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"GREENLASH" IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT – BETWEEN POLITICISATION AND BUSINESS LOBBYING

MA thesis

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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

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Abstract

The recent political backlash against policies of the European Green Deal is a new phenomenon. This is particularly noteworthy in the case of the European Parliament considering the institutions historical role as an environmental champion, now exhibiting opposition to key environmental policies. The thesis addresses this research puzzle through a comparison of three regulations proposed by the 2019 – 2024 von der Leyen Commission which varied in their degrees of success in the adoption by the European Parliament: the Nature Restoration Law, the Deforestation Regulation, and the Sustainable Use Regulation. Borrowing insights from literature on electoral politicisation and business lobbying, this thesis introduces a novel framework that examines the combined influence of these factors on policy outcomes in the European Parliament. The thesis contends that the convergence of increased public scrutiny and resistance from corporate actors leads to the rejection of a policy. Based on an analysis of EU institutional documents, speeches of the Members of the European Parliament, political group publications, and interest group reports, the thesis reveals that the policy outcomes of the European Parliament are increasingly shaped by the inability to find compromise which is a result of high levels of politicisation and business lobbying as illustrated in the case of the Sustainable Use Regulation.

Keywords: European Green Deal, EU environmental policy, European Parliament, policy failure, electoral politicisation, business lobbying

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List of Abbreviations

ECR – European Conservatives and Reformists

ENVI – Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee

EP – European Parliament

EPP – European People's Party

EU – European Union

FoEE – Friends of the Earth Europe

GAPKI – Indonesian Palm Oil Association

Greens/EFA - The Greens/European Free Alliance

GUE/NGL – European United Left-Nordic Green Left

ID – Identity and Democracy Group

MEP – Member of the European Parliament

MSSD – Most Similar Systems Design

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

OLP – Ordinary Legislative Procedure

PAN Europe – Pesticide Action Network Europe

PPP – Plant Protection Products

S&D – Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature

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Introduction

Climate change harms food systems, energy, and water accessibility, public health, as well as the economy. The main risks of global warming affect the environment, including disruption of ecosystems, loss of agricultural production, water scarcity, and flooding (Bednar-Friedl et al., 2022). Although the environmental policy of the European Union (EU) is formally a field of shared competence, in practice, the Union has particular competence in this policy area (Volgler, 2017, p. 266). Around 80% of the national environmental legislation of the member states is initiated by the EU. Most commonly, in environmental decision-making, the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP) applies. Since the global financial crisis, a shift in EU ambitions and a decline in the ability to initiate and implement more demanding proposals by the European Commission (hereafter 'Commission') in the field of environmental policy have been observed (Zito et al., 2019, p. 201). Since this shift, deregulatory initiatives (Pollex & Lenschow, 2022) and different forms of policy dismantling by the Commission (Steinebach & Knill, 2017) have been typical practices in the policy field.

The announcement of the European Green Deal in 2019[1] seems to represent a turning point. The von der Leyen Commission is proposing ambitious policies and seemingly recommencing as a policy entrepreneur (Pollex & Lenschow, 2022). Some scholars have argued that the European Green Deal is not another initiative, among others, but a third building block of the EU, next to the single market and the European Monetary Union (Bonghardt & Torres, 2022). However, opposition to the burdens imposed by environmental regulations integral to the European Green Deal is increasing. This trend is particularly unexpected in the case of the European Parliament (EP). Since the first European elections in 1979, the European Parliament has taken on a pioneering role in environmental policy (Burns, 2021, p. 128). However, recently, there has been a political backlash against proposals for environmental policies within the EP.[2] The rise of populism has contributed to increasing internal heterogeneity, making it more challenging to reach consensus (ibid., p. 129). In addition, the European People's Party (EPP), the largest political group in the European Parliament, has openly opposed two flagship legislative proposals promoted by Commission aimed at nature restoration and reducing pesticide use (European People's Party, 2023a). This shift is particularly striking, given that

[1] The European Green Deal is "a new growth strategy"(European Commission, 2019) of the EU, aiming to address climate and environmental challenges. The initiative sets out a framework for reaching climate neutrality by 2050 with far-reaching policies across all sectors.

[2] While "EU environmental policy" refers to the entire policy field (Wenzelburger & Zohlnhöfer, 2015, p.8), references in this thesis to proposals for policies specifically pertain to legislative acts, such as regulations.

Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission and the proponent of these initiatives, is herself a member of the EPP. The European Parliament is seemingly moving away from the role of an environmental pioneer to an environmental laggard.

What factors contribute to the European Parliament's opposition towards environmental policies of the European Green Deal? By tackling this question, the thesis aims at explaining the conditions for the rejection of a draft legislative act by the European Parliament during the plenary stage of the institutions first reading (European Parliament, 2020, p. 20).[3] I analyse three regulations proposed by the 2019 - 2024 von der Leyen Commission that seem similar at first glance. All three policy proposals focus on the issue of restoring biodiversity and the protection of nature. The selected proposals are regulations proposed in the framework of the European Green Deal, all of which fall under the ordinary legislative procedure. Additionally, the same institutional entities, such as the European Parliament's Committee on Environment, Public Health, and Food Safety (ENVI), are responsible for the proposals within the European Parliament. Despite these similarities, the policy proposals differ in their outcomes – the dependent variable of the thesis. One of the regulations was rejected by the EP, while the second one was adopted despite substantial backlash. The third regulation was adopted by the European Parliament without significant opposition.[4]

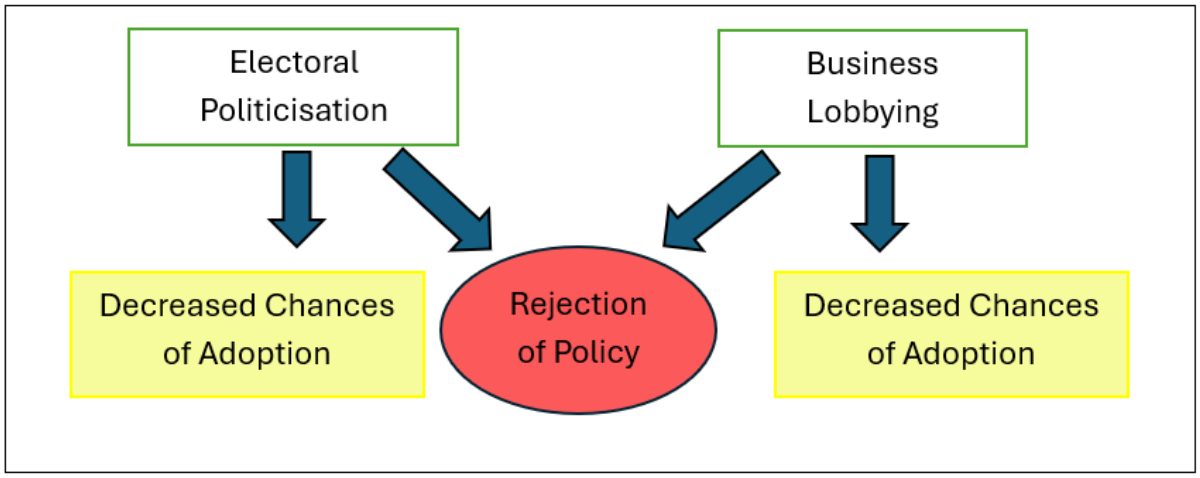
I argue that what explains the variation in the dependent variable is the interplay between electoral and business pressures. Based on the literature on electoral politics (Rokkan, 2015; Hix & Marsh, 2007; Schimmelfennig et al., 2015), I assume that when an environmental policy becomes highly politicised, public opinion significantly influences the decisions of the MEPs. Driven by the desire for re-election, MEPs become more responsive to the concerns and preferences of their voters (Klüver, 2013, p. 36). The first independent variable of the thesis is, therefore, ***the level of politicisation***. Drawing on the literature on business influence (Culpepper, 2011; Coen & Richardson, 2009; Bouwen, 2002), I assume that corporate actors, particularly large companies and business associations, possess significant resources and leverage to influence policy outcomes. To protect their interests, they engage in extensive lobbying efforts to sway MEPs towards positions that align with their business objectives. As

[3] A draft legislation is rejected, if the institution fails to adopt the committee report by a simple majority of votes or if an amendment proposing the outright rejection of the draft legislative act is adopted (European Parliament, 2019, Rule 59).

[4] I refer to them as regulations, however, I specifically mean the committee reports on the regulations that are subject to a plenary vote and form the basis of the EP's first reading position.

profit-seeking actors, businesses often advocate for maintaining the status quo[5] (Gross, 2017). The second independent variable is, therefore, ***the level of business lobbying***. I expect that when a policy proposal discussed in the EP is either highly politicised or subject to business lobbying, the likelihood of its successful adoption diminishes. While these two assumptions can be made based on existing literature on politicisation and business lobbying, my novel argument highlights the convergence of politicisation and business lobbying. I expect that when both factors are high, the outcome is likely to be the outright rejection of the policy in the EP, as reaching a compromise becomes impossible.

Figure 1: Explaining Policy Rejection: The Overlap Between Politcisation and Busines Lobbying



The focus will be only on the European Parliament, the only directly elected EU institution. The EP has evolved from being a consultative body to becoming a powerful co-legislator (McCormick, 2020). Its voice counts as much as that of the Council of the European Union (hereafter 'Council') in the ordinary legislative procedure, which makes up the majority of the legislative procedures used to adopt legislation (Lehmann, 2009, p. 44). As a co-legislator, the EP is known for being extremely active (Nugent, 2017, p. 201). Another reason for choosing the European Parliament is that the institution is more transparent and visible than the Council. It is, therefore, easier to access important documents such as committee meetings and amendments. I argue that the European Parliament is the ideal institution for examining this research question, as it serves as the arena where electoral politics and business lobbying meet at the EU level (Kluger Dionigi, 2017; Coen & Richardson, 2009).

[5] Status quo refers to the current state of things. In the context of business influence, the term refers to the existing regulatory or institutional arrangements that businesses seek to maintain (Culpepper, 2011, p.6).

