement, which deepened the divergence between strong and weak parliaments (Rasmussen, 2018). Therefore, the common level of oversight response by national parliaments is questionable during future crises. Lack of formal powers, differences between the domestic institutional design of national parliaments, and political dynamics thus potentially amplify those effects in crisis, paving the way for more executive dominance. These dynamics during crises suggest that only certain parliamentary configurations, those

combining centralisation, political will, and institutional capacity, can sustain the policy shaper or watchdog role under pressure. Others risk reverting to symbolic roles or being sidelined altogether.

2.5 Framing the Hypotheses

While the previous sections have outlined the formal empowerment of national parliaments through processes of Europeanisation and the institutionalisation of EU scrutiny mechanisms, more particularly through EACs, this thesis now turns to the empirical questions arising from the apparent research gap between formal rights and practical influence. Building on the theoretical debates surrounding Europeanisation, deparliamentarisation, EAC roles, and political dynamics, this subchapter synthesises these insights to frame hypotheses. These are focused on the internal functioning of EACs and the extent to which their practices, especially voting behaviour and dissent, reflect substantive parliamentary oversight. By grounding the hypotheses in the literature on institutional adaptation, issue salience, and politicisation, this subchapter operationalises the central tension between formal authority and real influence in EU affairs.

The increasing institutional maturity of EACs following the Lisbon Treaty has likely enhanced their assertiveness in European policymaking. One of the most significant institutional changes brought by the Lisbon Treaty was the formal strengthening of national parliaments', more specifically EACs', involvement in EU decision-making by scrutinising national governments. The Lisbon Treaty not only increased the flow of information to parliaments but also indirectly legitimised their more active engagement. According to the literature on Europeanisation, national parliaments evolve in response to EU-level changes, gradually integrating new responsibilities and adjusting procedures and resources accordingly (Christiansen et al., 2014). Consequently, it is plausible to expect that EACs have become more assertive over time, especially as they have adapted to new responsibilities and developed institutional routines. Parliamentary learning, increasing familiarity with EU processes, and the professionalisation of committee support staff may all contribute to this growing assertiveness. Furthermore, in the typology of EAC roles, this development corresponds to a shift toward the "policy shaper" and "government watchdog" models, where committees take a more proactive stance. Assertiveness, therefore, is conceptualised here as the frequency with which EACs choose to delay, modify, or reject the government's EU

policy positions. Therefore, the first hypothesis examines the effect of time and institutional experience on committee behaviour:

H1: The frequency of EAC modifying or rejecting government positions or proposals increases as time since the taking of effect of the Lisbon Treaty.

The salience and politicisation of EU policy areas strongly influence the assertiveness of EACs in their scrutiny of national governments. While formal Europeanisation has given national parliaments the tools for oversight, actual influence often depends on the political relevance of the issues under consideration. As mentioned in the previous subchapters 2.3 and 2.4, existing literature on parliamentary scrutiny emphasises that not all EU-related issues are treated equally by national parliaments. Particularly salient or politically sensitive topics tend to attract greater parliamentary attention and scrutiny, while highly technical or routine matters are more likely to be processed with minimal discussion (Grzelak, 2012, p. 4). This dynamic reflects the broader theoretical understanding of Europeanisation as a variable process shaped by domestic political priorities and institutional incentives. Within the role typology discussed in subchapter 2.4, greater engagement with salient issues is characteristic of EACs acting as "public forums" or "government watchdogs", where assertiveness is driven not only by formal powers but also by political pressures. In the context of EU decision-making, political matters, typically discussed at COREPER II level, often involve sensitive areas such as foreign affairs, justice, or economic governance, which are closely tied to national sovereignty and public opinion. In contrast, technical matters, which are generally handled in COREPER I, are more administrative or regulatory in nature and less likely to trigger parliamentary resistance. Therefore, the second hypothesis tests whether EACs are more assertive when dealing with politically salient issues:

H2: EACs are more likely to modify or reject government positions on politically salient issues than on technical matters.

The distinction between different types of EU-level discussions (legislative proposals vs Council of the EU configuration meetings) shows how national parliaments vary their level of scrutiny depending on the nature of the issues at stake. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of Europeanisation and deparliamentarisation, this hypothesis examines that while national parliaments have gained formal rights to oversee EU matters, their actual

influence is dependent upon the salience, political relevance, and procedural context of the issue. Council configuration meetings agendas combine numerous EU initiatives, political negotiations at the highest level, either in formal or informal meetings. With such a quantity of agenda items, they are more likely to provoke assertive parliamentary responses due to their large variety of issues and inherently form a demand for political dialogue to be confirmed by EACs. In contrast, EU legislative initiatives are focused more on specific policy-shaping, tend to follow longer-term policy cycles and often involve technical or regulatory matters handled through bureaucratic channels. Literature on parliamentary scrutiny supports this distinction: salient or politicised matters tend to increase the likelihood of parliaments engaging in substantive scrutiny (Auel et al., 2015; Winzen, 2012), while technical matters often proceed with minimal intervention (Raunio, 2007; Högenauer & Neuhold, 2015). Thus, if EAC demonstrates greater willingness to amend government positions when scrutinising Council meetings than legislative proposals, it may indicate a selective exercise of influence based on political relevance, supporting broader concerns that parliamentary Europeanisation is uneven and issue-contingent.

H3: The EAC is more likely to amend the government positions for the Council of the EU configuration meetings compared to proposed EU legislative initiatives.

The chairmanship of EAC meetings may significantly shape the assertiveness of parliamentary scrutiny, particularly through its influence on the tone, agenda-setting, and outcome of deliberations. This hypothesis builds on the broader theoretical basis of how political dynamics (partisan control and opposition behaviour) influence the effectiveness of formal scrutiny mechanisms in EU affairs. While Europeanisation has institutionalised parliamentary oversight through tools like EACs, actual influence remains politically dependent. Opposition-led sessions, in particular, may serve as venues for challenging the executive more assertively, as opposition chairs are less bound by coalition discipline and may highlight policy alternatives, dissent, or governmental shortcomings. This is consistent with the literature that sees opposition parties as key drivers of politicisation in EU affairs (Karlsson et al., 2025; Palau, 2021). Furthermore, it is suggested that fragmented or minimal-winning coalitions are more vulnerable to scrutiny when parliamentary control is in the hands of actors outside the ruling bloc (Finke & Herbel, 2015; Raunio, 2007). In this context, EAC decisions that modify or reject government positions may occur more frequently under opposition chairmanship, reflecting not only institutional openness but also

political incentives to resist executive dominance. This hypothesis, therefore, directly engages with the idea that deparliamentarisation is not uniform but shaped by the interplay between formal procedures and partisan control.

H4: The EAC meetings chaired by the opposition yield more "to change" decisions than coalition-led sessions.

The mode of decision-making within EACs, whether decisions are reached through formal voting or unanimous consensus, can serve as a significant indicator of the level of parliamentary scrutiny and assertiveness. As Europeanisation has expanded the formal rights of national parliaments to oversee EU affairs, the actual exercise of these rights often depends on internal parliamentary dynamics, such as voting. Formal votes, particularly those resulting in amendments to government positions, suggest a higher degree of engagement and willingness to challenge the executive, reflecting a move away from passive compliance. In contrast, unanimous decisions may indicate either genuine agreement or a tendency toward accepting the executive's positions, aligning with the concept of deparliamentarisation. Therefore, examining the relationship between voting procedures and amendment rates within the Estonian EAC can provide valuable insights into the practical influence of the parliament in shaping EU policy positions.

H5: Formally voted decisions show higher amendment rates than unanimous approvals.

3. Research Design, Case Selection, Data and Methods

This chapter outlines the empirical strategy used to investigate the role of EACs in shaping the EU policy. Building on the theoretical expectations developed in the previous chapter, it introduces the research design, a case study of the Estonian EAC (ELAK), and the dataset and methods used to analyse its scrutiny decisions. The structure proceeds from general to specific: subchapter 3.1 presents the overarching design of the study, including the analytical approach and the operationalisation of key concepts and variables. Subchapter 3.2 justifies the choice of Estonia as the case study, situating it within broader comparative literature on EACs. Subchapter 3.3 details the nature of the data sources and how they are coded to extract relevant empirical information. Finally, subchapter 3.4 explains the statistical techniques applied in testing the hypotheses. Taken together, these components aim to assess whether and under what conditions the Estonian EAC acts as a substantive institutional counterweight to the executive in EU affairs. The chapter reflects the need for both empirical precision and conceptual clarity in addressing how formal parliamentary scrutiny translates into meaningful influence over supranational decision-making processes.

3.1. Research Design

The central objective of this thesis is to assess the conditions under which national parliaments, the Estonian European Union Affairs Committee (ELAK) in this case, exercise meaningful influence in shaping EU-related governmental positions. The research questions are veiled by the overarching central question: under what conditions does the EAC act as a counterbalance to the executive in the formulation of EU policy? To answer this, the thesis tests five hypotheses formulated in the theoretical framework, each derived from prior academic literature on deparliamentarisation and Europeanisation. First, it is hypothesised that EAC scrutiny becomes more assertive over time following the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty (H1). Second, scrutiny intensity is expected to vary across policy sectors, being more frequent in politically salient areas (H2). Third, the type of issue being either confirmed, amended or rejected by the EAC, such as the Council configuration meeting or a specific EU initiative, have an impact on the scrutiny intensity (H3). Fourth, opposition chairing an EAC meeting yields to higher scrutiny (H4). Lastly, voting on the issues poses a stronger scrutiniser role of EAC, compared to unanimous decisions. These expectations are tested empirically using a structured dataset covering ELAK decisions between 2010 and 2024. The unit of

analysis is the individual decision taken by the EAC in response to government proposals or positions submitted for parliamentary scrutiny. Figure 1 shows how the independent variables constructed based on the hypotheses relate to EAC assertiveness.

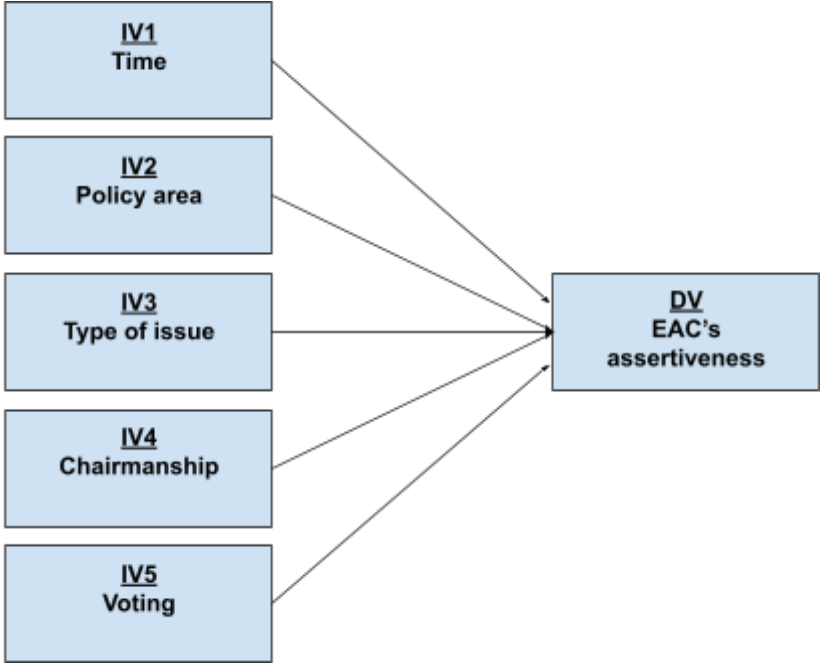


Figure 1. Hypothesised relationships between independent variables and EAC decision outcomes

Source: made by the author

To evaluate these hypotheses, the thesis employs a quantitative research design that integrates descriptive statistics with regression analysis. Descriptive statistics allow for the identification of patterns and longitudinal shifts in committee behaviour, such as the proportion of meetings where dissent occurs, or the frequency of formal voting. Regression analysis, by contrast, is used to systematically test causal relationships between hypothesised explanatory variables and the observed outcome variables. The dependent variable, whether the EAC modifies or rejects a government position, is modelled against independent variables like time elapsed since adoption of the Lisbon Treaty (H1), policy area (H2), type of issue (H3), chair affiliation (H4), and voting (H5). These operationalisations reflect theoretical expectations outlined in the previous chapter and are tailored to the specific institutional and political context of the Estonian parliament. The aim is not only to describe ELAK’s activity but to uncover under what circumstances its scrutiny function is more than merely symbolic. This dual-method

strategy enables both macro-level trend analysis and the testing of micro-level conditions affecting parliamentary influence.

The dataset used in this thesis includes over 3,200 individual decisions made by the ELAK from December 1, 2009, to December 31, 2024. The main data sources are the official minutes and meeting overviews of the committee, which provide both qualitative and quantitative insights into the nature and content of each decision. Each entry is coded according to a standardised scheme, capturing variables such as policy area, timing, chair affiliation, government-opposition dynamics, presence of formal votes, and instances of deviation from the government's original stance. These variables form the empirical backbone of the hypothesis testing. While the regression models and coding scheme are discussed in more detail in subchapters 3.3 and 3.4, this subchapter clarifies the guiding principle of the design: to examine whether institutional features and political context shape the actual exercise of scrutiny. The analysis assumes, based on the theoretical framework, that EAC decisions reflect both institutional constraints and political will, meaning they are simultaneously a product of formal rules and the strategic behaviour of parliamentary actors. This design ensures that the study addresses not only whether ELAK plays a role in EU policymaking, but also under what conditions that role becomes substantively influential.