First, the case of the draft legislative act passing in the European Parliament swiftly and with minimal complications is the report on the regulation on minimising the risk of deforestation and forest degradation associated with products placed on the EU market and exported from the EU (hereafter 'Deforestation Regulation'). It aims at reducing the EU's contribution to deforestation and forest degradation. Proposed by the Commission in November 2021, it seeks to reduce the consumption of products linked to deforestation while promoting 'deforestation-free' commodities (Halleux, 2023a). Second, the case of the regulation being adopted despite significant setbacks is the regulation on nature restoration (hereafter 'Nature Restoration Law'). It was proposed by the Commission on June 22, 2022, as part of the EU's 2030 biodiversity strategy. It aims to implement restoration measures across 20% of Europe's land and sea by 2030, enhancing biodiversity in rivers, forests, agriculture, and marine areas. The regulation requires member states to develop restoration plans to achieve the targets (Halleux, 2024). Third, the case of a regulation that was rejected by the European Parliament is the regulation on the sustainable use of plant protection products (hereafter 'Sustainable Use Regulation' or 'SUR'). The draft legislative act was proposed by the European Commission on the same day as the Nature Restoration Law and is part of the European Green Deal's farm-to-fork strategy. The regulation targets the agricultural sector by setting the goal of cutting the overall chemical pesticide use and risk by 50%, as well as reducing hazardous pesticide use by half by 2030 (European Parliament, 2024). The thesis focuses on a specific timeframe: from November 2021, when the first regulation analysed (the Deforestation Regulation) was proposed by the Commission, to November 2023, marked by the European Parliament's rejection of the committee report on the Sustainable Use Regulation.

Table 1: Overview of the three Case with Regard to their Outcomes

Regulation	Objective	Outcome in EP plenary
Deforestation Regulation	Minimise the EU's contribution to deforestation and promote deforestation-free commodities	Adopted with minimal complications
Nature Restoration Law	Implement restoration measures across 20% of European land and sea by 2030	Adopted despite significant setbacks
Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR)	Cut overall chemical pesticide use and risk by 50%, and reduce hazardous pesticide use by half by 2030	Rejected by the European Parliament

I employ document analysis as the primary research method to explore the influence of politicisation and business lobbying on EU environmental regulations in the European Parliament. A variety of data sources are used, including institutional documents such as ENVI committee draft reports, the final report of the European Parliament, speeches by MEPs and publications from political groups and interest groups. The data is gathered from official EU databases like EUR-Lex and the Legislative Observatory, as well as from transcripts of plenary sessions and publications from political groups, ensuring comprehensive insight into how the regulations were discussed and framed. Additionally, publications from corporate actors and environmental non-governmental organisations (NGO) are examined.

The thesis makes two contributions. First, it contributes to the understanding of a unique and new phenomenon in the European Parliament. The recent backlash against environmental policies in the European Parliament has not yet been explored in literature. While different forms of policy dismantling (Steinebach & Knill, 2017) and deregulatory initiatives (Pollex & Lenschow, 2022) by the European Commission have been researched, the European Parliament's role as a site of policy gridlock remains underexplored (Burns, 2021). Second, a novel theoretical framework is introduced that synthesises the concepts of politicisation and business lobbying. It highlights the unique dynamic that occurs when both factors are high, suggesting that this overlap leads to the rejection of policies. Given that the European Green Deal remains a central item on the EU political agenda, as underscored by von der Leyen's speech on 27 November 2024, stating, "We must and will stay the course on the goals of the European Green Deal" (von der Leyen, 2024), the insights of the thesis could be valuable concerning the future progress regarding policies of the Green Deal.

The thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. It develops an approach to understanding policy outcomes, specifically policy failure, by exploring the concepts of politicisation and business lobbying and the interplay between the two factors. The third chapter describes the methodology, including the method, research design, case selection, operationalisation of variables, the data used for the research, and limitations. The fourth chapter outlines the results of the empirical analysis. First, I assess the Nature Restoration Law as a case of high politicisation. Next, I analyse the Deforestation Regulation as a case of neither high politicisation nor high business lobbying. Third, I examine the Sustainable Use Regulation as a case where there was an overlap between politicisation and business influence. The fifth chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the research.

1. Theoretical Framework

There are different frameworks for analysing policy change or policy success in public policy. The policy cycle framework, originating from Lasswell (1956), views policy-making as a sequence of different phases (Jann & Wegrich, 2007): Agenda-Setting, Policy Formulation and Decision-Making, Implementation, Evaluation and Termination. It provides a valuable tool for simplifying the understanding of the policy-making process (Mwije, 2013, p. 18). By simplifying the process, it enhances the comprehension of the diverse activities involved in policy formulation and the roles of key actors and institutions (ibid., p. 10). While the policy cycle model acknoledges that policy change can be an outcome of varoius phases of the policy-cycle, mainly in the evaluation stage, it the focus is rather on the explanation of the creation and effects of policies (Wenzelburger & Zohlnhöfer, 2015, p. 3).

As a criticism of the policy cycle, Sabatier's Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) has become one of the most widely used analytical frameworks in policy analysis (Bandelow, 2015, p. 278). Initially, the focus was mainly on examining the influence of policy learning on policy changes. The ACF assumes that political decisions are made in policy subsystems (Sabatier, 1987, p. 652). Another assumption is that politically relevant actors are guided by belief systems. Sabatier's framework argues that policy change is primarily driven by fluctuations in dominant beliefs within a specific policy domain (ibid., p. 650). Another prominent framework for analysing policy change is Kingdon’s Multiple-Streams Framework (Kingdon, 2003). His considerations are based on elements of the Garbage Can Model (GCM) by Cohen et al. (1972). It is assumed that political processes are shaped by the problem, politics, and policy streams, as well as by policy entrepreneurs. Agenda change depends on the state of the three streams, the existence of a policy window and the commitment of a policy entrepreneur (Herweg & Zohlnhöfer, 2015, p. 306).

Within the EU context, theories of European integration and Europeanisation also examine how the integration process or the Europeanisation influence policy-making. (Börzel & Panke, 2015). Hooghe and Marks (2001), the developers of the Multi-Level Governance approach, view European integration as a process of creating an institutional, structural entity (polity) in which authority and influence on policy-making are distributed at different levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 2). According to the authors, European politics can be explained using instruments of comparative politics as they are applied to national political systems since these approaches are interested in the general character of the EU system and the design of European

governance (ibid., p. 184). In the context of Europeanisation as a concept in policy research, which mainly deals with the interaction between the EU level and the member states, top-down Europeanisation can be conceptualised as a theory for domestic policy change (Börzel & Panke, 2015, p. 217).

This thesis does not use well-known frameworks of policy change. Instead, in this chapter, I develop a theoretical framework that focuses on electoral and business pressure on the European Parliament. While the aforementioned frameworks (AFC, Multiple-Streams Framework) emphasise gradual changes in policy over time, this thesis focuses on explaining legislative failure in the form of policy rejection within a specific EU institution. The European Parliament operates differently from member states' parliaments. While the Multi-Level Governance explains the broader system in which the EU drafts and adopts policies, it does not capture the everyday political debates and vote calculations within the EP.

First, I show that when policy issues such as environmental regulations become salient and controversial, MEPs are especially sensitive to their constituents' opinions. They become salient and controversial through the process of ***politicisation*** (De Bruycker, 2017). While the first section of the theoretical framework establishes that politicisation complicates policy-making, the second section analyses the phenomenon of ***business lobbying*** within the EP. Large corporations seek to advance business interests (Klüver, 2013), which generally leads to them advocating for a status quo regarding a policy issue (Gross, 2017). As they bring substantial resources and leverage into policy-making in the EP, I argue that when corporate actors oppose a policy and engage in extensive lobbying, the chances of policy adoption decrease.

The last section of the theoretical framework presents a novel argument. Literature suggests that businesses engage in lobbying when public attention to an issue is low (Culpepper, Culpepper, 2011, p. 6). However, this section argues that the relationship between business lobbying and political salience is more nuanced as it is possible for business lobbying to remain highly influential, even in the face of heightened political attention. The overlap of politicisation and business lobbying leads to the rejection of a policy within the EP. When the level of politicisation and the level of business lobbying is high, compromise becomes nearly impossible as MEPs find themselves under pressure from both the public and business sectors.

1.1. Electoral Politicisation

This section of the theoretical framework shows that politicisation in the context of the European Parliament is a process that shapes the relationship between voter's opinions and MEPs in the EU policy-making process (Copeland et al., 2024, p.3). Politicisation leads to heightened and vociferous political debates, a phenomenon increasingly evident in the domain of EU environmental policy (Delreux & Burns, 2019, p.341). Within this charged political environment, MEPs are compelled to consider public opinion. As office-seeking actors interested in preserving their seats in the European Parliament, they are particularly sensitive to the preferences and concerns of their electorates (Zürn, 2013, p. 14; Klüver, 2013, p. 36). I argue that if a proposed EU regulation becomes politicised generating significant public attention and controversy, leading to a large number of people caring about the issue, the chances of the policy proposal being successfully adopted in the EP diminish. I start by reviewing existing literature on politicisation in the context of the EU. I acknowledge the diverse conceptualisations of this phenomenon and clarify the specific understanding employed in this thesis. Next, I examine the role of MEPs as vocal representatives of public interests. Finally, I refer to the EU environmental policy as an example of politicisation due to its increased salience and broad impact on public interests.

Due to its multidisciplinary origins, the term "politicisation" has been given varying interpretations depending on the sub-discipline of political science. This variation reflects the diverse intellectual traditions and backgrounds within fields such as European studies, political theory, international relations, and comparative politics (Wiesner, 2020, p. 39). In general, politicisation can be defined as "[…] the demand for or the act of transporting a decision or an institution into the realm of politics" Zürn, 2013, p. 13, author's translation) or as "the act of marking something as political […]" (Wiesner, 2021, p. 5). The term is thus understood as a dynamic process (Meiering & Schäfer, 2020, p. 16), whereby an issue of non-political character becomes political. The process of politicisation can take place on different levels and in diverse ways, encompassing both top-down and bottom-up perspectives (De Bruycker, 2017, p.606). From a top-down perspective, political entrepreneurs such as certain policy-makers, parties and institutions address voters by making an issue a matter of political debate. From a bottom-up perspective, individual activism, social and environmental movements and protests frame an issue in political terms. Moreover, politicisation can take place in two different ways. Firstly, it can involve bringing issues that were not previously considered political into the public debate and making them a part of the political discussion. Secondly, it can refer to changes in

how political decisions are made, or the normative framework of the political system itself (Meiering & Schäfer, 2020).

In the context of contemporary European studies, it is widely agreed upon that public apathy, technocratic decision-making and the need for unanimous agreement are no longer the keywords for characterising EU politics (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 603). From a postfunctionalist perspective, the EU is a multi-level governance system and the European integration is described as a process of creating an institutional entity in which authority and influence on policy-making are distributed at different levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 2).[6] As domestic and European politics have become more interconnected, the EU has grown into a prominent issue in national elections (Hix & Marsh, 2007). At the same time, an increasing number of policy issues have been shifted to the EU level. The politicisation process drew mass publics into the political discourse surrounding European integration and led to pluralising actors and positions (Hooghe & Marks 2009, p. 6). The EU's elite-centric approach is diminishing, and European issues increasingly attract public attention. As a result, the EU is being evaluated against the criteria of a normatively demanding political system and is under pressure to legitimise itself (Zürn, 2006, p. 244). In light of these developments, there is a greater divergence of policy-relevant views and a limited scope for agreement on policy issues (Hooghe & Marks 2009, p. 14).

In the context of specific EU policies, the term "politicisation" is often conceptualised and measured through specific dimensions and criteria. While the terminology employed for these dimensions may differ among scholars, the underlying meaning is often similar. The most common criteria for politicisation is "expansion of the circle of those involved in the conflict" (Grande & Kriesi, 2013, p. 84, original in German: *Vergrößerung des Kreises der Konfliktbeteiligten*), "range" (Meiering & Schäfer, 2020, p.19, original in German: *Reichweite*), or "actor expansion" (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 605). This criterion refers to the circle of actors involved. On the one hand, this could point to the number of people, who voice their opinion on a policy issue, who protest against or in favour of a policy, or who are generally interested in a policy topic (Meiering & Schäfer, 2020, p. 19). Another understanding of this dimension refers to specific groups that a policy issue has reached such as large corporations or NGOs (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 607). While from a top-down perspective, politicians by

[6] Unlike intergovernmentalism, this approach does not assume that national governments integrate into the EU only to maintain their existence as states. Instead, it is an actor-centred approach that emphasises the diversity of domestic and non-state actors and their interplay at different levels (Knodt & Große Hüttmann, 2012, p. 190; Bendlin, 2017, p.18).

publicly addressing issues of public interest, can stimulate the activity of civil society groups, the occurrence of business lobbying is a balancing force within politicisation, limiting the predominant public interest in EU political debates (ibid., p. 616).

In addition to increased actor involvement, the heightened salience of a policy issue is considered to be another important indicator of politicisation. The salience of an issue influences political behaviour (Hobolt et al., 2008, p.111). The more salient an issue, the greater the political rewards or consequences for a decision-maker (Keller, 2018, p. 292; Burstein, 2003, p. 29). The salience of a policy issue can be understood as the significance or importance voters assign to political information. Another perspective is that salience refers to prominence, meaning the degree to which an issue is at the forefront of people's thoughts (Wlezien, 2005, p. 557). Sometimes, voters hold deeply entrenched positions on a topic, making compromise difficult. Regardless of the definition employed, it is widely acknowledged within political science that a salient issue can affect the public's political behaviour, as they are more likely to favour a candidate who shares their view of an issue (Wlezien et al., 2016, p. 10). Citizens are more inclined to watch the politicians' stances and actions more closely if an issue is more important to them. Conversely, less essential issues enjoy less public scrutiny, and the pressure to consider public opinion is lower (ibid.). A highly salient issue generates significant public debate and is consequently more likely to be addressed by politicians (bottom-up politicisation). Politicians may, however, strategically stress the significance of an issue by openly appealing to public concerns (top-down politicisation) (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 606).

Highly salient policy issues often result in intense public debates and lead to polarised opinions. This dimension of politicisation is referred to as “intensity” (Meiering & Schäfer, 2020, p.25, original in German: *Intensität*) or “polarization” (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 604). It refers to the extent to which different actors disagree on certain aspects of a policy issue (ibid., p. 607). This degree of divergence of opinions leads to conflictual debates between the different stakeholders. In this context, extreme positions are taken on policy issues while neutral and indifferent attitudes are suppressed. In an extreme polarisation scenario, coalitions of different social groups with opposing positions confront each other (de Wilde et al., 2016, p. 7). Due to this dimension of politicisation, the phenomenon can also be defined as the “expansion of the scope of political conflict” (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 16).

The presence of vociferous public debates surrounding a policy issue allows for the characterisation of politicisation as "loud"(Busemeyer & Garritzmann, 2022, p. 59) or "noisy" (Culpepper, 2021, p. 135) politics. Culpepper (2021) describes noisy politics as a style of politics characterised by a public discourse in which emotionally charged rhetoric is used and opinions are polarised. This type of politics has recently emerged within the EP. Scholars have explored the issue of politicisation in relation to the growing representation of MEPs from political groups outside the grand coalition consisting of the European People's Party (EPP) and the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) and how this trend has disrupted the dynamics in the policy-making process (Crum, 2020). As a result, there is an increased polarisation of views, as demonstrated by Eurosceptic contestation and the deepening disunity between and within political groups (Copeland et al., 2024, p. 5). However, "noisy" politics can also be viewed as a high-salience situation where voter preferences, when in conflict with corporate interests, may become the decisive factor for policy-makers (Rinscheid, 2020).

Given these different conceptualisations of politicisation and the context of this thesis which aims at identifying factors contributing to policy failure in certain EU environmental policies in the EP, politicisation is defined as a dynamic process whereby a policy issue becomes part of a heated public political debate. There is a diverse range of actors involved who actively and vocally engage in public discourse on a specific policy issue. Furthermore, in this arena of "loud" or "noisy" politics, policy-makers tend to adopt distinct and often opposing standpoints as there is an increased intensity of the discourse and public disagreement regarding the policy issue in question. This understanding of politicisation assumes that besides generating the most suitable policy option for solving a problem, policy-making also entails considering societal values, priorities, and voters' interests (Keller, 2018, p. 291). While it is widely agreed that public opinion influences government regulation in democratic countries (Burstein, 2003), when it comes to the European Parliament, the degree to which MEPs address public opinion differs.

It is widely agreed on that compared to the European Commission or the Council of the EU, MEPs are the most vocal representatives of public interests in EU legislative procedures (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 615). However, compared to national parliaments and due to the nature of the EP elections as "second-order" elections, some scholars have argued that MEPs are less

sensitive to their electorates.[7] As national political leadership is not at stake in European elections, voters, parties, and politicians care less about it, leading to a low turnout (Hix & Marsh, 2007). Another aspect of this theory of EP elections as "second-order" elections, is that voters are more likely to "punish" (ibid., p. 495) the current governmental parties and, therefore, engage in protest voting rather than strategic voting (Ehin & Talving, 2021). Based on the theory of the electoral cycle, opposition and smaller parties are more likely to gain votes as citizens express dissatisfaction with the national government's performance (De Sio et al. 2014: 85). From this perspective, it can be argued that the electoral connection between voters and MEPs stays frail as citizens neither punish nor reward MEPs nor care about EU policy matters (Hix & Marsh, 2007, p. 507; Kluger Dionigi, 2017, p. 19).

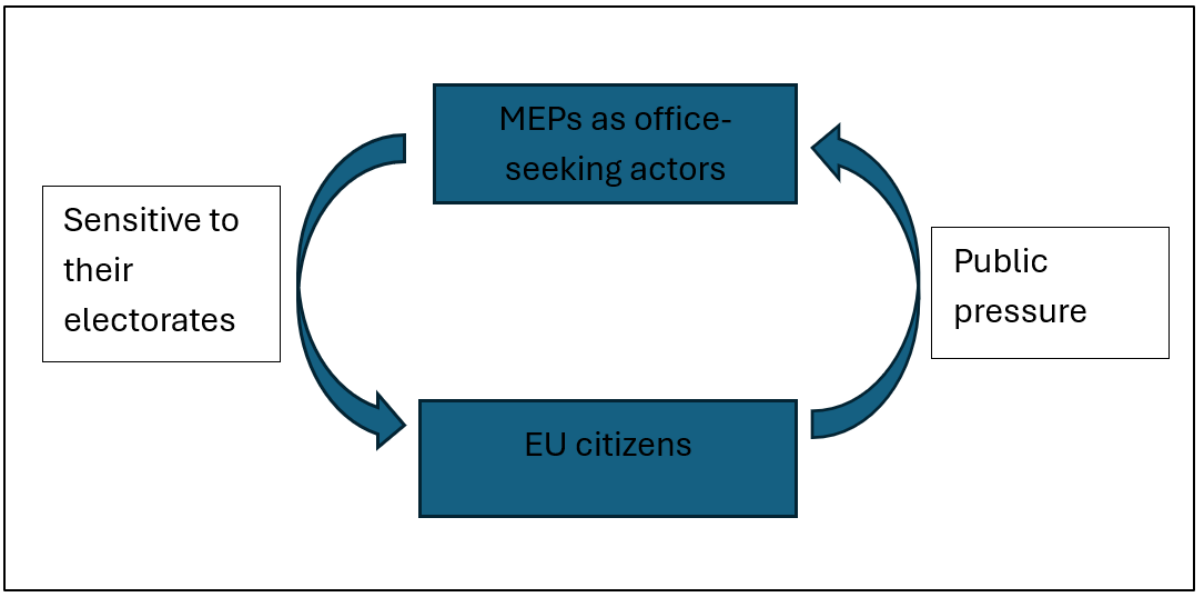
Even though, according to the theory of EP elections as "second-order" elections, the chances for the re-election of an MEP are influenced by factors outside of their direct control, such as whether their national party is in power, MEPs are not indifferent to voters' perceptions and are sensitive to their signals. Whitaker (2014) tackles why MEPs seek to remain in their current positions for extended periods instead of pursuing national political careers. He refers to the concept of MEPs as policy seekers, meaning that they are motivated by policy goals while remaining conscious of their prospects for re-election. Daniel (2015) explores the connection between MEPs who seek to maintain their professional ambition at the European level and the historical development of the EP. As the institution has gained legislative power and become a powerful co-legislator, more MEPs have wanted to pursue or keep a career in the EP. Therefore, according to him, the increasing influence of the European Parliament shapes the career trajectories of the MEPs.