3.2. Case Selection – Estonia's European Union Affairs Committee

This thesis focuses on the European Union Affairs Committee (ELAK) of the Estonian Parliament and examines its decisions over the period from 1 December 2009, the date the Lisbon Treaty entered into force, until 31 December 2024. The justification for beginning the dataset at this point is rooted in the significant institutional changes brought about by the Lisbon Treaty, particularly in enhancing the role of national parliaments in EU policymaking through mechanisms such as the EWS and improved access to EU legislative proposals. While systematic and detailed documentation of ELAK meetings began in 2016, the dataset includes earlier meeting records from December 2009 onwards, although the minutes are less detailed in the earlier years. The endpoint of 2024 is justified by the conclusion of the von der Leyen Commission and the availability of nearly a full legislative cycle, making the period analytically robust for observing long-term patterns of parliamentary scrutiny. Within the selected 15-year timeframe, three complete parliamentary electoral cycles are included, which helps to assess whether they have an impact on party behaviour in the Riigikogu

(Schwalbach, 2022). Furthermore the von der Leyen's first commission is in the period which introduced significant EU initiatives, such as the European Green Deal, NextGenerationEU recovery plan, and higher emphasis on rule of law conditionality. All which required heightened national parliamentary engagement, especially in areas of fiscal commitments, energy transition and legal oversight. Hence, this timeframe captures the effects of Lisbon Treaty empowerment of formal powers given to national parliaments, party behaviour and high salience of different policies, needed to test the hypotheses.

Methodologically, this case qualifies as a "typical case" in the typology of case study research. Based on Yin (2018), the case study is appropriate when the phenomenon is real but is not clearly distinguishable from its context. In this thesis, the ELAK's existence is evident, but its relation to wider EU policy-making remains a question as it has developed over time. By focusing on a single, well-defined case, with a specific timeframe, this research can explore the complexities and contextual factors that shape ELAK's functions, offering a comprehensive understanding that contributes to both theory and practice in the field of EU affairs and parliamentary studies. This fundamental principle is vital for assessing the influence of ELAK and its decision-making processes, and allows for potential generalisation to other cases in future research.

Moreover, ELAK is not selected because of its extremity or uniqueness, but rather because its characteristics are analytically generalisable across parliamentary systems in the EU, which makes it suitable for hypothesis testing and theoretical generalisation. Estonia's government type is a parliamentary republic, with a unicameral parliament, which is directly elected in multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation vote (*CountryReports*, n.d.). These characteristics are common across the EU. However, Estonia's case also shows special characteristics which are not shared universally. Estonia represents a small member state context with a relatively limited number of MPs (101) and a smaller EAC compared to larger member states. According to Auel and Neuhold (2017), this variation in committee size and capacity may influence the effectiveness of scrutiny, making Estonia a potentially revealing case. Based on the classification by Ehin (2015), Estonia's EAC falls into the "watchdog" category. It has typically been considered moderately active in terms of scrutiny and deviates neither strongly toward full executive dominance nor toward highly assertive legislative independence. Hence, ELAK shares similar characteristics to other "watchdogs", such as parliaments of Poland, Latvia and (Barcz & Pudlo, 2015, p. 609; Figulova, 2015, p. 644;

Ikstens, 2015, p. 561). Moreover, Estonia can thus serve as a proxy for medium-capacity EACs operating within standard parliamentary constraints, making it useful for hypothesis-testing purposes. Hence, Estonia's ELAK serves as a case study that examines a typical case within the EACs classification of "watchdogs".

The European Union Affairs Committee (ELAK) of the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu) plays a central role in coordinating national positions on EU legislation and policymaking, with a special status compared to other Riigikogu committees. ELAK operates under the Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules of the Riigikogu (RKKTS), which grant it formal powers to issue mandates to the government prior to Council meetings. These mandates are binding in principle, although they are typically negotiated in advance through with government representatives (Ehin, 2015, p. 517). The size of ELAK membership depends on the number of specialised committees and the number of parliamentary parties to reflect Estonia's 101-member unicameral parliament. The current composition of ELAK has 16 members. The committee meets twice a week, and its meetings are typically attended by relevant ministers or ministry officials. The committee's limited administrative resources (5 staff members) (Euroopa Liidu asjade komisjon, n.d.), and reliance on government-provided information are common characteristics among "watchdog" EACs. This institutional configuration groundwork, with relatively strong formal powers but modest administrative capacity, shapes how ELAK exercises scrutiny and interacts with the executive branch, and is taken into account in the empirical analysis that follows. More thorough functioning of ELAK will be given in subchapter 4.1.

The research, specifically concentrating on Estonia's European Union Affairs Committee, has used case study approaches but with qualitative means. Glaese (2023) has examined whether EU-related decision-making power shift from the Riigikogu's plenary to ELAK is constitutionally justified or not, and came to the conclusion that RKKTS is not a viable instrument in regulating this decision-making dynamics and might need a clearer provision in the constitution. The number of research studies dedicated to assessing the role of ELAK is relatively low compared to other national parliaments. The only case study has found that the institutional design of the Riigikogu holds back the role of challenging executive dominance Ehin (2015, p. 527). The legislative framework does guarantee extensive formal powers, but they were rarely used during that time. ELAK's reliance on information from the government and EU institutions limited its ability to independently influence EU policymaking. This led

to the initial conclusion that the ELAK functions more as a watchdog than as an active policy shaper. However, this interpretation remains uncertain currently, given the previous infrequent use of post-Lisbon parliamentary powers, raising doubts about whether the ELAK's role has evolved since then. Additionally, since this study was conducted shortly after the Lisbon Treaty's implementation, a reassessment of Estonia's parliamentary engagement in the long-term view of EU affairs may be warranted to account for subsequent developments. Therefore, extending the temporal scope and introducing quantitative measurement of decision types based on minute analysis would contribute to the existing literature.

3.3. Data and Sources

The author employs a quantitative analysis of 3,200 ELAK decisions from the period from 1 December 2009 to 31 December 2024 to address the research questions. As an ELAK decision is a unit, the author worked on over 900 meeting minutes. However, not all of the minutes were used to gather over 3,200 decisions for several reasons. Firstly, some were not available to the public. Secondly, not all minutes concerned the research subjects, e.g. meetings which only had agenda items of procedural decisions (electing chair and vice-chair for the committee) or joint sessions with another specialised committee in order to have a hearing, where no decisions were made. All the available minutes were found on the Riigikogu's document register. Under each unit, following characteristics were coded: 1) rank number in descending order of date; 2) date of decision; 3) number of meeting minute; 4) joint-session with another committee, if applicable; 5) name of chair of the meeting; 6) number of members present; 7) number of members absent; 8) decision itself; 9) type of issue (either the Council configuration or EU initiative); 10) initially coded policy area; 11) used voting for deciding; 12) the nature of decision; 13) votes for; 14) votes neutral; 15) votes against; 16) votes abstaining; 17) meeting chair affiliation; 18) policy area based on the Council configurations competencies.

3.3.1. Creation of the Dataset

For initial analysis, the author constructed a dataset, where each observation represents a decision made by ELAK, which can be described on a scale of objectivity with three levels (objective, semi-objective and interpretative). Firstly, objective variables, as mentioned earlier, decisions were coded purely based on the ELAK meeting minutes. Thus, a decision's descriptive metadata (date, number of the minute, attendance numbers, chair of the meeting,

joint-committee session, and the decision itself) are objectively described in the minutes and leave no room for interpretation.

Secondly, semi-objective variables include 1) the format, which the decision concerns; 2) the topic of the decision; and 3) voting results on the decision. They are semi-objective because there is no academically acknowledged way of dividing them into different categories. In the case of the format, the author mainly concentrated on coding a) the Council of EU configuration meetings, and b) the EU initiatives. However, the dataset contains some rows that are neither of them, e.g. ELAK has shown initiatives in some cases. The topic of the decision depends on the format. In the case of the Council of the EU meetings, the topics are the Council of the EU configurations. In total, there are 10 different configurations¹. However, there are two exceptions. Firstly, ELAK confirms or hears Estonia's positions in the European Council, which is then required to code as well. Secondly, on some occasions, the ministers of some policy areas meet unofficially, meaning this would not be officially considered a meeting under a configuration but as a meeting of ministers. The author explains later in subchapter 3.3.2, how coding these will be addressed in terms of the topic. In the case of EU initiatives, topic codes are based on the decision's description. For example, if the decision concerns agricultural regulations, the topic code would be "agriculture".

Thirdly, a decision can be either unanimous or voted on. However, the general pattern based on the meeting minutes suggests that the voting results are mentioned in the case of voting, thus making the absence of a vote a unanimous decision. Nevertheless, this data is vital for further analysis, and its usage will be explained later. Lastly, the interpretative variables are as follows: 1) the nature of the decision; and 2) the categorisation of the former. The nature of the decision is a direct interpretation of the decision in a shorter form. In addition, each nature differs from the other with different emphases. Thus, this can be described as a toolbox, used by the ELAK. However, as the research question centres around factors that influence the decision, the number of those natures is too high for later statistical analysis. Thus, the second variable generalises all natures together based on their characteristic and is the primary dependent variable of this research. In addition, it takes into account the voting result on the

¹ GAC – General Affairs; FAC – Foreign Affairs; ECOFIN – Economic and Financial Affairs; JHA – Justice and Home Affairs; EPSCO – Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs; COMPET – Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space); TTE – Transport, Telecommunications and Energy; AGRIFISH – Agriculture and Fisheries; ENV – Environment; EYCS – Education, Youth, Culture and Sport. In addition, the European Council – EUCCO

decision, which means if a decision or a proposal made by a member of the committee failed to gain enough support, it will be coded as "Not to amend", which will be separately analysed.

3.3.2. Operationalisation of Variables

However, codes in this form are not suitable for analysis, so separate variables have to be created based on the initial variables. The following subchapter focuses on the operationalisation of variables, starting by defining the dependent variable.

The dependent variable – nature of the decision category (NDC)

Similarly to Rozenberg & Heftler (2015) classification of parliaments into five different roles, the author differentiates it based on their connotation as an influence to ensure comparability. In total, over 50 different natures of decisions were coded in the initial analysis. As this thesis focuses on how much control the role of the EU Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu exercises vis-a-vis the executive, the author has removed procedural decisions made by the ELAK as they do not describe the dynamics of the parliament's and the government's relationship. Although few NDs set direct obligations to the executive branch, e.g. inquiring about additional information, they were fulfilled after a decision about the Council meeting or EU initiative had been made. Moreover, the NDs regarding ELAK's relation with plenary sitting and other Riigikogu committees are not part of the further analysis, as they do not meet the criteria of the research question. Most notable cases of such are A Nationally Significant Issue (*Olulise tähtsusega riiklik küsimus*), asking for an extra opinion on the matter being discussed from another committee, submitting a legislative act proposal to be voted on in a plenary sitting. Furthermore, any other ND that could not be categorised under the main categories and had fewer than five counts were eliminated. After the cleaning, 13 different NDs remained, which were then categorised into four main groups.

Therefore, ELAK has made four different types of decisions regarding Estonia's government's positions in the Council meetings and EU initiatives: 1) To change; 2) To support; 3) Not to support; and 4) To take note of. Firstly, "To change" implies that ELAK has changed the original position proposed by the executive branch. ELAK has used a variety of wording for these decisions. ELAK has "supplemented" positions, which add additional points to the original ones. "Drawing attention" to a certain position point means that the government may have to pay additional attention in the negotiations, defending positions. Similarly, "To emphasise" has the same effect but has a stronger connotation. It is a decision

which amends a position, changing the government's initial position. This can lead to a more direct or vague phrasing or going against the executive's original political will. "To renew" positions were used in cases where the country's stance on specific issues had become outdated, for example, due to the prolongation of negotiations or changes in the situation, and the ELAK had not wished to alter its positions despite this. In a few cases, ELAK used a mean of "To make a proposal" to the government, which means adding a different perspective or point to the initial positions, but the government is not required to take it into account.

Secondly, "To support" implies ELAK's approval of the presented positions by the government. In most cases, ELAK decided to support the government's position fully without any further amendments. Under the "to change" category, ELAK confirmed that they also "partly support" the government's views. However, this makes the "partly support" decisions also partly dependent on the first ND, since, for example, the ELAK can endorse certain positions of a Council configuration, but make changes within only a few. "Conditional mandate" is given with decisions which are dependent on other EU institutions and member states' behaviour. "Parliamentary reservation" refers to a practice in which ELAK temporarily withholds its full consent until it has been reviewed and approved by its national parliament. However, in these cases, ELAK has made a decision in principle to accept the positions.

Thirdly, ELAK can reject the governmental positions either fully or partly. Interestingly, this has been done on very marginal occasions, which might be due to the dependence on "To change" NDs. ELAK is reluctant to disapprove of something fully if it has the power to change its position. Lastly, ELAK used "To take note of" decisions, where they did not use decision-making power, which acknowledges the governmental positions as information. This mainly applies to the topics related to common foreign and security policy, where the Committee of Foreign Affairs has more substantial decision-making power. However, it may still suggest that maintaining the ELAK's awareness of developments in these matters is of critical importance. Thus, a separate ND category is required to observe whether the share of such decisions has changed over the time span. Moreover, it cannot be asserted that this constitutes a form of endorsement of the government's positions, given the primarily informative nature of the decision. In addition, this is in line with Crum (2018) critique of parliament being a "rubber stamp". The author has to state that in the earlier minutes, each agenda item had a decision where ELAK took note of the information, but was not coded

separately in the cases where there had been either a supporting or amending decision. The full division of selected NDs can be seen in Figure 2.