This thesis assumes that MEPs are office-seeking actors interested in preserving their seats in the European Parliament, which is why they strive for re-election (Klüver, 2013, p. 36). To achieve the goal of being re-elected in the European Parliament, MEPs continuously put effort into cultivating and maintaining strong citizen support to ensure their continued electoral success. The demands of EU citizens need to be taken into account as MEPs are dependent on the support of their national voters, who delegate the representation of their interests to the European level (ibid.). As representatives of EU citizens, directly elected every five years, MEPs are attuned to the preferences and opinions of their voters. This dynamic between EU

[7] De Sio et al. (2014) argue that the 2014 European elections can be viewed as the "first" true European elections as the electoral campaigns in many countries focus on European issues rather than national politics (De Sio et al., 2014).

citizens and MEPs creates a loop (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 606). On one side, MEPs actively appeal to public interests in order to ensure re-election. On the other side, this responsiveness of MEPs to public concerns enables EU citizens to exert various forms of public pressure on MEPs.

Figure 2: Relationship Between EU citizens and MEPs (Adapted from De Bruycker, 2017)



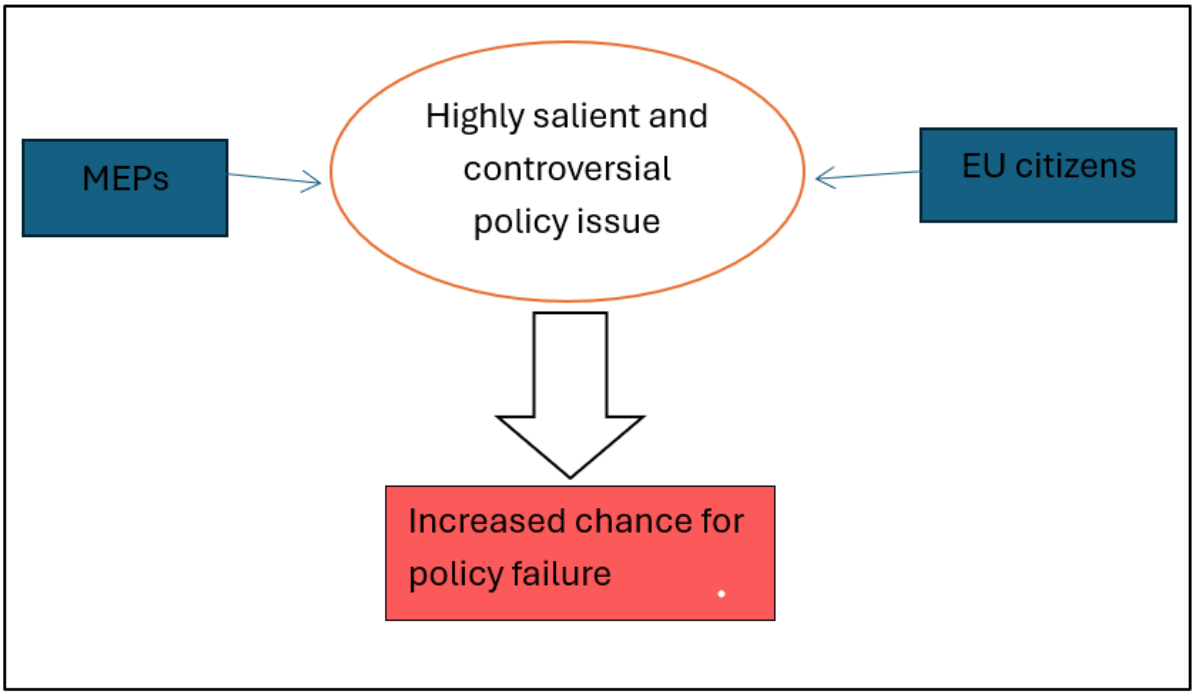
While public participation is a cornerstone of EU environmental policy (Zebek, 2020), the technical nature of environmental legislation has, until recently, resulted in a perception of the policy field as rather apolitical (Wurzel et al., 2019, p. 254). Most EU citizens view the EU as the most suitable venue for addressing environmental and climate change challenges (Hofmann, 2021, p. 319). Strong political leadership is crucial in gaining citizens' support for climate change mitigation. Public support diminishes if politicians lack interest and commitment in addressing climate change (Lipari et al., 2024, p. 13). If voters' interests are represented unsuitably, a miscalculation in the acceptance rate can occur, which can lead to misleading policy-makers and hindering their ability to provide the necessary support (ibid.). While there is clear scientific evidence suggesting that greenhouse gas emissions need to be decreased and biodiversity preserved, EU environmental regulations can have (re)distributional consequences as some people will bear the costs. Public opinion on these specific matters is increasingly divided, and the EU itself is subject to politicisation. Therefore, it is crucial that EU decisions are perceived as legitimate by EU citizens (Hofmann, 2021, p. 329).

While environmental concerns are not equally significant to economic concerns, environmental policies can affect many people. Politicians seek re-election and are, therefore,

more likely to consider policies expected to affect many people (Guntermann & Persson, 2021). Walgrave and Soontjens (2023) argue that politicians learn about citizens' preferences and that direct contact with citizens is considered the most helpful way to learn about the public interest. However, estimating the will of the public is not an easy task as politicians are not able to directly perceive their electorate (ibid.). To ensure re-election, MEPs have to listen to the masses. While environmental concerns may not be prioritised over economic concerns, recognising that environmental policies directly impact the lives of citizens (Hofmann, 2021, p. 319), politicians seeking re-election are increasingly incentivised to take public concerns into account.

Given what the literature discusses about politicisation and the role of public opinion, the theoretical expectation is that if a proposed EU environmental regulation discussed in the EP becomes politicised in a way that is politically charged and controversial among the public and the MEPs, the likelihood of its successful adoption diminishes. If EU citizens care about a specific regulation and voice their opinion, MEPs, motivated by a desire to be re-elected, are responsive to their opinion (Klüver, 2013). When a regulation is politicised and has significant implications for a large number of people, MEPs are more likely to consider these impacts carefully when forming their stance. Controversial topics lead to intense public debates making the adoption of the regulation more difficult (De Bruycker, 2017). This is because MEPs become more cautious when engaging in highly salient and polarised policies, as missteps could hinder their re-election. The increased politicisation of environmental regulation within the European Parliament is, therefore, expected to diminish the probability of successful regulatory adoption.

Figure 3: Effect of Politicisation on Policy Adoption



1.2. Business Lobbying

This section of the theoretical framework examines the phenomenon of business lobbying in the EP, by conceptualising it as a process whereby corporate actors defined as either large companies or business associations[8] try to influence MEPs to benefit business interests (Lehmann, 2009, p. 40). Given their substantial effect on the economy, their vast resources and expertise, corporate actors are in a privileged position to be heard by politicians (Bouwen, 2004). As actors who aim to maximise their profits (Klüver, 2013), businesses tend to resist policy changes that may disrupt existing market structures or increase operational costs. As a result, I argue that the successful adoption of new, stricter regulations within the EP becomes more unlikely as the intensity of business lobbying efforts aimed at maintaining the status quo increases. I start by showing that in contrast to the more visible forms of "loud" or "noisy" politics, this arena of policy influence is often characterised as "quiet" politics as interactions between corporate actors and policy-makers frequently occur behind the scenes (Culpepper, 2011, p. 12). The section proceeds by providing a comprehensive definition of business lobbying within the EP framework, examining the sources of corporate power within the EU, and exploring the specific dynamics of business lobbying in the context of EU environmental

[8] EU Business associations are made up of national associations and large companies (Greenwood, 2017, p. 74).

policy. This theoretical framework will then be used to formulate specific research expectations.

To ensure the development of beneficial policies, corporate actors such as businesses take part in corporate political activity (Coen & Richardson, 2009, p. 1). To describe this interaction between policy-makers and businesses, Culpepper (2011) characterizes this phenomenon as "quiet politics". It is defined as a concept according to which businesses have the ability to shape policies and regulations while working behind the scenes (Kluger Dionigi, 2017). Culpepper argues that this influence of corporate actors depends on the salience of an issue to the public and politicians. Businesses are more powerful in influencing policies when the political salience of an issue is low (Culpepper, 2011, p. 177). In this case, corporate actors gain disproportionate power which has significant implications for democratic governance. It shows that the traditional assumptions about politics in democracies, which imply that politicians always represent the voters' interests and that policy-making takes place only in the legislative arena, do not fully reflect the reality (Coglianese & Carrigan, 2016). Instead, corporate control is often shaped by negotiations that take place under the radar (Culpepper, 2011, p. 180).

By advocating their interests and engaging in corporate political activity, businesses pursue lobbying, which can be defined as the act of influencing policy and decision-making processes to benefit the interests of a specific group or organisation (Coen & Richardson, 2009, p. 1). The term 'lobbying' carries a strong connotation and is understood differently across EU nations and beyond (Greenwood, 2017, p.1). Berny and Moore (2021, p.147) define lobbying as the variety of activities aimed at shaping public policy. This can be achieved either directly through the decision-making process by contacting government officials or indirectly through the broader environment of decision-makers, such as through protests or the media. Kluger Dionigi (2017) has a similar definition and adds that interest groups forge their interests "through information, arguments, or threats" (Kluger Dionigi, 2017, p. 1). Influence is in this context defined as "the ability of an actor to shape a political decision in line with his preferences" (Klüver, 2013, p. 7). Kluger Dionigi (2017) provides a more precise definition tailored to the EP and defines influence as an "achievement of interest groups' goal in decision-making, which is caused by interest groups' own intervention (lobbying activity) and/or MEPs' anticipation of

them" (Kluger Dionigi, 2017, p. 6).[9] Given these different understandings of lobbying, this thesis defines business lobbying in the European Parliament as a process, whereby corporate actors have the ability to shape the policy-making process in the EP and make use of this capability in a manner that is conducive to the realisation of policy objectives that are beneficial to them.

Businesses that lobby EU institutions such as the European Parliament act in their self-interest. Their ultimate goal is to maximise their profits (Coen et al., 2021, p. 61). To reach this goal, corporate actors can try to increase the number of people consuming their goods or services or reduce their costs of providing these goods and services. However, to do this, businesses also rely on the political environment of the region in which they operate (Klüver, 2013, p. 28). If corporations want to run their business in the EU, their products and services have to meet EU regulatory standards. Moreover, they have to pay taxes and/or customs to be part of the EU internal market (ibid.). Therefore, businesses actively engage in efforts to shape the political landscape. Literature suggests their success in achieving these objectives. Stigler (1971), who developed the theory of economic regulation to identify who benefits from or is disadvantaged by regulation and how the regulatory framework is determined, argues that "regulation is acquired by the industry and is designed and operated primarily for its benefit" (Stigler, 1971, p. 3).

However, this theory of regulatory capture[10] does not fully represent the reality of EU policy-making. The EU's pluralist design made up of multiple institutions with different roles and powers, diverse stakeholders and a tendency towards transparency and openness, tends to hinder such a takeover of power (Greenwood, 2019, p. 10). The term "pluralism" in this context can have different implications. Elite pluralism suggests that businesses are the most influential actors in Brussels and are successful at forming alliances across policy fields (Eising, 2007). EU policy-makers value the technical expertise, economic power and Europe-wide cooperation of large businesses over the advocacy of national associations (ibid., p. 399). Chameleon pluralism, in contrast, argues that access to EU decision-makers is generally limited to interest groups even if they can provide valuable information. Interest groups, however, are flexible and can change their approach to influence policy outcomes. This flexibility enables them to

[9] Furthermore, lobbying can be divided into two categories: general lobbying and lobbying on a single policy decision (Gullberg, 2008, p. 2968). General lobbying entails attending conferences and meetings with policy-makers to discuss the general agenda.

[10] Sitgler did not use the term "regulatory capture" in his publication from 1971. However, his theory aligns with the idea of the term (Coglianese & Carrigan, 2016).

navigate the EU's complex policy-making process and effectively influence decision-making processes (Coen & Katsaitis, 2013, p. 1107).

Regardless of the specific interpretation of "pluralism", businesses invest significant amounts of resources into influencing policy outcomes (Greenwood, 2017, p. 50). This is particularly the case when regulatory changes threaten their existing business models. The standard profit-seeking model of the firm originating from the US can be applied to companies in the EU market (Bernhagen & Mitchell, 2009). Lobbying in the US often involves a clash between those seeking to maintain the status quo and those advocating for change (Klüver et al., 2015, p. 7). Successful lobbying, therefore, is not only measured by the ability of interest groups to achieve a policy outcome that is closer to their desired end result. Blocking a regulation and maintaining the status quo can also be considered a significant success (Gross, 2017, p. 163). Maintaining the status quo by preventing the development of new regulations can help preserve the firms' operational and financial stability. Whether the interest group wants to preserve or change the status quo has implications for their strategies and the level of policy influence (Klüver et al., 2015, p. 7).

Although corporate actors mostly engage in lobbying to influence policy-makers into maintaining the current state of things, it is important to acknowledge that this objective does not uniformly apply across all businesses within an industry sector. Greenwood (2019, p. 10) illustrates this variation in business unity by examining the case of the EU automotive industry in the context of the introduction of stricter CO2 emission reduction targets. Car parts suppliers could support stricter CO2 emission reduction goals as they possess the needed technologies. These suppliers can capitalise on the demand for new technologies, ensuring continued profitability even under stricter environmental regulations. Car manufacturers; however, may opt for lower regulatory standards to avoid additional costs (ibid.). Even though variations in business unity exist, this thesis assumes that corporate actors generally tend to prioritise policies that preserve the status quo, as changes can lead to disruption of their business operation.

Policy-makers such as MEPs, while aiming to serve their electorate cannot ignore the demands of large corporations. This does not mean that every large industrial company gets what it wants, but that politicians cannot permanently take the anti-industry side of every policy proposal (Stigler, 1971, p. 10). This is underlined by the actuality that politicians' success in being re-elected partly depends on the performance of the economy (Culpepper, 2011, p. 191).

According to the concept of the economic voter, the government is made responsible for the economic performance of the country leading to either re-election or defeat (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000, p. 211). Businesses, besides pursuing lobbying, can use media outlets to frame the issue favourably, influencing voter preferences. When regulations are perceived as too hostile, businesses will stress that the companies are put in an unfair position compared to foreign competition leading to less national economic independence (Culpepper, 2011, p. 10). As politicians avoid harming the economy, they are likely to take the lobbying demands of businesses into account when developing changes in legislation (ibid., p. 178). As the functioning of the EU single market is fundamental, policy-makers consider business interests, especially policy fields such as environment, competition and industry, that are most essential to businesses (Coen et al., 2021, p. 85).

Although large corporations are influential and possess the necessary resources for successful lobbying, they are not the only powerful lobbying actors (Boräng & Naurin, 2015, p. 500). They compete with a wide range of actors such as diffuse interest groups. The number of interest groups trying to influence the decision-making process in Brussels is higher than ever (Gullberg, 2008). Since the early 1990s, there has been an upsurge in the number of interest groups, which can be explained by the broadening of the competencies of the Union and the implementation of new rules in the decision-making process (Berny & Moore, 2021, p. 147). This has resulted in companies locating their resources increasingly in Brussels (Coen et al. 2021, p. 179). The category of interest groups includes civil society actors, associations and companies. According to Klüver (2013, p. 25), interest groups are actors that fulfil three criteria: they have political interests, are organised, and do not seek public office. It can also be distinguished between two interest group types with different membership levels: associations and companies. Associations are membership organisations that bring together individuals, companies, and public institutions. In contrast, companies are corporate entities without members (ibid., p. 6). Interest groups are, therefore, organised actors with the goal of influencing public policy (through lobbying activities), and the definition includes non-membership groups like business organisations (Berny & Moore, 2021, p. 147).

As all interest groups aim at influencing EU policy, the dominance of corporate actors in this process can be questioned. Boräng and Naurin (2015) argue that instead of the EU institutions being in the hands of industry players, there are indications that civil society actors appear to share a closer alignment with the institutions' perspective on policy issues. There is even evidence that NGOs can be more successful than businesses in reaching their desired outcome

from EU policy-making (Greenwood, 2019, p. 2). The ability of businesses to be more successful than diffuse interest groups in the EP depends on business unity, the salience of an issue and the involvement of parliamentary committees (Rasmussen, 2015, p. 366). Business unity refers to the ability to have a unified voice and shared objectives. When advocating for different goals, their lobbying impact tends to be weaker (Kluger Dionigi, 2017, p. 40). Issue-salience is linked to business influence, as it is assumed that corporate actors tend to be more influential when the importance of an issue to the public is relatively low compared to other political issues (Culpepper, 2011, p. 4). The involvement of parliamentary committees means that when the legislative proposal is in the responsibility of a parliamentary committee that is perceived as particularly hostile towards businesses, their lobbying efforts can have little impact (Kluger Dionigi, 2017, p. 11). It is assumed that businesses are more successful in their lobbying efforts when the legislative proposal is assigned to a committee that deals with policy issues where technical expertise is needed (Rasmussen, 2015, p. 370).

While the presence of corporate political activity is more commonly associated with the field of industrial or trade policy, businesses seek to shape a wide range of regulatory policies such as environmental regulations, taxation policies, agricultural subsidies and regulations regarding food safety (Coen & Richardson, 2009, p. 1). As this thesis focuses on the EU environmental policy, literature on business lobbying success in this field is necessary. The European Parliament was long perceived as a "policy champion for environmental interests" (Rasmussen, 2012, p. 239) representing diffuse interests such as environmental NGOs.[11] Contrary to the expectations of the EP as an advocate for environmental protection, Bunea (2013, p. 553) finds that demands for stricter environmental regulations are less likely to result in actual policies than demands for the preservation of the status quo. As businesses tend to favour the maintenance of the status quo, it can be argued that their efforts are more likely to have an impact on the policy outcome in this policy field. The European Parliament's receptiveness to environmental concerns appears to have waned in recent times as its position has changed from being perceptive to environmental interests and advocating them to being an environmental

[11] This was specially the case when the EP was not yet as powerful and a co-legislator in most policy areas. On the example of the vans regulation, Rasmussen (2012, p. 253) finds that three reasons account for this change in the EPs receptiveness. Firstly, asymmetrical lobbying from the car industry appeared as fewer environmental NGOs were dealing with the topic. Secondly, lobbying one legislative act cannot be seen in a vacuum. The vans regulation was closely tied to the existing legislation on the reduction of CO2 emissions from passenger cars. Lastly, the institutional set-up within the EP (close cooperation between EP committees) and between EU institutions (Parliaments negotiation strategy) has had the consequence that the EP has been lowering its environmental demands (Rasmussen, 2012, p. 256).

pragmatist (Kluger Dionigi, 2017, p. 73). This shift in the EP's stance is likely to put businesses in a favourable position to have their demands for the preservation of the status quo translated into policy outcomes.

MEPs reason for granting businesses access to policy-making is not only out of fear of not being re-elected, should they ignore too many corporate interests. They additionally grant businesses access to the policy-making process, to obtain specific expertise and information that only corporate actors can offer. This exchange process between EU policy-makers and interest groups is a common conceptualisation of lobbying (Klüver, 2013, p. 11). Interest groups such as large corporations demand influence from or access to the EU institutions in exchange for policy-relevant information. The European Parliament exchanges the good of access for three types of information: expert knowledge, information about the European encompassing interest, and information about the domestic encompassing interest (Bouwen, 2004, p. 477). As the representative institution of all EU citizens, the EP needs political information to determine voters' preferences, as argued in the last sub-chapter. On the other hand, the MEPs need technical expertise to be able to fulfil their legislative tasks (Coen et al., 2021, p. 60). This technical expertise can be provided by businesses.

The type of information needed by MEPs also vary depending on the stage of the policy cycle (Coen et al., 2021, p 86). MEPs tend to grant businesses favourable access during the committee stage, the phase during which the EP drafts its version of a legislative act in the assigned committee and prepares amendments (Lehmann, 2009, p. 51). This is because changes to the text and, therefore, the possibility of having business interests represented in it are possible during the committee stage. Once the draft legislation reaches the plenary, changes to the text are unlikely as proposals that gain approval at the committee stage typically pass the plenary session (ibid.). Given the critical role of the committee stage, scholars argue that the primary objective of lobbying within the European Parliament is to influence the Parliament's negotiating position with other EU institutions (Marshall, 2010, p. 555). During this stage, corporate actors target the rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs from the largest political groups (Klüver, 2013, p. 42). While during this phase of the policy-making process, businesses lobby both MEPs that are aligned with their positions and MEPs that are opposed to them, as the Parliaments proposal is about to move to the plenary stage, businesses focus on MEPs that align with their stances to ensure that they vote similarly (Gullberg, 2008, p. 2971; Coen et al., 2021, p 120).