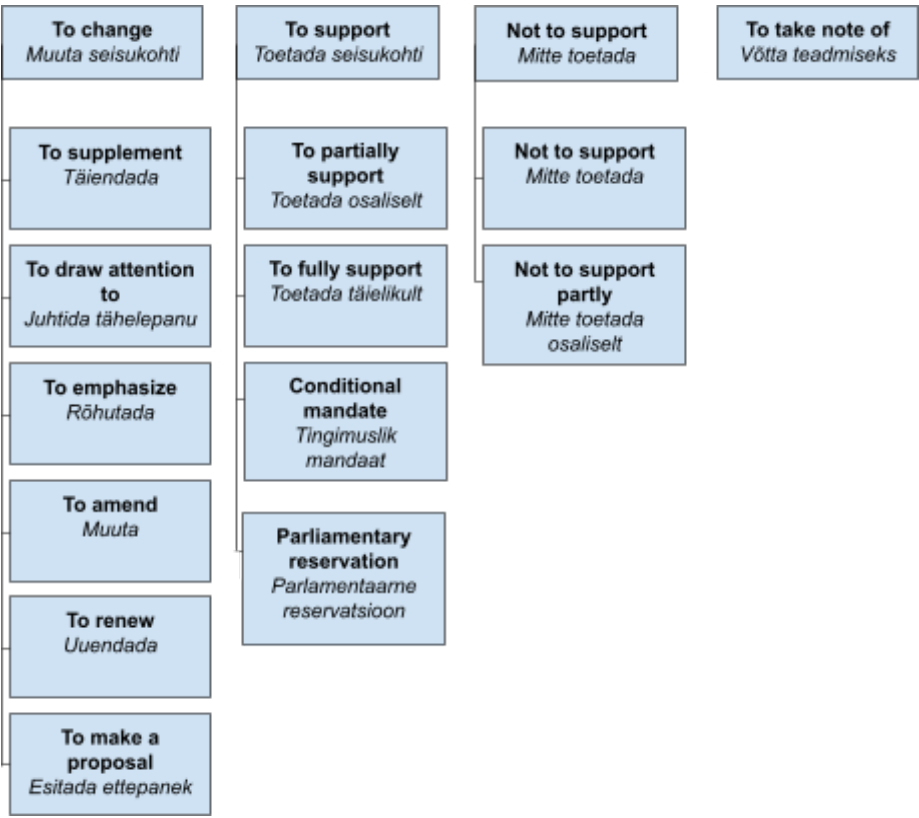


Figure 2. Division of the nature of decisions into different categories

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

Independent variables are the following: 1) year/time; 2) configuration; 3) format; 4) chair; 5) voting on the decision. For the first independent variable, the ordinal timeline from 2010 to 2024, with a year being a unit, aims to capture certain trends in NDC outcomes. Within this time period, there are three election cycles. Moreover, during this period, the EU faced numerous crises, such as the debt crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian aggression against Ukraine, and the migration crisis (Matthijs, 2020, p. 1127). On the one hand, the analysis will examine whether these external events have an impact on NDCs. However, the timeframe allows for the post-Lisbon Treaty period to be divided into two parts: 1) 2010-2012, the immediate implementation period; 2) 2012-2024, the implementation period. This is due to the Lisbon Treaty entering into force in 2009, meaning 2010 is the first full year of implementation, taking into account national legislative processes. Linking to Europeanisation, the Lisbon reforms should increase "To change" decisions over time.

Furthermore, based on the fact that the Riigikogu has several times amended RKKTS by specifying the operating rules of committees, it has potentially empowered its role as a scrutiniser. Based on the empowerment of the Lisbon Treaty, effects of crises, and changes in institutional design, this variable supports the expectation that ELAK scrutiny becomes more assertive over time as formal powers are embedded in practice.

The second independent variable is constructed on the basis of the initial decision topics, taking as a basis the 10 official configurations of the Council of the EU, plus the European Council, making a total of 11 different values. However, it is necessary here to specify the process of how the generic codes outlined in subchapter 3.3.1 will be allocated between configurations. Since the EU initiatives were coded as a general topic area and not all the Council meetings that took place were official, and therefore could not be coded directly as one configuration, the author created a new variable to place them under one of these configurations. To do this, he first used a Google Gemini AI machine-learning program that would find a configuration match for each topic code. Codes that were ambiguous, such as "safety", which could be categorised under health issues or product standards, had to be manually reviewed by the author. One of the limitations is that it is not clear which configuration an EU initiative falls into. For example, initiatives requiring horizontal coordination are primarily the domain of GAC, but may also be under a specific configuration. Thus, the variable will be categorical with no hierarchy between the values.

However, for analytical purposes, the author divides the configurations into two parts based on the Committee of Permanent Representatives in the European Union (COREPER). COREPER has two bodies called COREPER I and COREPER II, which respectively deal with more technical policy fields and politically loaded issues (*Coreper I*, n.d.; *Coreper II*, n.d.). Under the COREPER I, AGRIFISH, COMPET, EYCS, EPSCO, ENV and TTE configurations can be found. COREPER II prepares the work for configurations GAC, FAC, ECOFIN and JHA. For example, in ECOFIN issues, Estonia's accession to the ESM allows the use of fast-track procedures, where the eurozone is at risk with financial instability (Ehin, 2015, p. 515), proving the high saliency of these issues, where there may be disdain amongst MPs. For the sake of this thesis, the European Council (EUCO) is also classified under COREPER II due to its nature of being the highest political forum for the EU leaders. This phenomenon would link to deparliamentarisation, where high-salience issues result in more scrutiny. Moreover, politicisation of issues may also contribute to that. Hence, the author

expects COREPER II and EUCO-related decisions to have a higher probability of ELAK making amendments or expressing dissent.

The third independent variable, type of issue, will only include the values of the Council's configuration meeting and its agenda or a specific EU initiative, as this is the most evident cases, where ELAK has shown assertiveness based on the meeting minutes. Thus, ELAK's own, third international parties' and other Riigikogu committees' initiatives are excluded. Similarly to Auel et al. (2015, p. 73), the author did not manage to create a separate division of the EU initiatives due to the varying detailedness of minutes, which do not specify the essence of the initiative. The assumption is that EU initiatives require more technical scrutiny rather than political intervention, meaning that due to the lack of expertise within the EU, it is more likely to amend governmental positions in the Council configuration meetings, including high-salience configurations. Similarly to hypothesis 2, COREPER II adopts a relatively lower number of EU initiatives, meaning that this could skew the result. To address the concern of informal ministerial meetings, where ELAK still reviews the governmental positions, they were still included in the analysis and not differentiated from official Council meetings. This operationalisation mirrors the assumption that ELAK is more likely to amend the government positions for the Council of the EU configuration meetings compared to proposed EU legislative initiatives.

For the fourth variable, the author plans to assess the oppositional behaviour and political dynamics by constructing a binary variable to describe coalition and opposition lines. Art. 30 of the Riigikogu Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act sets that a committee is led by a chair and a deputy chair. As they are elected simultaneously, the candidate who receives the most votes is elected as chair and the second most as the deputy. Moreover, the composition of the committee largely mimics the coalition and opposition balance lines, thus, the coalition manages to hold the chair position and the opposition the latter. As the deputy is substituting the chair if one is not present, the variable is operationalised as chair of the meeting, either from the coalition or from the opposition, based on the parties that formed the government at the given time. Depending on the style of chairing a meeting, the chair can hold the initiative in proposing amendments or rejecting the government's positions. This could highlight a partisan conflict, which was highlighted by Raunio (2007). This variable allows for evaluating whether opposition-led meetings are associated with a higher incidence of assertive or dissenting outcomes, reflecting possible partisan dynamics in ELAK.

The last independent variable for the NDCs analysis constructed is whether the decision was being voted on. If a decision is voted on rather than approved by consensus, it signals disagreement within the committee. For clarification, by voting, the author means the following situations: 1) the chair of the ELAK meeting or a member of the commission asks for a vote to confirm the government's positions, which is carried out; 2) a member of the ELAK wants to put on the record, either his or her dissenting opinion or a supplementary opinion, which may be further joined by other members of the commission; 3) a vote is taken on a proposal by a member of the commission to change the proposed positions. Using this broad approach, where the positions themselves and proposals are viewed as equal votes, allows to make a comparison in the political will within the ELAK. It must be noted that besides the decisions mentioned in NDCs analysis, decisions where the committee decided "To take note of" were excluded due to their informative nature, and a vote is not necessary. In addition, this is in line with Crum (2018) critique of parliament being a "rubber stamp" in EU affairs. If it is less likely to hold a vote, lacking debate on the matter, as a result of that, it takes the role of a "rubber stamp". The reasons for voting for the positions can be either the opposition parties challenging the government's positions or the high salience of the issue. On the other hand unanimous decision can suggest either low political stakes, which can mostly deal with technical issues or executive dominance. Hence, this variable acts as a proxy for internal disagreement or contestation within the committee by formally voted decisions showing higher amendment rates than unanimous approvals.

3.4. Methods

To test the five hypotheses outlined in subchapter 2.5, the thesis employs quantitative analysis by conducting descriptive and regression analyses with the dataset of over 3,200 individual decisions made by ELAK. The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, descriptive analysis is used to map the overall distribution of ELAK decisions over time, by the independent variables. Frequency distributions, bar charts, and time series plots are used to visualise trends in parliamentary behaviour. Second, the thesis applies logistic regression to test the association between the dependent variable and the five independent variables. The primary interest is to determine whether each independent variable increases or decreases the probability of an assertive decision.

Descriptive analysis is one of the most used forms of quantitative analysis in social sciences. As the term itself hints, the analysis gathers data to describe a phenomenon or outcome (Baha, 2016). However, the data itself is organised into different variables, and the main objective is not to find causality between them. Moreover, the process of organising data into a numeric format ensures comparability between the variables in question, which is a prerequisite for other quantitative analyses, such as regression analysis (Bhattacharjee, 2019). The strength of this method lies in its objectivity and neutrality, while being able to summarise the trends with the help of graphs and charts, making it useful for creating new variables and hypotheses (Baha, 2016). The most common techniques used are measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode), measures of dispersion (range, variance, standard deviation), frequency distributions (counts, percentages), and graphical representation (bar charts, histograms, box plots) (Randolph & Myers, 2013). As this thesis focuses on the timeline of the ELAK's activity, frequency distributions and graphical representations will be used. However, for objective graph interpretation, the observations from December, 2009 are excluded to ensure comparability between other years. The variables used are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. List of variables included in the analysis

Variable	Title	Values	Type
<i>DV</i>	Nature of decision category (NDC)	4 different: To change, Not to support // To support, To take note of	Categorical (descriptive); Binary (regression)
<i>IV1</i>	Time	A specific year in the timeline of 2010-2024, 15 in total	Interval
<i>IV2</i>	Policy	10 different configurations, plus the European Council (EUCO)	Categorical
<i>IV3</i>	Type of proposal	The Council / EU initiative	Binary
<i>IV4</i>	Chair	From coalition / opposition	Binary
<i>IV5</i>	Voting	Yes / no	Binary

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

After the initial descriptive analysis of the data with preliminary interpretations, the author conducts binary logistic regression analysis to examine the relationships between dependent

and independent variables. Contrary to the descriptive analysis, the dependent variable distinguishes between routine/passive decisions ("To support", "To take note of") and assertive/dissenting decisions ("To change" or "Not to support"), thus making it a binary variable. Logistic regression estimates the likelihood of an assertive decision being made, given a set of independent variables: year (ordinal), policy configuration (categorical), type of issue (binary), chair affiliation (binary), and voting procedure (binary).

To estimate the effects of categorical variables in the logistic regression model, dummy variable coding was applied. For the variable "Policy", which captures the relevant Council configuration associated with each agenda item, the model includes dummy variables for each category, with AGRIFISH serving as the reference category. This means that all policy effects are interpreted relative to the AGRIFISH configuration, which in the current outline assumes that it is a more technical and less politicised EU policy area. The variable "Type of proposal" was also dummy coded, with formal initiatives to the Council agenda, the latter being the reference category. Similarly, "Coalition vs. Opposition Chair" represents whether the committee chair was from the opposition, with coalition leadership as the reference category. The binary variable "Voting used" captures whether a vote was held during the committee discussion (1 = vote held, 0 = no vote). The variable year was entered as a continuous variable and was not dummy coded.

To test the relationship between the dependent and independent variables, this thesis employs a logistic regression model. Since the outcome variable is binary coded as either 1 (assertive/dissenting decision by ELAK) or 0 (routine/passive approval), a standard linear regression model (OLS) would not be appropriate, as it assumes a continuous, unbounded dependent variable. Instead, logistic regression estimates the probability that ELAK issues an assertive or dissenting decision (i.e., modifies or rejects the government's position) based on a set of explanatory variables. The model is specified as follows:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P(Y=1)}{1-P(Y=1)}\right) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \beta_3 X_{3i} + \beta_4 X_{4i} + \beta_5 X_{5i} \quad (1)$$

where

β_0 - Intercept; represents the expected log-odds of $Y=1$ when all independent variables equal zero

Y - Observed value of the dependent variable for the i -th observation (1 = assertive/dissenting; 0 = passive/supportive)

X_{ji} - value of the j -th independent variable influencing Y distinctly for the i -th observation

β_j - slope coefficient of the j -th independent variable

The model estimates the effect of each independent variable on the log odds of the dependent variable, which are subsequently transformed into odds ratios to facilitate interpretation. An odds ratio greater than one indicates that the variable increases the likelihood of an assertive decision, while an odds ratio below one suggests a decreasing effect. The analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel for data organisation and RStudio for model estimation and visualisation. Additional diagnostics, including multicollinearity checks and pseudo- R^2 statistics, were performed to assess the robustness and explanatory power of the model.