In sum, the literature on business influence confirms that corporate actors can have significant influence on the EP during EU policy-making and in the context of environmental policy (Bouwen, 2006). As profit-seeking actors, companies generally advocate for the maintenance of a status quo, meaning that policy-makers should refrain from adopting stricter regulations that could lead to a disruption of the businesses business model and threaten financial stability (Gross, 2017). Businesses, particularly large corporations, have a significant advantage in influencing policy outcomes due to their resources, economic clout and technical expertise (Klüver, 2013). To ensure their interests are taken into account, corporate actors engage in extensive lobbying activities to persuade MEPs to draft a report on a legislative proposal that supports their positions. In accordance with the scholarly literature outlined in this section of the theoretical framework, I expect that the adoption or rejection of policy proposal by the European Parliament is influenced by the level of business influence. Increased business lobbying activity within the European Parliament on an environmental regulation is expected to reduce the probability of successful policy adoption.

1.3. Between Electoral Politicisation and Business Lobbying

In the previous two sub-sections, I have developed a theoretical framework illustrating that the adoption or rejection of an EU regulation by the European Parliament can be influenced by the level of the politicisation of the issue or the level of business lobbying. Increased politicisation or intensified business lobbying is expected to significantly increase the likelihood of regulatory failure, meaning that there are numerous amendments made to the committee report or that the report is not adopted by the European Parliament. Businesses engage in lobbying mostly when issues are of low political salience as they might lose in political battles when policies gain significant public attention (Culpepper, 2011, p. 6). This is because when the general public pays attention and a policy issue is politicised, politicians are more likely to prioritise the median voter's wishes (ibid.). In this section, I argue that policy issues can become highly politicised while business influence remains high (Keller, 2018). By synthesising established theoretical frameworks on politicisation and business lobbying, I formulate a novel theoretical expectation: The convergence of politicisation and business lobbying on an EU regulation results in the outright rejection of the policy proposal by the European Parliament. I start by exploring the condition under which both politicisation and business lobbying are high. Next, I discuss why this overlap creates a unique dynamic. I bring examples from EU environmental policy.

For a high level of politicisation and simultaneous business lobbying to appear, the policy issue discussed must be highly visible and impactful to both the EU citizens and corporate actors. EU policy fields can be categorised into regulatory policies and (re)distributive policies. The EU has more competence in the regulatory sphere (Coen et al., 2021, p. 3).[12] Corporate actors tend to focus on regulatory policy while distributive policy is more visible to the public (ibid., p. 85). This is because regulatory policy establishes standards that directly affect how businesses operate (e.g., environmental regulations) and in this case their complex and technical expertise is needed. (Re)distributive policy on the other hand encompass government interventions that involve the transfer of resources among different segments of society (ibid., 90). This includes measures such as subsidies, tax relief or healthcare access which citizens can directly detect and experience. While regulatory policies such as EU environmental measures might be more difficult for citizens to grasp, environmental regulations can still appeal to the public if their consumption patterns and lifestyle are affected (e.g. CO2 emissions regulations on vehicles, ban on Single-Use Plastics) (Hofmann, 2021, p. 329). While scientific evidence suggests that greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced and biodiversity protected, solutions to these problems have clear distributional implications, as the costs must be borne by someone. In this case, both companies and citizens are closely observing the policy-making process and interested in the policy outcome.

The EU, which has taken it upon itself to address problems related to environmental protection, is increasingly becoming the subject of political disputes, as public opinion on these specific issues is increasingly polarised (Greenwood, 2017, p. 134). It is, therefore, important for the EU that its policies in this policy area are percieved as legitimate (Hofmann, 2021, p.329). However, securing public approval becomes more difficult as citizens opinions on possible policy solutions are divided into those supporting stricter environmental regulations and those fundamentally against. Policy-makers are forced to justify and defend their positions more intensively in this polarised environment. In doing so, they strategically use public interest as a framework that helps protect their positions in the face of controversy (De Bruycker, 2017,

[12] There are three different categories of EU competence which are specified in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union: exclusive competence, shared competence and supporting competence (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 2). Exclusive competence refers to policy areas in which the EU has the sole authority is to legislate and adopt binding acts. Examples of this areas are customs union, the establishment of competition rules, monetary policy for the Eurozone. Shared competence between the Union and the member states refers means that both can adopt legislation, however, member states can only adopt legally binding acts where the EU has not exercised its competence. The third category means that the EU may carry out actions to support, coordinate, or supplement the actions of the member states (Nugent, 2017, p. 309).

p. 607). They may also, however, refrain from addressing public interests as public demands become so contested and ambiguous that they lose their value as a persuasive tool (ibid., p. 613).

If policy-makers such as MEPs decide to openly refer to public interests, it can incentivise greater engagement from diffuse interest groups, particularly environmental NGOs in EU environmental policy (Kluger Dionigi, 2017). Given the contrasting objectives of these NGOs, who are mostly advocates for the implementation for stricter environmental regulations and corporate actors, who support the maintenance of status quo (Greenwood, 2017, p.137), heightened lobbying activity from both sides can be a result.[13] Moreover, the presence of these opposing interest groups intensifies public debate. While NGOs are more well-known in mobilising public support, businesses can also employ campaigns to convince the public to consider their positions (Culpepper, 2011, p. 6). This is specially the case, if corporate actors believe that the public mostly aligns with their viewpoints.

This understanding of business influence strategies diverges from the traditional characterisation of business lobbying as primarily occurring through "quiet" politics (Keller, 2018). This perspective argues that corporate actors can strategically make use of the politicisation of an issue by contributing to raising its salience and expanding the conflict. By following this strategy, businesses, rather than relying on their privileged position in negotiations taking place behind closed doors, try to access the policy-making process by leveraging public visibility through the "voice" (ibid., p. 291). This outside lobbying strategy is most effective when businesses succeed in framing the issue in a way what resonates with public opinion and enhances their own legitimacy. In the example of the debate over the ban of single-use plastics in the EU, corporate actors in the plastic industry can grasp the growing awareness of the public about the environmental impact of plastic pollution and use it to advocate for industry-led solutions to plastic pollution, framing themselves as part of the solution (Kiessling et al., 2023).

Corporate actors can also have their concerns picked up by the media. There is an asymmetry of expertise between businesses and journalists of news outlets which puts corporate actors on a favourable position (Culpepper, 2011, p. 178). This is because journalists, in contrast to politicians, are not concerned about economic consequences of their reporting. However, they

[13] It is possible for environmental NGOs and corporate actors to form an alliance, however, this is unlikely (Greenwood, 2017).

have to simplify complex issues for public consumption. This can lead to journalists adopting the framing and terminology of corporate actors (Keller, 2018). In this way, businesses are being granted significant influence over the public discourse surrounding a policy issue. This dynamic can have implications for policy-making (Davis, 2000: 300). By framing a policy issue in a way that aligns with their interests, corporate actors can influence public opinion and indirectly pressure policy-makers to adopt their preferred policy outcomes. When businesses succeed in setting the terms of the debate, they can marginalise voices that advocate for alternative regulatory approaches, including those of NGOs. As a result, the European Parliament, traditionally considered an advocate for environmental interest (Rasmussen, 2012, p. 239), finds itself increasingly navigating a complex and contentious political landscape.

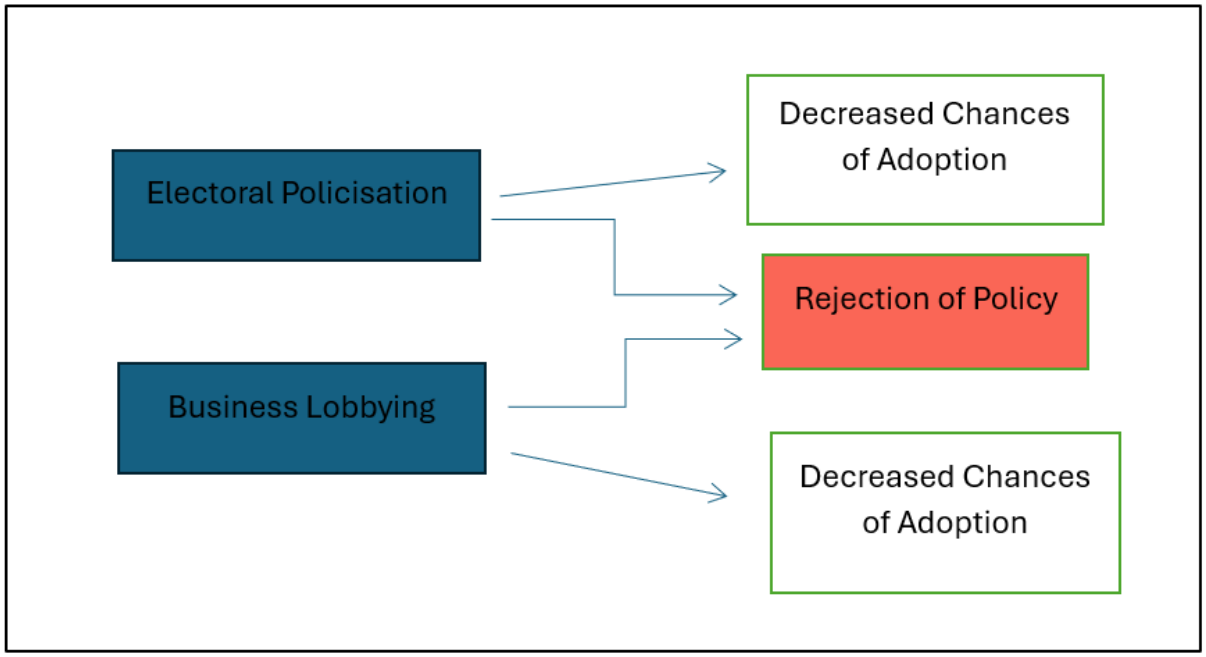
While increased politicisation drives electoral pressures on MEPs, business lobbying remains high as comprehensive regulatory changes threaten to disrupt business models or market structures. This creates a unique dynamic, whereby reaching compromise becomes impossible. MEPs face the dual challenge of addressing public demands in a politicised environment while simultaneously experiencing resistance from business actors seeking to safeguard their interests. The politicisation of a policy places MEPs under a heightened level of scrutiny, forcing them to consider public concerns (De Bruycker, 2017). Moreover, politicisation tends to polarise policy debates, reducing the willingness of stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue. At the same time, businesses as powerful economic actors able to provide technical expertise needed for developing regulatory policies, engage in lobbying to shape policy outcomes in ways that favour the status quo (Gross, 2017). Operating in the interplay between these pressures, I expect MEPs to reject the policy proposal.