3.5. Limitations

The author acknowledges numerous limitations that come with the selected research design. Firstly, the detail of the minutes varies by years; earlier minutes include only decisions with voting results if a vote was held on the matter. The latter minutes have a summary of debates held by the members of ELAK. Thus, it is difficult to assess whether a decision was unanimous when no voting results are mentioned. However, in these cases, the unanimous decisions do not always correlate with the number of participants in ELAK, meaning it is challenging to interpret the political will of the committee. Secondly, not all meeting minutes of each ELAK meeting are made available to the public, meaning that some of the decisions are not included in the constructed dataset. Thirdly, the wording or phrasing on each decision is not consistently done over the time period, meaning it poses a challenge in interpreting each decision's nature. Hence, the subjectivity of the author's interpretation of decisions in categorising them may have contributed to skewing results and affecting reproducibility. Lastly, the thesis does not assess and cover the whole activity of the ELAK as a player in the

EU institutional framework, but takes a pragmatic conscious choice of coding and interpreting decisions that scrutinise government positions on an EUCO or the Council meeting or a specific EU legislative initiative. The problem of capturing the informal influence of the Riigikogu, such as ELAK's own or specialised committees' initiatives, is not described and analysed by this thesis.

4. Empirical analysis

The following chapter presents the empirical findings of this thesis and answers the research questions. The analysis begins by breaking down the different types of decisions made by the ELAK, including those to support, oppose, take note of, or to change, and then explores how these vary across time, issue areas, type of issue, and the party affiliation of the chair of the meeting. Moreover, it also considers how often formal voting occurs, and whether this correlates with opposition leadership of the committee or high-salience issues. Later, it is examined how independent variables relate to the dependent variable via a logistic regression analysis and determines whether relations have statistical significance.

4.1. ELAK's Institutional Role and Scrutiny Practices in EU Affairs

The following subchapter gives a brief overview of the ELAK and how it fulfils its role with formal and informal powers, aiming to answer the first research question. The European Union Affairs Committee (ELAK) of the Riigikogu serves as a mechanism for coordinating Estonia's engagement with EU policies and legislative processes. ELAK is unique in the sense that it has the authority to form opinions in the name of parliament (Ehin, 2015, p. 517). Established in 1997, ELAK fulfilled the role of monitoring the government during the accession process to the EU (Ehin, 2015, p. 517). Two pivotal moments, which expanded the role of ELAK with Estonia's accession to the EU and adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, which resulted in amendments to the Riigikogu Rules of Procedure and Internal Rules Act (RKKTS). However, in the former case, this did not outline Riigikogu's role in EU affairs, even after the EU accession referendum in 2003 to the Constitution. Although it acknowledges the supremacy of EU law while the Constitution of Estonia still applies, there have been calls to amend the Constitution in a way that would mirror the actual legal environment (Ehin, 2015, p. 515). Hence, attention should be drawn to the main legislative acts that regulate ELAK's formal powers.

4.1.1. The Institutional Setting of ELAK and Domestic Functioning of ELAK

RKKTS is the main legislative act, outlining the procedural framework for ELAK. The Government of Estonia is required to submit draft EU legal acts to the Riigikogu's Board for consideration, particularly those that require legislative approval under the Estonian Constitution or have significant economic or social implications (RKKTS Art. 152(1)). These

drafts are accompanied by detailed explanatory memoranda, which emphasise their objectives, potential impacts, and alignment with EU principles such as subsidiarity and proportionality (RKKTS Art. 152(2)). Upon receipt, the Riigikogu's Board forwards the draft acts to the ELAK or, in cases involving common foreign and security policy, to the Foreign Affairs Committee (RKKTS Art. 152(2)). Specific specialised committees may also be tasked with providing expert opinions on the drafts (RKKTS Art. 152(3)). The ELAK or Riigikogu's Foreign Affairs Committee deliberates on the draft acts and adopts formal positions on behalf of the Riigikogu. These positions are recorded in the ELAK's meeting minutes and communicated to the government, which is legally obligated to adhere to them unless it provides a justified rationale for deviation (RKKTS Art. 152(4)). Moreover, the Prime Minister is required to present an annual report to the Riigikogu on the Government's activities in implementing EU policies (RKKTS Art. 152(5)).

In terms of political dynamics, the institutional design contributes to the dominance of governing parties over oppositional ones in the ELAK. The composition of ELAK is tightly related to it. RKKTS states that ELAK consists of at least one member from each specialised committee, while the minimum number of members is 15 (Ehin, 2015, p. 517). Moreover, it has to reflect the parliamentary election results as any other committee, thus increasing the chances of smaller parliamentary factions to have a representative there and diversifying the opinions within it. On the other hand, this further strengthens the position of governing parties as they would still reflect the plenary majority in the committee. Furthermore, contrary to specialised committees, the Board of Riigikogu may be affiliated to the ELAK (RKKTS Art. 24(2)), meaning there would not be difficulties for the governing parties to retain the majority in ELAK. These features enable the governing parties to consolidate control and minimise dissent within the committee. Thus, this institutional design acts as a caveat for the political will to use the powers of scrutiniser effectively.

In addition to its formal legal mandate, ELAK has informal powers and procedural practices that shape its effectiveness in scrutinising EU affairs. Similarly, to other specialised committees, ELAK has the right to summon ministers to attend meetings, request documentation from government agencies, and invite external experts to provide insights on draft EU legislation (Ehin, 2015, p. 518). These tools enable the committee to gather relevant information and ensure that its positions are informed by both political and technical perspectives. Based on the recent meeting minutes, ELAK has

appointed its members as rapporteurs from specialised committees to improve issue-specific scrutiny, which indicates attempts to professionalise its internal working methods. The question of ELAK's transparency has become relevant in recent years. Although meetings are typically closed to the public, meetings may be opened and livestreamed when public interest prevails or when hearings are held jointly with other committees. In 2023, there were discussions, whether to make all ELAK sessions open to the public to improve inclusivity and accountability (ERR, 2023, 2024). If adopted, such reforms could reinforce ELAK's role as a public forum due to the smaller role of the public plenary sessions in the current legislative framework.

4.1.2. ELAK's Engagement with the EU Level and Interparliamentary Dialogue

Similar to other national parliaments, the ELAK is tasked with guarding the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. It can propose resolutions to the Riigikogu if an EU draft legislative act is deemed to violate these principles. These resolutions are put forward to debate, amendment, and adoption by the Riigikogu before being transmitted to relevant EU institutions (RKKTS Art. 152(6)). Moreover, the ELAK or parliamentary factions may propose resolutions requiring the Government to initiate legal proceedings before the Court of Justice of the EU if an EU legislative act is found to breach the principle of subsidiarity. The government is legally bound to act on such resolutions, highlighting the Riigikogu's role in upholding Estonia's constitutional and legal framework within the EU context (RKKTS Art. 152(7)). The Riigikogu can express formal opposition to specific EU Council initiatives or European Commission proposals through resolutions. These resolutions are debated, amended, and adopted following a structured process, ensuring that Estonia's concerns are formally communicated to EU institutions (RKKTS Art. 152(8)). However, ELAK has not in the past used these powers extensively to foster Political Dialogue and initiate subsidiarity controls (Ehin, 2015, p. 523). Possible reasons are that a lack of resources and staff contribute to the ELAK's passive role. Moreover, drawing from the theoretical framework, the success of these actions depends on the cooperation of national parliaments in order to trigger either the Yellow or Orange card mechanisms.

When pursuing relations with other member states or EU-level institutional actors, ELAK prefers bilateral to multilateral cooperation. First, this is exemplified by the visit of European Commissioners to Estonia, with separate meetings with ELAK, which have been viewed as useful by ELAK members as they provide a direct link and opportunity to voice their

concerns to major EU actors (Ehin, 2015, p. 525). Secondly, this is supported by ELAK's relatively low appreciation of COSAC, the interparliamentary platform for EACs (Ehin, 2015, p. 525). Although it is seen more as a venue for networking, the effect of shaping it to a more effective cooperation forum and increasing its ability to scrutinise is met with passive reaction (Ehin, 2015, p. 524). Moreover, the extent to which ELAK members pursue independent contacts with EU-level actors during COSAC meetings or through personal networks remains underexplored and would benefit from further empirical research, as it is inherently building bilateral relations. Although the ELAK possesses formal mechanisms to participate in EU interparliamentary dialogue, its consistent prioritisation of bilateral over multilateral engagement reveals an institutional orientation that remains fundamentally nation-centred rather than European in scope.

In conclusion, ELAK is a formally empowered institution, which should hold it holds exclusive authority to approve Estonia's EU negotiating positions, ensures compliance with subsidiarity, and can formally oppose EU initiatives, but it is constrained by political dynamics, selective use of powers, and limited engagement at the EU level. While the committee makes modest use of interparliamentary mechanisms like COSAC, it prefers more direct bilateral contacts with EU actors. These patterns reflect a primarily national focus and a preference for informal, government-oriented influence. Using Auel et al.'s (2015) typology, ELAK remains a watchdog in practice at first sight. With potential developments in the future by making the meetings public, the ELAK would take a stronger role as a public forum.

4.2. Overview of Decisions of the EU Affairs Committee of the Riigikogu, 2010-2024

The following chapter aims to answer research questions 2 and 3 by using descriptive analysis to give an overview of the meetings of the ELAK which analyses the NDCs by independent variables.

Figure 3 outlines trends in several kinds of decisions of the ELAK for the years 2010-2024. Supportive decisions have been the most frequently dominant decision type during the entire timeline, indicating strong parliamentary support for government positions concerning EU policies. There was a decrease from 2013 to 2015, then a sharp increase to highs during the years of 2018 and 2022. The short decline in 2024 shows that either the submission of governmental positions to ELAK has decreased or that there are other unknown factors

influencing it. The "To take note of" increasing frequency of this decision type began in 2010, peaking in the 2016-2018 period. Both upward and downward swings suggest a tendency of the committee to merely acknowledge information without much impact on the process. There has been a low frequency of ELAK cases that modify the government position, but an increase was observed after 2020. This could indicate an increasing assertiveness of the Parliament with regard to changing government positions or institutional maturation that contributes to it. Compared to other NDCs, the ELAK has mostly avoided making non-supportive decisions, indicating that outright rejections of the government position are avoided. Marginal spikes for years in 2013 and 2023 indicate occasional pushes from the ELAK. The shaded areas on the timeline mark election years, and they appear to correlate with fluctuations in trends for decision-making. On three occasions out of four, one can see a drop in supportive decisions. This might be compensated by either other NDCs or an overall drop in processed initiatives or the Council meetings, which may be due to the new composition of parliament and the interplay of political dynamics.

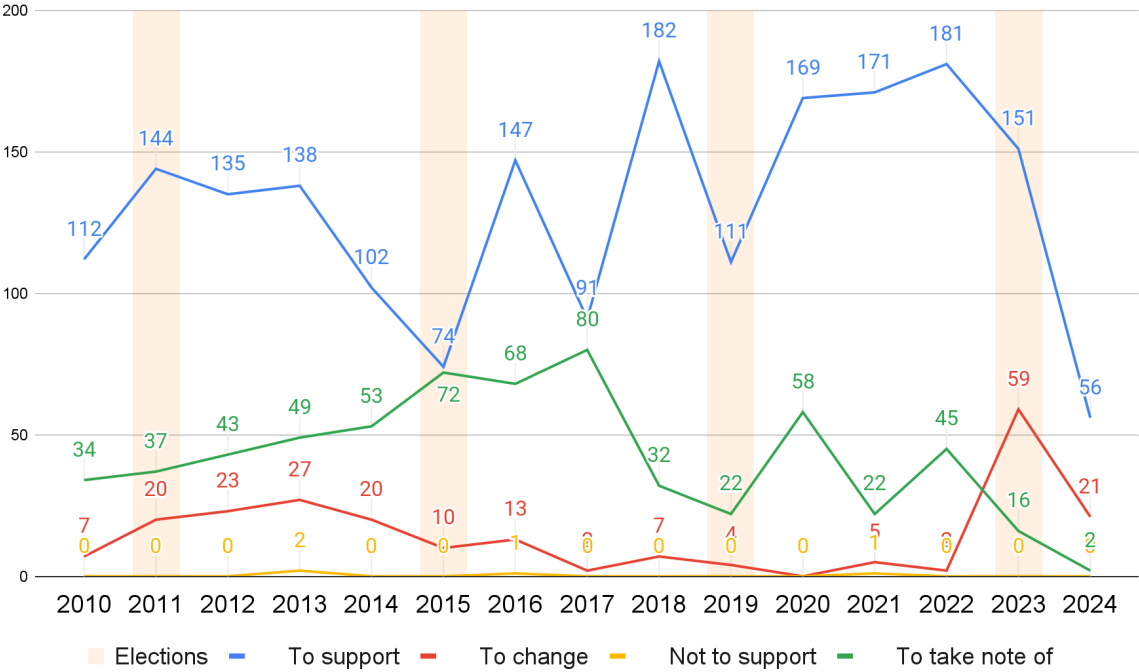


Figure 3. Number of decisions by nature of decision categories from 2010 to 2024

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

On the other hand, absolute numbers of the nature of decision categories in the set timeline do not allow full comprehension of the full picture of ELAK using those four NDCs. Thus, the

share of NDCs is shown in Figure 4. The percentage-based approach reveals a more stable trend in the proportions of decision types. While there are still fluctuations, the relative proportions of "To support," "To take note of," "To change," and "Not to support" decisions remain fairly consistent over time. For instance, the dominance of "To support" decisions is evident, and the occasional increases in "To take note of" and "To change" decisions are more easily observed. Moreover, the raw counts in Figure 4 show drops during election years, while the percentage-based figure reveals that the relative proportions of decision types remain stable, despite changes in the total number of decisions. In addition, it is revealed that ELAK's "To support" decisions consistently dominate, though amendments have risen since 2023. This somewhat aligns with H1's prediction of post-Lisbon parliamentary empowerment but fails to explain the period before 2015, which is lower than the implementation period. Thus, H1 can not be confirmed based on only descriptive analysis. Lastly, passive "To take note of" decisions declined significantly post-2017, suggesting reduced executive deference over time.

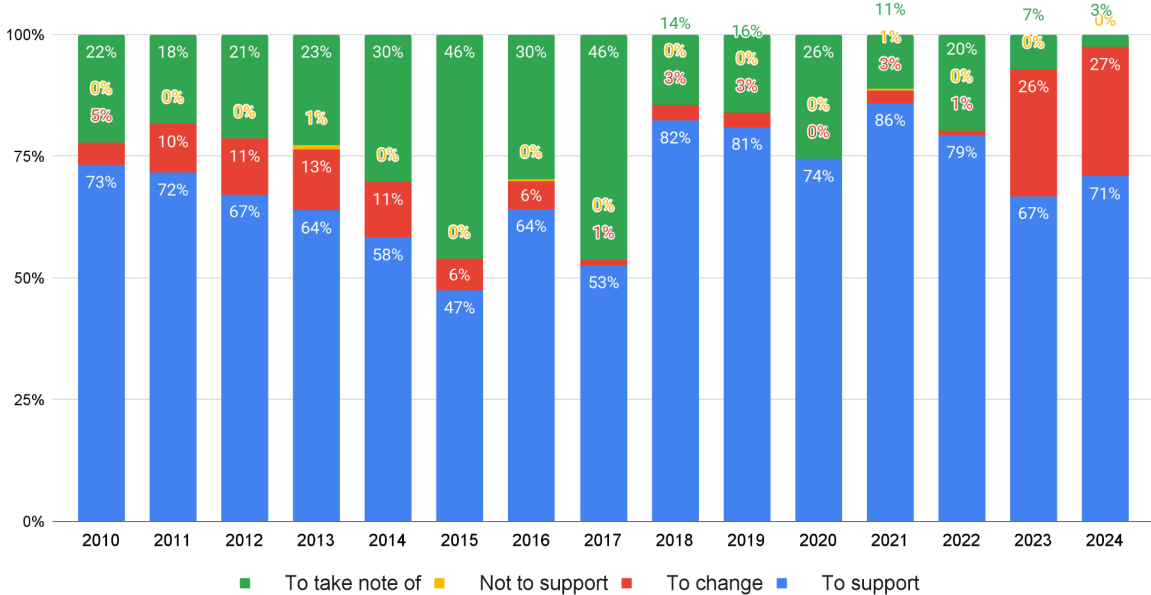
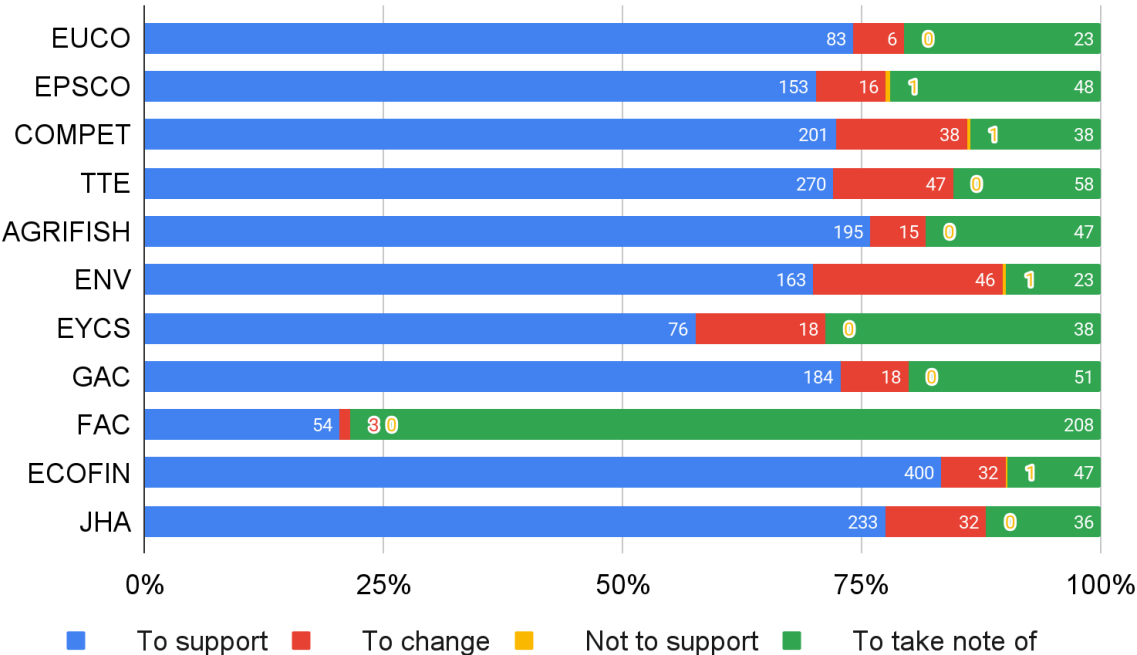


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of nature of decision categories from 2010 to 2024

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of different types of decisions made by the ELAK across various configurations of the Council of the EU. Across all Council configurations, the predominant decision type was "To support" the government's position. The most support was found in ECOFIN, JHA and AGRIFISH, where more than 75% of decisions were in favour.

Other configurations that show high support are EUCO, COMPET and GAC. FAC shows an exceptionally large share of "To take note of" decisions, which indicates the dominant role of Riigikogu’s Committee of Foreign Affairs in confirming foreign policy positions in the name of parliament. This further proves the notion that decision-making in foreign policy is based on other grounds, compared to other EU policy areas. Other policy areas showing a relatively high proportion of "To take note of" decisions are EYCS and EPSCO. The highest change rates in government positions in the TTE and ENV imply areas of parliamentary interference. COMPET also has a significant number of amendments, implying that economic and industrial policy decisions undergo many amendments. Almost no Council configurations reject the government's position. The few instances that occur are COMPET, ECOFIN, EPSCO and ENV. Therefore, across all configurations, the overwhelming support of government positions is seen from the ELAK, which further supports the view that the ELAK prefers to amend rather than reject positions.



2

Figure 5. Share of nature of decision categories by configurations

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

² GAC – General Affairs; FAC – Foreign Affairs; ECOFIN – Economic and Financial Affairs; JHA – Justice and Home Affairs; EPSCO – Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs; COMPET – Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space); TTE – Transport, Telecommunications and Energy; AGRIFISH – Agriculture and Fisheries; ENV – Environment; EYCS – Education, Youth, Culture and Sport. In addition, the European Council – EUCO.

Figure 6 illustrates how the categories of decisions are distributed according to who chairs the ELAK sessions. It can be either a member from the coalition parties or from the opposition. Firstly, it must be noted that 2574 decisions (88.86%) were made in the sessions chaired by a coalition (KOAL) member. The number of opposition-led (OPO) decisions was 324, accounting for 11.14% of all decisions. In terms of supportive decisions, coalition-led decisions make up almost 68% of all coalition-led decisions. This percentage is almost 10% higher in the case of opposition-led decisions, which works out to approximately 78% with cases numbering 250. Thus, regardless of who chairs the meetings, support for government EU positions remains very high. No matter the chair, both chair options allow amendments to be made to positions on similar levels. A coalition-led chair allows approximately 10% of decisions to be made, and in the case of opposition, it is 7% of NDCs. Therefore, both types of coalition and opposition seem to follow more or less similar government positions, with the coalition leadership giving quite a few more amendments. Rejections are extremely rare, regardless of who chairs the committee meeting. Hence, the results show a rather consensus-based political dynamics.

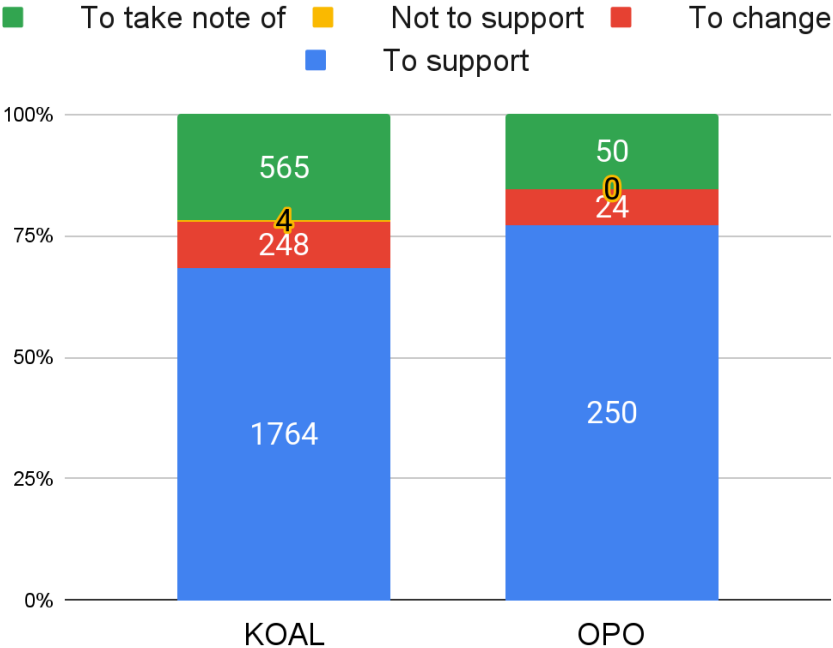


Figure 6. Share and count of the nature of decision categories by the chair affiliation of the ELAK meetings

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

Figure 7 offers direct empirical insight into hypothesis H5 by illustrating the relationship between decision type and the decision-making procedure used by the ELAK, either voting or unanimity. The distribution shows that while the majority of decisions are supportive in nature across both categories, the procedural mode strongly correlates with the assertiveness of the decision. Support decisions dominate overall but appear overwhelmingly in unanimous cases (1,758 cases), compared to only 256 under voting. In contrast, decisions proposing to change the government's position are proportionally much more frequent in voting scenarios (51 instances) than in unanimous ones (221), indicating that dissent or assertive scrutiny more often triggers formal votes. Moreover, this suggests that proposals to amend positions tend to generate disagreement and require voting, meaning that some of the ELAK members would have likely supported the original governmental position on the matter. Most notably, the "To take note of" decision type, here considered as neutral or procedural, occurs exclusively in unanimous decisions (618 cases), further reinforcing the association between consensus and passive or administrative outcomes. The minimal number of "Not to support" decisions (2 in each category) suggests such strong positions are rare and further describes the dialogical partner role of ELAK. Overall, the chart confirms that more critical or interventionist decisions are made under voting conditions, while supportive or neutral decisions are more likely to be adopted unanimously. This lends clear support to the idea that voting is a procedural expression of contestation, validating hypothesis H5 for testing in the regression model.

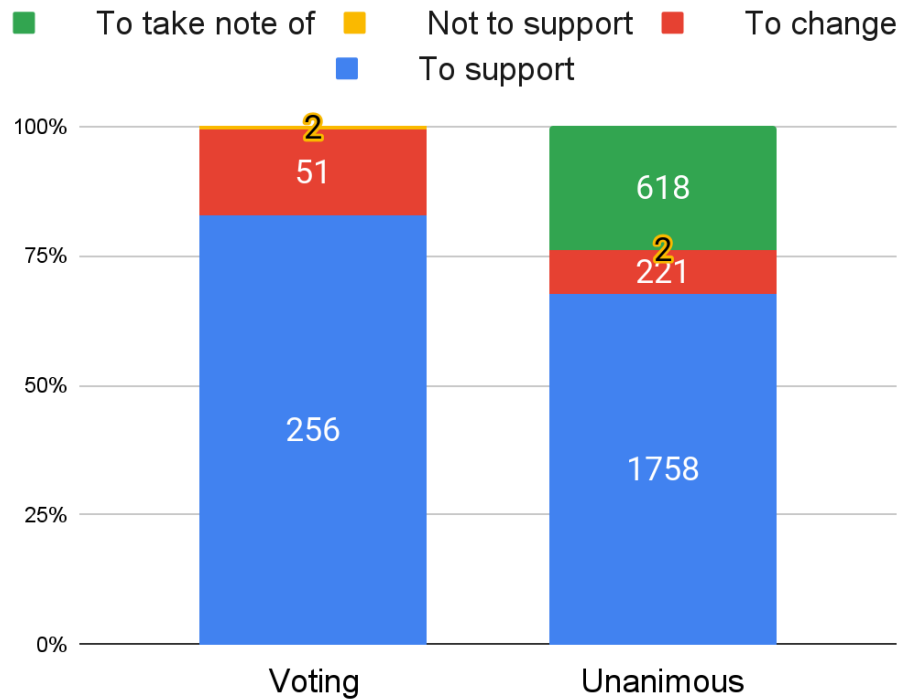


Figure 7. Share and count of nature of decision categories by voting procedure

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

Figure 8 shows that unanimous decisions overwhelmingly dominated the ELAK's decision-making process in the years 2010-2024, indicating a preference for consensus. However, fluctuations in voting patterns suggest that certain periods experience heightened contention, requiring formal votes. A very broad conclusion would be that voting has become more common during the period. Peaks in voting, such as in 2021 and 2022, reflect political opposition from certain members of the committee, which, in nature, seems to be more obstructionist than constructive. Moreover, this is supported by their behaviour and remarks outside the decision under review. However, with the changes in the committee's composition, the obstructionist member's replacement does not continue the same behaviour. This poses a question of whether this depends on the member, ideology or party. During the election years, we see a relatively low number of decisions where the ELAK voted. One possible explanation is that a lower absolute number of sessions reduces the overall opportunities for voting. Although decisions still typically rely on unanimity, external pressures or internal divisions can sometimes lead to more formalised voting.