According to the literature on politicisation, business lobbying and my novel theoretical argument about the overlap between electoral politicisation and business influence, I propose three expectations regarding the policy-making process in the EP in the field of environmental policy:

- First, I expect that politicisation increases pressure on MEPs to address public concerns, leading to the likelihood of policy adoption to diminish. When a policy becomes highly salient and polarised, MEPs face increased electoral pressures as public opinion intensifies and citizens voice their concerns. Navigating in these politically charged debates, MEPs become cautious to avoid upsetting their voters, as they are worried about losing their seat in the next election.

- Second, I expect intense business lobbying aimed at maintaining the status quo, to increase the likelihood of policy adoption to diminish. Businesses leverage their economic power and technical expertise to resist regulatory changes that could disrupt their business models and financial stability.
- Third, I expect that in the case of dual pressure from politicised public scrutiny and persistent business lobbying, the rejection of a policy is inevitable. In this political environment, compromise becomes nearly impossible, forcing MEPs vote against the The subsequent sections of the thesis detail the research methodology and proceed to empirically probe these expectations.

Figure 4: Policy Rejection as an Outcome of Electoral Politicisation and Business Lobbying



2. Methodology

The political backlash against EU environmenal policy in the European Parliament as a research topic is a unique and new phenomenon. To comprehensively analyse the reasons for policy rejection in the EP, the thesis employs the comparative method (Zohlnhöfer, 2016). The level of analysis is institutional, but with a focus on the behavior of individual actors (such as MEPs) within the broader structure of the European Parliament. This analytical approach aligns with the principles of Historical Institutionalism as it focuses both on structure (institutional rules) and agency (MEPs' behavior) (Steinmo, 2008). The unit of analysis is individual policy proposals discussed within the European Parliament in the course of the ordinary legislative procedure. Analysing three specific proposals for environmental regulations introduced under the 2019–2024 von der Leyen Commission, enables me to systematically evaluate variations in the success or failure of these proposals based on predefined independent variables.

The expected result is primarily important for understanding the dynamics of EU policy-making in the context of growing politicisation and recent backlash against environmental initiatives (Greenwood, 2017). The empirical data and conclusions of the research may also be useful in understanding and explaining the broader implications of politicisation and business lobbying on the effectiveness of EU environmental governance, as well as the challenges of balancing economic interests with ambitious biodiversity goals. To capture these dynamics in the EP policy-making, the analysis focuses on the period between November 2021 when the first regulation analysed in this thesis, the Deforestation regulation, was proposed by the European Commission and ends in November 2023, when the EP rejected the committee report on the Sustainable Use Regulation.[14]

2.1. Method and Research Design

Three proposals for regulations put forward by the 2019 - 2024 von der Leyen Commission in the field of EU environmental policy will be analysed to answer the research question about the factors contributing to the failure of policy adoption in the European Parliament. As I will be systematically analysing and comparing three policy proposals, I make use of the ***comparative method*** (Lijphart, 1971). Due to the small number of cases, it is a small N-study. This type of study can be described as case-oriented as the basis of the approach is a detailed knowledge of the cases, which can be achieved, for example, through document analysis

[14] This means that recent developments regarding the regulations will not be taken into account. In the case of the Deforestation Regulation, following calls from global trading partners, the European Commission proposed a one-year delay in the regulation's application date in October 2024. The Council approved this delay.

(Pickel, 2016, p. 30). The opposite of a case-oriented approach is the variable-oriented approach. Instead of analysing the uniqueness of each case, the researcher examines general relationships between variables that could apply to many cases (ibid., p. 34). Small-N-studies seek to understand the process behind an outcome. In the context of policy analysis, it aims to elucidate the contextual factors that shaped the policy's development (Zimmerman, 2022).

In 1971, Arend Lijphart published an article about comparative politics and the comparative method in which he categorised four different methods available in political research. Although he viewed the experimental method as the ideal research method, the comparative method came second: "[…] the comparative method is not the equivalent of the experimental method but only a very imperfect substitute" (Lijphart, 1971, p. 685). Lijphart's understanding of the comparative method closely resembles the most similar systems design (MSSD) of contemporary comparative political research (Anckar, 2020, p. 33). By applying the MSSD, a concept introduced by Przeworski and Teune in 1970, the researcher chooses highly similar cases, differing only concerning one phenomenon of interest (ibid., p. 34). The rationale behind choosing similar cases is to minimise the influence of extraneous variables. The MSSD follows the logic of Mill's Method of Difference (Ghalendhar, 2022). If two cases that are almost identical except in one respect are compared, and a certain phenomenon occurs in only one of the two cases, then the difference is most likely to be the cause of the phenomenon (Anckar, 2020, p. 34).

The three cases chosen in this thesis are policy proposals that are similar in several key aspects. The chosen proposals are all regulations. EU regulations are binding legislative acts that must be applied in their entirety in every member state (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 288). Furthermore, the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP) applies to all of the cases. The OLP was formerly known as the co-decision procedure and came into effect in 1987, granting the European Parliament more legislative powers resulting in an equal position to the Council (Rüdiger & Wurzel, 2021, p. 80). Additionally, the same institutional entities are assigned to work on the proposals. In the case of the European Parliament, the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) is responsible for drafting a committee reports on all three regulations. Furthermore, all three cases were developed in the framework of the European Green Deal, a new growth strategy of the EU announced in 2019. They are all part of the EU environmental policy domain and share a common focus: the protection of land and the restoration of nature and biodiversity.

The thesis follows an inductive approach as the research question aims to find out what explains the European Parliament's increasing opposition towards the environmental policies of the European Green Deal. The point of departure is the dependent variable and the ambition is to identify the relevant independent variables (Anckar, 2020, p. 35). The underlying logic for choosing the policy proposals will be based on the variation in the dependent variable – the policies' success in being approved by the European Parliament during the formulation of the institutions position in plenary which is a crucial step in the legislative process. All three policy proposals differed in terms of their pace for being approved and the setbacks encountered. The committee report on the Deforestation Regulation was adopted without complications and rather quickly. The committee report on the Nature Restoration Law faced major setbacks but was eventually approved by the European Parliament. The Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR) was rejected by the European Parliament in plenary.

2.2. Case Selection

Below I discuss the variation of the dependent variable. The first selected case, exemplifying a regulation that was approved swiftly and with minimal complications by the European Parliament, ***Deforestation Regulation***. The regulation, proposed by the European Commission in November 2021 is part of the EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, EU new forest strategy for 2030 and the European Green Deal. According to article 1 of the regulation, the aim of the legislative act is to reduce the EU's contribution to deforestation and forest degradation (Regulation 2023/1115 **)** . This is to be achieved through the reduction of the consumption of products coming from supply chains associated with deforestation or forest degradation and the increase of EU demand for 'deforestation-free' products as well as commodities (soy, beef, coffee, etc.) (Halleux, 2023a). The European Parliament, instead of watering down the regulation, was more ambitious than the Commission and the Council as it wanted to broaden the scope of products as well as include other natural ecosystems besides forests (European Parliament (OEIL), 2023). The EP approved the ENVI report forming the basis of the EP's first reading position on the 13th of September 2022 (European Parliament, 2021/0366 (COD).

The Deforestation Regulation is replacing the EU Timber Regulation (Regulation 995/2010). The European Parliament initially showed strong support already in October 2020 as the institution adopted a legislative initiative resolution. In it, the EP calls on the Commission to table a legal framework to halt global deforestation driven through the EU (European Parliament, 2020/2006 (INL). The ENVI committee was appointed the lead committee and the

EPP member Christophe Hansen the rapporteur. The ENVI committee adopted its position in July 2022. In the plenary session of the 13th of September 2022, the proposal was adopted with 453 votes in favour, only 57 votes against and 123 abstentions (Halleux 2023a). The EP adopted its position on the regulation in just 11 months, significantly faster than the average 18-month timeframe for legislative acts during the first reading (European Parliament, 2020, p. 50).

The second case, demonstrating a regulation approved by the European Parliament despite major setbacks is the regulation on nature restoration (***Nature Restoration Law***). It was proposed by the Commission on the 22nd of June 2022 as part of the biodiversity strategy for 2030 (European Parliament, (OEIL), 2024). As described in article 1 of the regulation, it "establishes a framework within which Member States shall put in place, without delay, effective and area-based restoration measures which together shall cover, by 2030, at least 20 % of the Union's land and sea areas and, by 2050, all ecosystems in need of restoration" (Regulation 2022/0195). It aims at protecting the biodiversity of rivers, forests and agriculture as well as marine areas and extend biodiversity in these areas (Decleer, 2023). The regulation is based on the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) which according to Hoek (2022) has failed to provide nature conservation and stop biodiversity loss. The nature restoration law foresees developing nature restoration plans to reach the targets at the member state level (Halleux, 2023b).

The initial support of the EP for the Nature Restoration Law was strong as in its resolution from June 2021, The European Parliament applauded the Commission's pledge to create a law on nature restoration with mandatory restoration targets (European Parliament, 2020/2273 (INI)). In the European Parliament, the proposal was appointed to the ENVI committee, and on the 12th of July 2022 Cesar Luena (S&D, Spain) was appointed rapporteur (European Parliament, (OEIL), 2024). On the 5th of May 2023, the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), a opinion-giving committee, rejected the Commission's proposal (European Parliament, 2024). Instead of listening to the opinion-giving committee, MEP César Luena drafted an ambitious report that was welcomed by several environmental NGOs such as BirdLife, ClientEarth, EEB, Oceana and WWF (WWF, 2023a). In June 2023, the proposal for the regulation barely succeeded in the vote of the ENVI committee with 44 votes in favor of the proposal and 44 against it and the suggestion to reject the file in plenary prevailed (European Parliament (Multimedia Centre), 2023). However, in plenary, the ENVI report was adopted with 329 votes in favour, 275 against, and 24 abstentions.