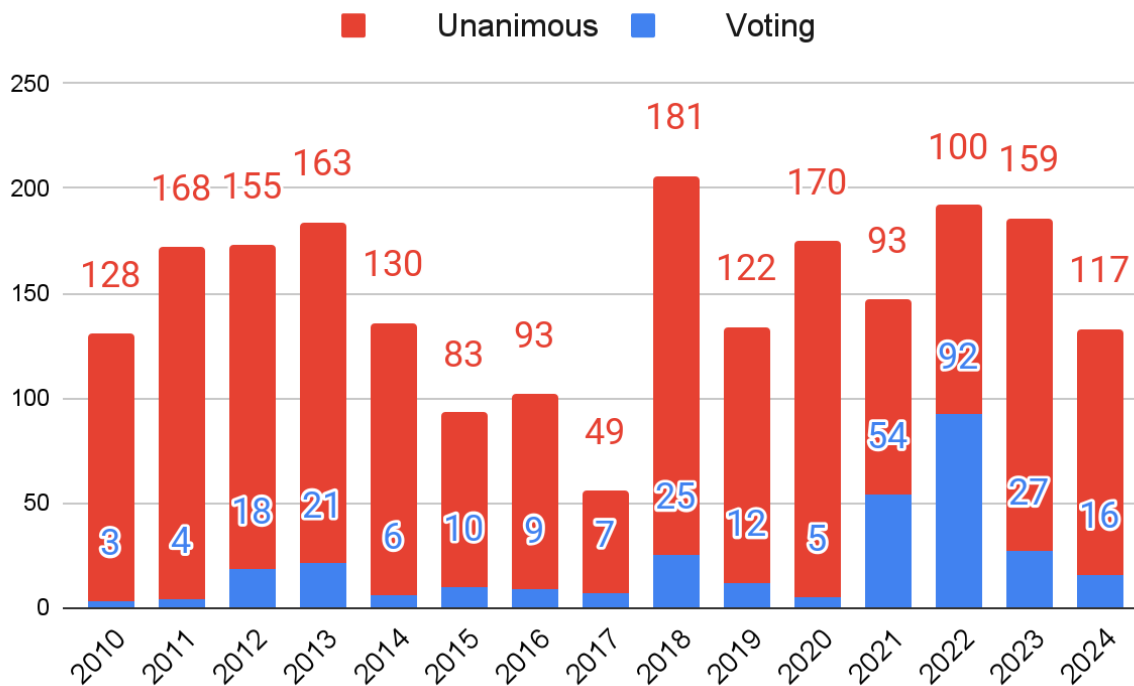


Figure 8. Share of unanimous and voted decisions by years

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

In Figure 9, the share of unanimous and voted decisions across different configurations of the ELAK is shown. In every configuration, unanimous decisions are in the majority, compared to voted decisions. This suggests a high level of consensus in decision-making within the ELAK. However, some configurations show a relatively higher share of voting activity, such as ENV (58 votes), ECOFIN (86 votes), EPSCO (42 votes), and JHA (48 votes). In the case of ENV, key disputes revolved around climate targets that included emissions trading and methane reduction, forestry and land-use policies, and the balance between environmental ambition and the economy's competitiveness. For ECOFIN, the disputes centred on the ESM³, banking union reforms, and tax harmonisation. Gender equality, work-life balance directives, and handling of COVID-19 were the main decisions voted on under EPSCO policy areas. Formal voting was used in JHA matters that focused on migration, asylum policies and security integration (harmonisation of travel documents, automated police data exchange) were being voted on. On the contrary, FAC (3 votes) and EYCS (6 votes) have the lowest share of voting decisions. In the case of FAC, the dissent focused on the government's positions on Syria, the pan-European defence plan, and the establishment of the Reform and Growth Facility for the Republic of Moldova. EYCS-related decisions dealing with lowering

³ European Stability Mechanism

the voting age, youth guarantees, and efficiency of the "Europe for Citizens" programme were voted on. AGRIFISH, EUACO, TTE, GAC and COMPET can be classified under the middle share of voting decisions, as their share is between those mentioned.

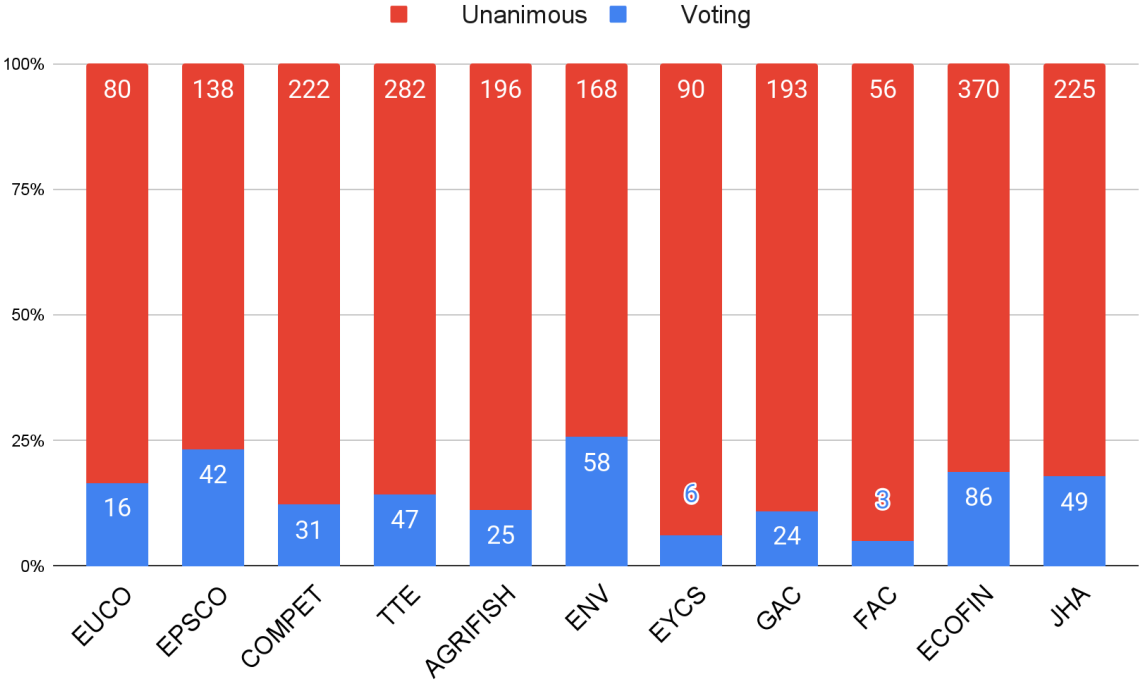


Figure 9. Share and count of unanimous and voted decisions by configurations

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

Figure 10 indicates that comparing decisions taken unanimously and voted on by the chair of ELAK meetings indicates a very strong general tendency towards consensus, whether the chair is leading the coalition (KOAL) or the opposition (OPO). Under coalition leadership, 85% (1815) of decisions are made unanimously, as opposed to the slightly lower 76% (217) for opposition leadership. This signified that coalition-led decision-making is very stable with unanimity and thus results in less proper voting. In contrast, the share of voted decisions in the case of an opposition-led chair is 24%, compared to 15% for a coalition-led chair. Thus, by combining this with findings from NDC descriptive analysis, although an opposition-led session is more likely to use voting, when it comes to adopting positions or amending them, the coalition members still retain the majority within the session to vote down proposals and motions from the opposition.

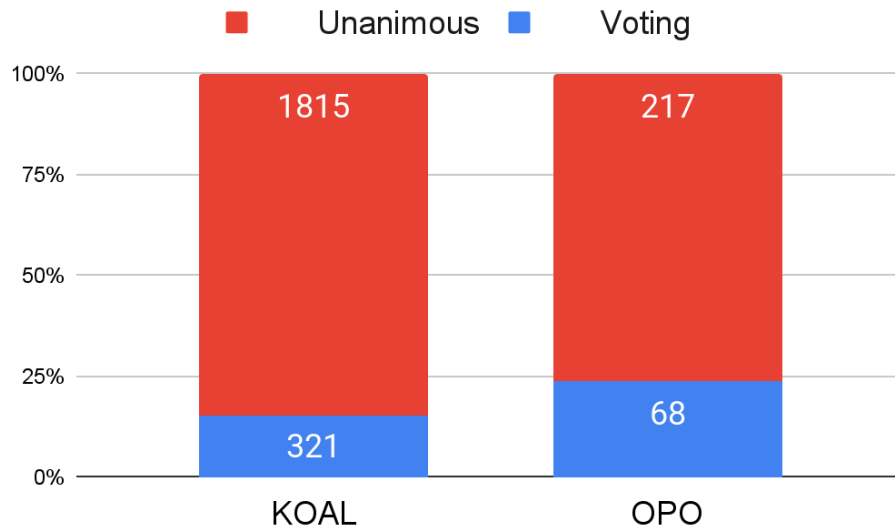


Figure 10. Share of unanimous and voted decisions by the chair affiliation of the ELAK meetings

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

These preliminary findings suggest that while the ELAK formally possesses scrutiny powers, their exercise is highly conditional. Increased dissent and voting frequency under opposition-chaired meetings, or in politically sensitive domains, support the idea that scrutiny is more robust when institutional or political incentives align. Otherwise, the committee tends toward consensus and passive endorsement, supporting arguments of continued deparliamentarisation.

4.3. Logistic Regression Analysis

In order to empirically test the hypotheses formulated in this thesis regarding the role of (ELAK) in shaping national positions on EU matters, binary logistic regression was selected as the principal statistical method. This approach reflects the characteristics of the dependent variable, "nature of decision", which was converted into a binary variable for analytical clarity. Decisions categorised as "To support" and "To take note of" were combined (coded as 0) to capture the committee's more routine or passive responses in relation to the executive. On the other hand, "To change" and "Not to support" categories were recoded as 1, capturing more assertive or dissenting forms of parliamentary influence. This binary distinction reflects the analytical focus of the thesis: identifying when and under what conditions the committee shows resistance or attempts to shape the government's EU position. Since a four-category

multinomial logistic regression would introduce complexity and limit interpretability, the binary approach offers a more pragmatic yet theoretically sound alternative. Appendix A presents descriptive visualisations of the binary dependent variable distribution across chair affiliations and policy areas. Logistic regression is particularly suited for this kind of binary outcome analysis because it estimates the effect of independent variables in terms of odds ratios, allowing clear statements about the increased or decreased likelihood of assertive decisions. Independent variables included in the model reflect all theoretical expectations outlined earlier: the year of decision (H1), type of Council configuration (H2), whether the type of decision concerned either a formal EU initiative or a full the Council matter (H3), whether the committee meeting chair came from the opposition or coalition (H4), and whether voting was used for decision-making (H5). By including all key independent variables in the model simultaneously, the author can isolate the effect of each factor while holding others constant. This approach offers an accurate way to assess how ELAK exerts influence over EU decision-making processes. The results of logistic regression are in Table 3, and the model's diagnostics are shown in Appendix B.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Results Predicting Assertive ELAK Decisions (Odds Ratios)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>OR</i>	<i>95% CI (Lower–Upper)</i>	<i>p-value</i>
(Intercept)	0	0.000 – 8608.586	0.095
Year	1.025	0.994 – 1.057	0.119
Coalition vs Opposition Chair (Opposition = 1)	0.71	0.444 – 1.093	0.135
Policy area:			
COMPET	1.468	0.790 – 2.835	0.236
ECOFIN	0.819	0.439 – 1.584	0.54
ENV	2.149	1.169 – 4.122	0.017*
EPSCO	0.895	0.433 – 1.864	0.765
EUCO	1.945	0.708 – 4.883	0.171
EYCS	2.243	1.068 – 4.747	0.033*
FAC	0.244	0.056 – 0.759	0.029*
GAC	1.239	0.601 – 2.575	0.561
JHA	1.044	0.555 – 2.033	0.895
TTE	1.246	0.686 – 2.363	0.483
Type of Proposal: EU Initiative (vs. Council Matter)	6.049	4.402 – 8.451	<0.001*
Voting Used (Yes = 1)	1.426	0.986 – 2.039	0.055*
N	2,904		
McFadden's R ²	0.134		

*Notes: OR = Odds Ratio. Values >1 indicate increased odds of assertive decision; values <1 indicate decreased odds. P-values with * indicate statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level.*

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

The model included 2,904 observations in total. Based on McFadden's R², the model explains around 13.4% of the uncertainty in the outcome compared to a null model, which is considered to be satisfactory (McFadden, 1974). Hence, the model adequately captures key factors influencing ELAK's assertiveness in EU policymaking. Based on the Generalised Variance Inflation Factor (GVIF) analysis, which is used to assess multicollinearity among predictor variables, the model appears to be stable and removing variables is not necessary. The model's odds ratios are visualised in Appendix C.

H1 is not supported. The time passed since the Lisbon Treaty does not significantly increase the likelihood of assertive decisions by the ELAK. Hypothesis 1 posited that the ELAK would

become more assertive over time, particularly in the years following the Lisbon Treaty, implementation period, reflecting a learning process or growing institutional confidence. In the logistic regression model, this expectation was operationalised through the variable "year", which captures the time trend from 1 December 2009 onward. The odds ratio for "year" is 1.025, indicating a slight increase in the odds of an assertive decision (i.e., either modifying or rejecting a government position) with each passing year. However, this increase is not statistically significant, as the p-value stands at 0.119 and exceeds the set 0.05 threshold. The confidence interval [0.994, 1.057] further shows uncertainty around this estimate, as it includes the neutral value of 1. These results imply that there is no robust evidence that ELAK decisions have become more oppositional or assertive over time. Substantively, this challenges the notion of institutional maturation or cumulative assertiveness in the post-Lisbon period. While minor temporal changes may occur, as seen in the descriptive analysis, they do not amount to a consistent or statistically meaningful trend toward greater ELAK activism. Therefore, H1 is not supported by the results.

The statistical findings provide partial support for H2, indicating that the policy area under discussion, operationalised through Council configurations, indeed affects the likelihood of ELAK issuing an assertive or dissenting decision. Specifically, three Council configurations, Environment (ENV), Education, Youth, Culture and Sport (EYCS), and Foreign Affairs Council (FAC), stand out as having statistically significant associations with assertive outcomes. Initiatives discussed under the ENV configuration are over twice as likely (OR = 2.15, $p = 0.017$) to result in assertive ELAK decisions, suggesting that environmental policy may carry greater salience, political contention, or normative concern, prompting stronger parliamentary engagement. Similarly, EYCS issues increase the odds of assertiveness (OR = 2.24, $p = 0.033$), possibly reflecting domestic value-based considerations in education and cultural matters. Conversely, FAC issues are associated with a dramatic decrease in assertiveness (OR = 0.24, $p = 0.029$), likely due to the traditionally executive-dominated domain of foreign policy, where parliaments often defer to governments. Theoretically, this outcome aligns with scholarship on issue salience and domain-specific executive prerogatives. It confirms that parliamentary involvement in EU affairs is not uniformly distributed across policy fields. Instead, the degree of scrutiny is shaped by how politically charged or technically, institutionally sensitive the policy area is. These findings reinforce the notion that national parliaments do not exercise their oversight powers uniformly but are instead selective and strategic, emphasising certain domains over others. This contributes to the literature on

differentiated Europeanisation and supports a more nuanced view of parliamentary activation that moves beyond formal powers to account for issue-driven variance in behaviour. However, the distinction based on COREPERs to define high-salience political and technical issues does not apply in this case, and thus, may depend on the Commission's political priorities.

The regression results reject H3. The variable representing whether the agenda item was a formal EU initiative (as opposed to a regular Council item) is highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and has a very large odds ratio of 6.05. This indicates that when the committee deliberates on formal EU initiatives, the likelihood of it adopting an assertive or dissenting decision is over six times higher than when it reviews general Council matters. This is the single most substantively and statistically powerful effect observed in the model, clearly differentiating between routine scrutiny and higher-stakes policy engagement. This finding supports theoretical arguments that formal legislative initiatives carry greater institutional relevance and legal weight, thereby attracting more scrutiny from national parliaments. It implies that ELAK is more likely to activate its oversight role when the stakes are perceived to be higher, when the proposal has a clear legal trajectory through the EU legislative system and could have binding effects on national policy when later transposing it as a directive. As it is consistent with some of the mentioned studies but rejects H3, this finding underscores how national parliaments act strategically, focusing their scrutiny where it is most likely to have an influence. Furthermore, the result raises broader discussions on institutional responsiveness: rather than engaging in only oversight, the EAC's assertiveness depends on the legislative proposal's importance in question.

The results do not support H4, as the relationship between opposition-led committee leadership and assertive decision-making is statistically insignificant. In the regression model, this dynamic is captured by the variable "opposition", which has an odds ratio of 0.71 and a p-value of 0.135. While the direction of the effect aligns with the hypothesis, suggesting that opposition chairs might be more likely to steer assertive outcomes, the lack of statistical significance and the confidence interval [0.444, 1.093] crossing the value of 1 indicates that this pattern cannot be considered robust. This result implies that the political affiliation of the committee chair does not have a statistically significant likelihood that the EAC will oppose or amend the government's EU position. This finding challenges assumptions drawn from parliamentary control theories, which suggest that opposition actors are more motivated to assert parliamentary influence as a means of constraining executive power. The absence of a

significant effect may be explained by several contextual factors: the committee may operate on a consensual basis irrespective of political leadership, or there may be norms of cooperative behaviour within EU scrutiny procedures that mitigate partisan contestation. It may also reflect a broader trend in Estonian EU policy-making, where the distinction between coalition and opposition is less salient in the European and foreign matters compared to domestic policy arenas. Overall, this finding suggests that formal political leadership does not translate into more assertive behaviour, indicating a more institutional or technocratic orientation in EAC proceedings.

The regression analysis provides partial support for H5, suggesting that when a vote is held before ELAK decisions, the odds of issuing an assertive decision, either to amend or not support the government's position, increase. This is reflected in the variable "vote", which has an odds ratio of 1.426 and a p-value of 0.055. While this p-value is just above the conventional 0.05 threshold, it is close enough to merit consideration as a borderline significant effect. The 95% confidence interval [0.986, 2.039] narrowly includes the null value of 1, indicating some uncertainty but also pointing toward a consistent positive direction of influence. Substantively, this result supports the notion that assertiveness is more likely in institutional settings that enable contestation. Voting mechanisms introduce a formal structure for disagreement and reduce the pressure for consensus, allowing committee members to openly express dissenting views or impose amendments. The presence of a vote may also signal that the issue at hand is more controversial or politically charged, making passive approval less likely. This finding aligns with deliberative and proceduralist models of parliamentary behaviour, which argue that institutional tools like voting shape the intensity and visibility of oversight. It suggests that the ELAK's assertiveness is not only a function of policy content but also of how decisions are procedurally handled. While not definitive, the marginal significance of this effect highlights the procedural sensitivity of parliamentary influence and reinforces the idea that voting is one pathway through which national parliaments exercise their scrutiny powers in EU affairs.

The logistic regression analysis conducted in this chapter explored the factors that shape the ELAK's assertiveness in EU policymaking. The findings reveal that parliamentary influence is neither uniform nor driven purely by institutional maturation. Among the five tested hypotheses, the strongest support is found for the idea that assertiveness is issue- and format-dependent. Specifically, certain Council configurations (ENV and EYCS) are

significantly more likely to provoke assertive decisions, suggesting that the ELAK reacts more forcefully to proposals with high political or normative salience. The opposite applies for FAC, where the domain can be considered bipartisan in terms of coalition-opposition lines. Additionally, assertiveness is far more likely when the item under review is a formal EU initiative, reinforcing the view that the EAC distinguishes between high-stakes legislative acts and routine Council agenda items. The partial effect of voting procedures further indicates that institutional processes matter, as formal mechanisms for contestation correlate with increased scrutiny. In contrast, no support was found for the hypotheses that ELAK assertiveness increases over time or is influenced by the political affiliation of the committee chair. These null findings suggest that neither the effects of the Lisbon Treaty nor opposition leadership necessarily empower the committee to act more assertively. Altogether, the results highlight a pattern of selective, procedural, and issue-sensitive parliamentary engagement, rather than one that is automatically driven by formal powers or partisan conflict. This points to the need for more contextualised understandings of how national parliaments like Estonia's adapt to and interact with the evolving structures of EU governance.

4.4. Discussion

The following subchapter gives the final answers to research questions based on the results of hypothesis testing. Moreover, it highlights the findings in comparison to the previous research.

The first research question asked to define the role of ELAK. Based on the empirical findings presented in sections 4.1 through 4.3, it is evident that the ELAK holds a formally central yet functionally constrained role in Estonia's EU policy process. The current legislation regulating ELAK and previous research indicate that ELAK is systematically involved in confirming Estonia's positions *ex ante* to Council meetings or legislative negotiations. However, its role is heavily shaped by the executive, particularly through the government's control of information and agenda-setting. Moreover, the governing parties' dominance contributes to that. Although ELAK has formal powers to issue mandates and amend positions, the overall data suggest that the majority of decisions are supportive or only acknowledge the executive's stance ("To support" or "To take note of"), indicating a predominance of procedural endorsement over substantive policy shaping. This supports the characterisation of ELAK as a passive "watchdog" (Ehin, 2015), rather than a fully proactive

"policy shaper." Nonetheless, the analysis also reveals instances of assertiveness, especially under certain conditions explored in the subsequent hypotheses. Thus, ELAK's role reflects a hybrid position: it is a formally empowered institutional gatekeeper whose influence varies across time, issue salience, rather than a consistent scrutiniser of governmental positions. These findings suggest that, while Estonia has adapted to Europeanisation through the formal integration of parliamentary scrutiny into EU affairs, the actual influence of ELAK remains conditional, selective, and often dependent on informal practices, political dynamics and executive cooperation.

The second research question focuses on the extent of control the ELAK exercises over the executive. The findings from both the descriptive and logistic regression analyses indicate that while ELAK has the formal authority to shape and amend government positions, it exercises this influence selectively. The majority of decisions fall into the "To support" category, indicating alignment with the executive, while "To change" decisions make up a smaller proportion. The regression results further show that certain factors increase the likelihood of dissent or amendment: the use of formal voting procedures (H5) is practically statistically associated with higher assertiveness, indicating that political dynamics within the committee and procedural formality affect scrutiny levels. The results are more mixed when trying to determine whether the ELAK prefers to intervene in more politically salient or technical issues (H2). Policy areas ENV and EYCS are perceived as more technical, as they fall under COREPER I. However, the former policy area can be considered political during von der Leyen's Commission I, as it was one of the Commission's priorities, but this is limited by the timeframe during its mandate. Moreover, the matters regarding TTE, inherently close to climate reforms, were not deemed to have a statistically significant relation to NDCs. EYCS focused more on copyright, educational and youth matters, where the political salience is not distinctive. Lastly, FAC as a high salience political issue shows a relatively lower level of assertiveness, which further supports that foreign affairs decision-making is done on other grounds.

The notion of preferring to scrutinise technical issues is further strengthened by rejection of H3, meaning that the EU legislative draft itself is comparably facing more assertiveness compared to the regular Council meeting agenda. This poses a further question whether during the overall debates in the Council meetings around a specific policy proposal, where it has not been yet formed as an official legislative draft and moved to decision-making stage,

the ELAK perceives its role more as an "excluded observer" rather than an active shaper of national positions because of the information asymmetry of held negotiations. Hence, when the government asks the ELAK to confirm its positions on the official EU legislative act, the committee may face time constraints in scrutinising. Especially in conditions where national parliaments have relatively lower administrative capacity to process the proposal itself and the government's positions on it.

These findings demonstrate that ELAK's control over the executive depends on institutional procedures and the nature of the issue under review. Although ELAK operates within a formal framework that gives it the right to scrutinise and amend government positions, its practical influence fluctuates. Assertiveness tends to emerge under specific conditions, but even then, ELAK's ability to reshape policy remains limited. ELAK responds to executive proposals rather than setting the agenda. The government's dominance, especially in terms of controlling information and framing alternatives, underscores a structural imbalance in the executive-legislative relationship. This aligns with deparliamentarisation, which highlights how national parliaments often lack the capacity or opportunity to challenge executive authority meaningfully, when they have lost their practical power to them. Thus, the Estonian case reinforces the view that Europeanisation has led to selective institutional adaptation without fully resolving the democratic deficit at the national level. While mechanisms exist to empower parliamentary involvement in EU affairs, their utilisation remains dependent on political will, institutional routines, and the broader strategic environment.

The third research question considers how the role of ELAK has evolved during the 15 years following the Lisbon Treaty. The evidence does not indicate a clear shift from a reactive to a proactive role, or from "watchdog" to "policy shaper". Descriptive data shows inconsistency of ELAK's engagement with EU matters as the number of total decisions varies by year. While some increase in "To change" decisions is observable in recent years, the overall share of assertive outcomes remains relatively low and stable. Hypothesis H1, which tested whether time alone leads to greater assertiveness, as given by the Lisbon Treaty, is not supported in the regression model. This suggests that ELAK has developed more routinised and structured practices without necessarily becoming more interventionist. In effect, ELAK has professionalised its procedures and gained familiarity with EU affairs, but this has not significantly altered the executive-parliamentary power balance. ELAK's behaviour throughout the timeline reflects a pattern of functional adaptation, greater procedural

engagement, better documentation, and assigning rapporteurs, but with limited evidence of a growing willingness to oppose or reshape government positions. Therefore, institutional learning does not automatically lead to increased influence, especially in political systems where executive dominance and information asymmetry remain entrenched.

The absence of a noticeable upward trend in assertive or dissenting decisions limits the argument for deep Europeanisation or empowerment of the Lisbon Treaty. Instead, the ELAK appears to mirror the literature about informative rather than substantive parliamentary involvement. Hence, the apparent effects of deparliamentarisation emphasise the executive dominance and information asymmetry over national parliaments in EU affairs, which results in relative power loss. Although ELAK has strong formal powers and exercises scrutiny occasionally, the government still retains strategic control over timing, information flows, and positions framing. Lastly, ELAK largely fits the "watchdog" characteristics of EAC typologies (Auel et al. 2015), with some elements of a "policy shaper" emerging under specific conditions. Overall, the ELAK case highlights the limits of formal empowerment in influencing institutional hierarchies in EU policymaking. It suggests that without stronger parliamentary capacity or political incentives to challenge executive preferences, the role of national parliaments in EU affairs will remain constrained, even in the post-Lisbon institutional environment.

Although ELAK has developed structured procedures and formal powers, its parliamentary control can be improved by some additional measures. The author finds that the enhancement of ELAK's administrative capacity would benefit that goal. The committee operates at a structural disadvantage because of limited staff and heavy reliance on government-provided information. Were analytical support increased and access to independent policy expertise improved, the informational asymmetry would reduce and enable more substantive scrutiny. However, as this depends on the political will and some more technical policy areas (ENV, EYCS) have already shown higher assertiveness, whether by assigning rapporteurs or temporary high salience of issues, the ELAK should consider strengthening capabilities concerning COREPER II configurations. Moreover, as oppositional behaviour would also depend on the timing of available information and processing it, the additional staff allocated to MPs would theoretically promote a more effective scrutiny system.

5. Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the role of national parliaments in EU policymaking, focusing specifically on Estonia's European Union Affairs Committee (ELAK). The research puzzle centred on the apparent tension between the formal empowerment of national parliaments under the Lisbon Treaty and their practical ability to influence EU decision-making. The primary objective was to investigate how ELAK exercises influence over the national government's EU policy positions, and to evaluate whether this role has become more assertive over time. This dynamic was addressed through a longitudinal case study of Estonia, a small EU member state with a centralised parliamentary committee structure for EU affairs. The choice of Estonia was supported by observing that smaller member states are often overlooked in comparative research, yet they face constraints and opportunities within the EU's multilevel governance system. Thus, the goal was both explanatory and evaluative: to measure ELAK's influence systematically, and to understand under what institutional or political conditions this influence materialises. In doing so, the research contributes to a more grounded understanding of how formal powers are translated into practical influence in EU affairs.

The thesis used two theoretical concepts: Europeanisation and deparliamentarisation. Europeanisation provided the framework for analysing how national parliaments adapt to EU-level governance. In particular, the thesis focused on top-down Europeanisation, where changes at the EU level, such as the Lisbon Treaty, exert pressure on domestic political structures to reform their procedures and increase engagement with EU policymaking. On the other hand, deparliamentarisation reduces those effects, highlighting how, despite formal reforms, national parliaments may remain structurally subordinated to the executive branch due to continuous information asymmetries, weak enforcement mechanisms, and political disincentives for opposition. Methodologically, the thesis employed a single-country case study of Estonia, drawing on an original dataset of more than 3,200 individual decisions made by ELAK from 1 December 2009 to 31 December 2024 to systematically give an overview and look for patterns in ELAK decision-making. This dataset was developed through the coding of ELAK meeting minutes and allowed for both descriptive and regression analysis. Logistic regression models were used to test five hypotheses derived from the theoretical literature, while the nature of decision categories (NDCs) provided the framework for assessing assertiveness. The combination of an extensive 15-year period and linking decision

outcomes to institutional and political variables ensured that the research could meet its objective of evaluating ELAK's actual role in EU policymaking, rather than assuming influence based solely on formal powers.

Three research questions were answered in the empirical analysis. First, regarding the role of ELAK in Estonian EU policymaking, the findings show that the committee is systematically involved in reviewing and confirming the government's EU positions. ELAK meets regularly, exercises its assertiveness on either the government's positions on a Council configuration meeting agenda or a specific EU legislative proposal, and formally approves or takes note of most government proposals. However, its role is more watchdog than policy shaper. ELAK rarely initiates changes in governmental positions, and most decisions reflect support for the executive rather than challenge. Second, on the basis of control exerted over the executive, the analysis discovered that assertiveness by ELAK is conditional rather than continuous. Assertive outcomes, such as amendments or rejections, are more likely when decisions are reached through formal voting, the agenda item under discussion concerns an EU initiative, preferably a technical issue, such as environment, education, youth, sports or culture. Hence, ELAK's influence is limited in relation to the executive and is dependent on institutional design, legal mandates, information access, administrative capacity, the issue under discussion and broader political dynamics. Third, it was explored how ELAK's role has evolved since the Lisbon Treaty. Although ELAK has taken steps to make its work more transparent over time and thus, taking a stronger role as a "public forum", there is no strong evidence that assertiveness has grown at the same rate. Thus, the assessment of ELAK being a watchdog in practice but a policy shaper on paper is still valid.

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Appendix A. Visualisation of Binary Dependent Variable Used in Logistic Regression Model

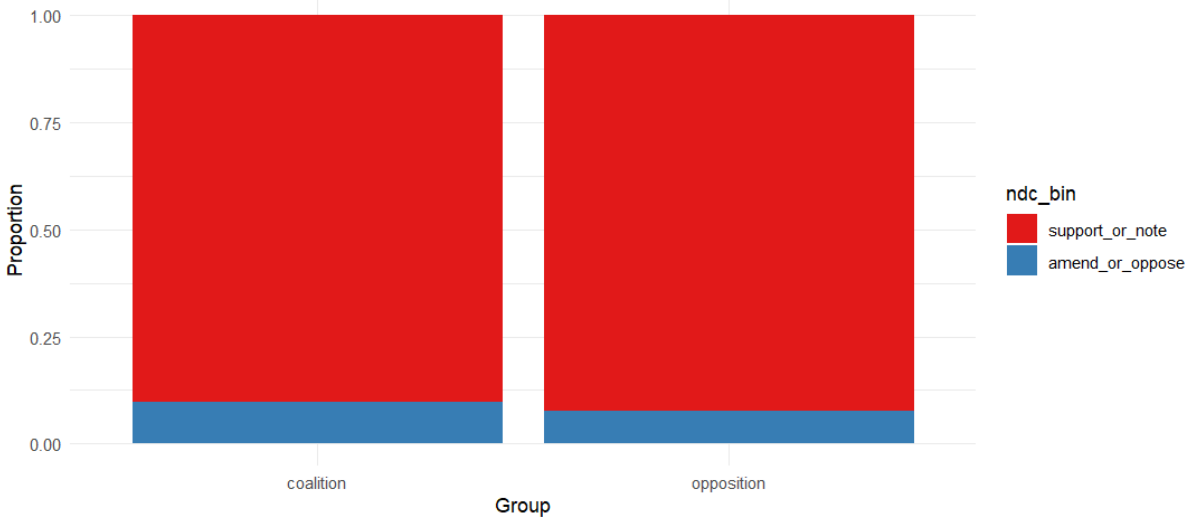


Figure A. Share of assertive and passive decisions by the chair affiliation of the ELAK meetings

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

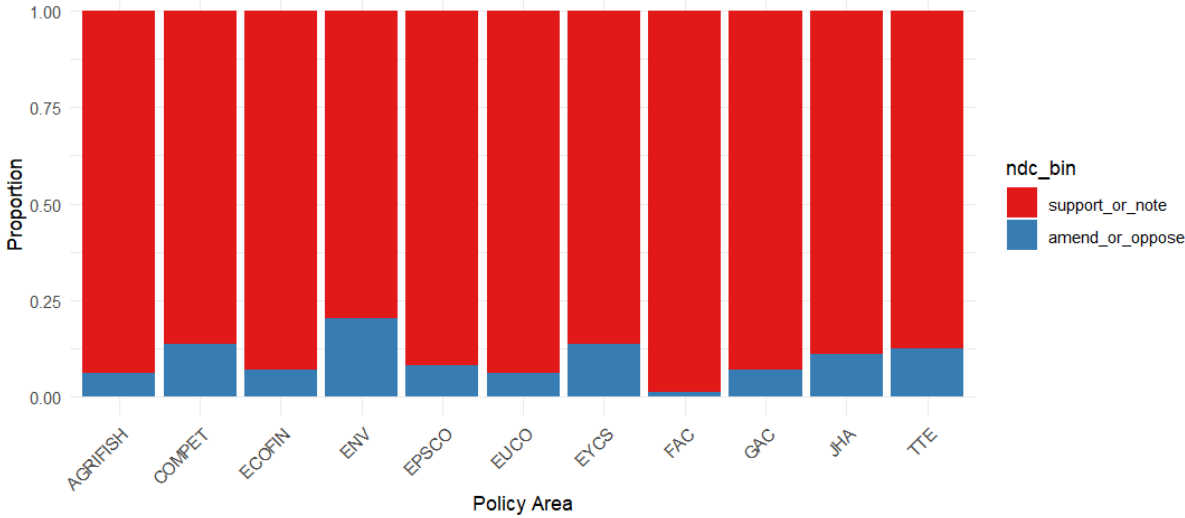


Figure B. Share of unanimous and voted decisions by the chair affiliation of the ELAK meetings

Source: made by the author based on the dataset

Appendix B. Diagnostics of Logistic Regression Model

Table A. Generalised Variance Inflation Factor Analysis

Variable	GVIF	Df	GVIF1/(2·Df)
<i>year</i>	1.102520	1	1.050010
<i>koal_opo</i>	1.019166	1	1.009537
<i>policy</i>	1.204066	10	1.009328
<i>type</i>	1.160844	1	1.077425
<i>vote</i>	1.133026	1	1.064437

Source: made by the author based on the regression model

Appendix C. Visualisation of the Regression Model

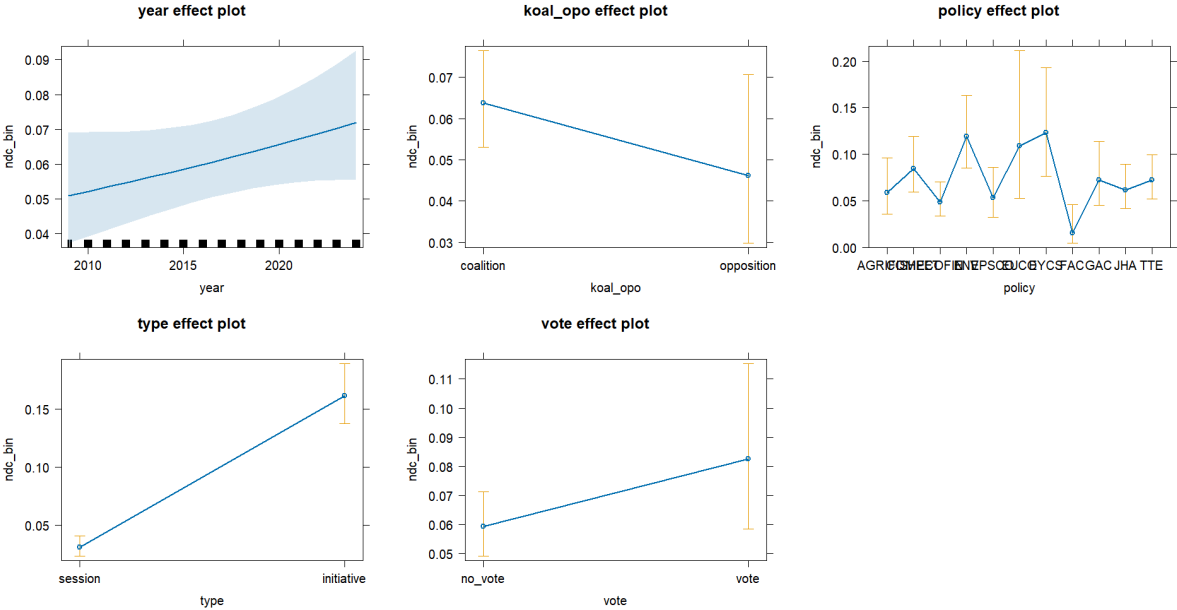


Figure C. Marginal effects of key predictors on assertive and passive decisions

Source: made by the author based on the model

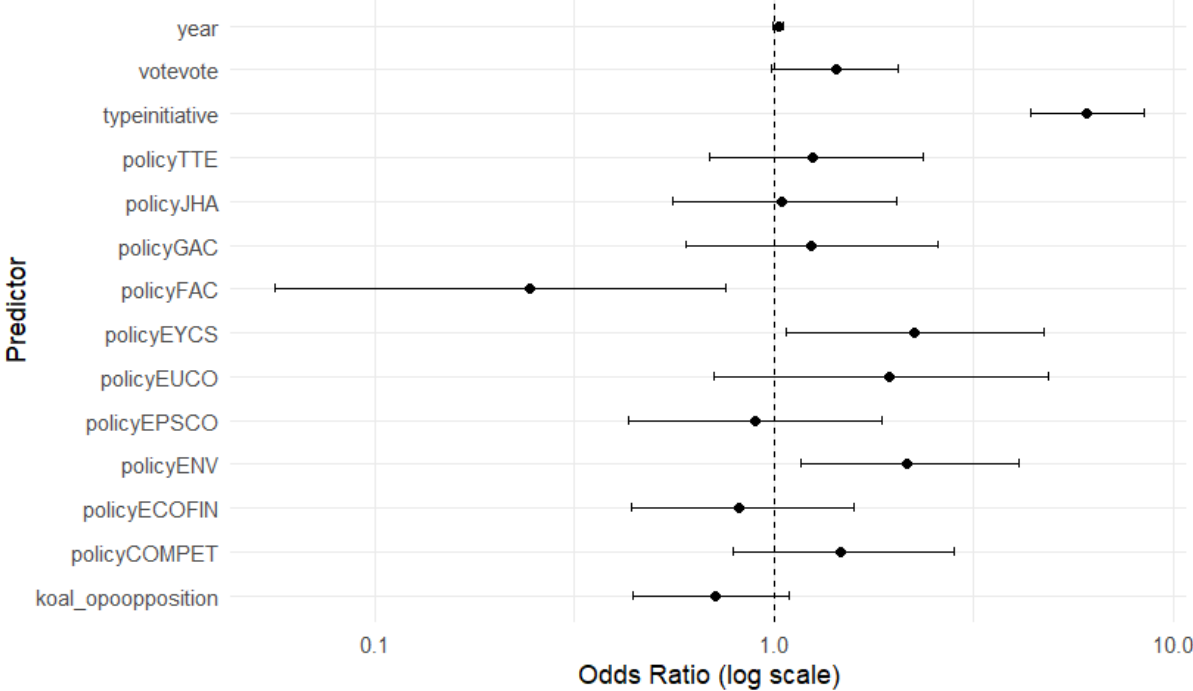


Figure D. Odds ratios of factors influencing assertive and passive decisions on log scale

Source: made by the author based on the model

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