The third case, exemplifying a regulation that was rejected by the European Parliament is the ***Sustainable Use Regulation (SUR)*** which the European Commission proposed on 22nd of June 2022. It was a revision of the Sustainable Pesticide Use Directive (SUD (Directive 2009/128/EC). The regulation was to be adopted in the framework of the farm-to-fork strategy as a part of the European Green Deal. The purpose of the regulation is to halve the overall use of and risk from chemical plant protection products and to reduce the use of more hazardous plant protection products by at least 50% by 2030 (Halleux, 2023b). The first assessment of the proposal, which was mostly qualitative and released before the war in Ukraine, analysed the impacts of SUR on social, economic, and environmental indicators (Gohin, 2024). On the 19th of December 2022, the Council adopted a position requesting the Commission to prepare and submit a study complementing the existing impact assessment. In the updated study, the European Commission confirmed that a remarkable reduction in the use of chemical plant protection products is achievable without negatively affecting food security, production as well as food availability and prices (European Commission, Response to Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572, p. 14).

In September 2022, Ms Sarah Wiener from the political party of the Greens/European Free Alliance was appointed as rapporteur for the proposal. The AGRI Committee was chosen as one of the opinion-providing committees. The Committee was given exclusive competence on Article 43 of the proposal which deals with the financing under the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) (Council of the European Union (progress report), 2023a). The ENVI committee acted as a policy champion at first, supporting the EU-wide reduction of plant protection products by 50% and being even more ambitious in the reduction goal for the use of more hazardous ones by raising it to 65% by 2030 (European Parliament, 2022). On 24th of October 2023, the ENVI committee adopted its report with 47 votes to 37 and 2 abstentions. In the plenary session on the 22nd of November 2023, the European Parliament voted to reject the Commission proposal, called on the Commission to withdraw its proposal, and closed its first reading (Council of the European Union, 2023b).

Table 2: Overview of Objectives and Target Sectors

Deforestation Regulation	Nature Restoration Law	Sustainable Use Regulation
Regulation Objectives: Minimise EU contribution to global deforestation Reduce EU-driven forest degradation. Reduce EU contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. Mitigate global biodiversity loss.	**Regulation Objectives**: Protect and restore ecosystems. Enhance biodiversity	**Regulation Objectives:** Protection of human health and the environment by reducing the risks and impacts associated with pesticide use
Affected commodities: Wood, rubber, cattle, coffee, cocoa, palm oil, soy	**Restoration goals proposed by Commission** Restore at least 20% of EU land and sea areas by 2030. Restore all ecosystems in need by 2050	**Reduction goals proposed by Commission** Reduce the overall use and risk of plant protection products by 50% and the more hazardous ones by 50% by 2030
Targeted entities: Operators & traders who place commodities on the EU market or export from the EU	**Targeted sectors:** Agriculture Forestry Fisheries	**Targeted sector:** Agriculture

2.3. Operationalisation of Variables

The policy proposals success in being approved by the European Parliament during the formulation of the institutions position in plenary, the dependent variable, is operationalised as the binary outcome of whether the EP report was adopted by the ENVI committee and approved by the EP plenary during the first reading of the ordinary legislative procedure. During the first reading of the OLP, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union examine the Commission's proposal in parallel, but the EP adopts its position first. The President of the EP refers the Commission's proposal to the committee responsible for its consideration, in this case, the ENVI committee. The ENVI committee appoints the rapporteur who is responsible for preparing the committee's draft report (European Parliament, 2020, p. 20). The committee approves the draft report containing amendments to the Commission's proposal by a simple

majority. As a next step, the report is tabled for a vote in plenary which is preceded by a plenary debate. During the plenary stage, only the responsible committee, a political group, or a group of at least 36 Members (one-twentieth of Parliament) can table amendments. The Parliament then votes on the Commission's proposal by a simple majority, with options to reject it entirely, approve it without changes or adopt amendments to the proposal (ibid. p. 16-18). As in previous terms, in the ninth term of the EP, no political group had a majority meaning that at least three political groups were required to build a majority for the approval of a legislative act (Barley et al., 2024, p 23).

Successful adoption of a policy proposal is determined by its progress through the policy-making process. A policy is considered successfully adopted if it is approved by both the ENVI committee and the plenary session of the European Parliament. If the report on the regulation is approved by the ENVI Committee, but rejected in plenary, it is deemed successful despite encountering significant setbacks. Conversely, a policy proposal approved by the ENVI committee but rejected by the plenary is not regarded as successful. The speed of the policy adoption also serves as an indicator of success. The average time for a legislative act to be adopted during its first reading in the 2014-2019 legislative term was 18 months (European Parliament, 2020, p. 50). If the Parliament adopts its position on a policy within a shorter timeframe, it suggests a more efficient and potentially successful legislative process.

The proposed theoretical expectations present two concepts that need to be operationalised: politicisation and business lobbying. Politicisation, the first independent variable, is defined as a process whereby a policy issue becomes a subject of heated public political debate, involving diverse actors who actively engage in public discourse and leading to often opposing political stances among policy-makers. Intense political debate is measured by quantifying the number of speeches delivered by MEPs during plenary sessions regarding each policy proposal (Wiesner, 2021, p. 39, Carlotti, 2021). All three proposals had a different number of speeches tabled by the MEPs. A higher number of speeches indicates greater salience, suggesting that the issue was more prominent in the political discourse. Besides taking the floor during the plenary session, the publication of written material by political groups on a policy proposal is a strong indicator of its salience, as such documents are not typically produced for all legislative acts proposed by the Commission. To measure the range of actors, all relevant interest groups including industry associations and NGOs, actively engaged in the policy-making process regarding each policy proposal are identified. A larger number of actors participating in the

debate signifies greater actor expansion, which contributes to increased politicisation (De Bruycker, 2017).

To measure the level of business influence, the second independent variable, policy positions advocated by relevant interest groups in their publications are compared to submitted amendments and speeches by MEPs. This method is referred to as the preference attainment approach (Klüver, 2013, p. 20). This analysis allows to assess the extent to which the demands and preferences of business interests were reflected either in MEP's positions or the Committee report (Kluger Dionigi, 2017, p. 4). The focus is not only on the final EP report that is an outcome of the plenary session but also on the draft ENVI committee report as the ENVI committee is the specialised committee responsible for the file. This is because while the plenary is formally pre-eminent for taking policy positions, most of the process under the legislative procedures happens in the committee sessions (Bouwen, 2004, p. 482). This makes committees the most important lobby target. Therefore, another indicator for the business influence is the involvement of interest groups in Committee hearings.

2.4. Data Selection and Collection

In this thesis, the method of document analysis, a systematic method used in qualitative research to interpret information in written documents, will be applied. For this, I use multiple sources of data. Firstly, I analyse relevant institutional documents. The ENVI committee draft reports and the final reports of the EP reveal the outcome of the legislative process and the extent to which initial objectives have been modified or preserved. Speeches by the MEPs during the plenary sessions as well as written publications such as official position papers and press releases by the EP political groups on the proposal for regulations are vital data sources. These data sources reflect the public positions, rhetoric, and narratives employed by MEPs as well as the influence of external pressures such as lobby groups. Besides these institutional documents, publications of relevant interest groups such as corporate actors as well as environmental NGOs are analysed.

The institutional documents are collected from official EU databases such as EUR-Lex, Legislative Observatory of the European Parliament and transcripts of EP’s plenary sessions available at the website of the EP. I analyse a total of 139 speeches by MEPs during plenary sessions, offering a rich source of data on how the regulations were framed and discussed within the legislative arena. For publications of the political groups, data is gathered from official websites of the political groups. This ensures that the publications reflect the formal

positions of the political groups, including official position papers, press releases, and other public statements made in relation to the regulations. I have identified 144 written publications by the political groups covering the three specific regulations examined. Written documents of relevant interest groups are gathered from their websites.

2.5. Limitations of the Research

Despite the comprehensive approach adopted in this thesis, two main limitations must be acknowledged, which might affect the generalisability and scope of the findings. Firstly, this thesis exclusively focuses on the legislative process within the European Parliament (EP). While this provides valuable insights into the EP's role in the development and rejection of EU environmental regulations, it ignores the interplay between the European Parliament and the other two main EU institutions: the European Commission and the Council of the European Union (Nugent, 2017). Notably, while the Commission and the Council are also targets of lobbying efforts, the channels and strategies employed in lobbying these institutions differ (Klüver, 2013). The three institutions interact with each other throughout the policy-making process specially in the form of trilogues. Trilogues are "informal tripartite meetings on legislative proposals between representatives of the Parliament, Council and Commission" (European Parliament, 2020, p. 28). This thesis does not consider how the actions and stances of the Council and the Commission influence the EP's positions or how negotiations between the institutions led to policy adoption or rejection.

Secondly, due to the limited scope, the thesis excludes media analysis as an in-depth analysis of media coverage would constitute a separate research project. While media coverage is not directly part of the legislative process, it plays a significant role in shaping public opinion (Berny & Moore, 2021, p. 161). Media reporting can increase or reduce the salience of a policy issue (Culpepper, 2011, p. 7). The absence of an analysis of how the media framed the three regulations may limit the understanding of the broader political context in which these policies were discussed (De Bruycker, 2017, p. 604). This is specially the case because the media's role in the politicisation of certain aspects of the policies could have been valuable to understand better the external factors that contributed to their success or failure. However, this thesis focuses on the internal parliamentary processes involved in the adoption of environmental regulations within the European Parliament. While media coverage can be viewed as an important factor, this analysis prioritises an in-depth examination of the internal dynamics within the Parliament.

3. Epirical Analysis

In this chapter, I will empirically analyse three proposals for regulations: Nature Restoration Law, Deforestation Regulation and Sustainable Use Regulation. By examining these cases, I demonstrate how the dynamics of politicisation and business lobbying interact to influence policy outcomes in the European Parliament. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I analyse the Nature Restoration Law as a regulation that was subject to intense political debates with polarised opinions among MEPs. It was also marked by extensive lobbying. Despite these opposing forces, the European Parliament approved the ENVI report, contradicting the expectation that politicisation and business lobbying would lead to rejection. Second, I examine the Deforestation Regulation as a case of low politicisation and minimal business lobbying. The regulation's focus on trade, which has less immediate impact on citizens compared to agriculture and forestry, likely contributed to its lower salience. Although business lobbying was detected it had little influence on the ENVI report, and the regulation was swiftly approved by the European Parliament. Third, I analyse the Sustainable Use Regulation which became highly politicised and encountered intense business lobbying. Despite support from environmental groups and some MEPs, the regulation was rejected, confirming the expectation that high politicisation combined with intense business lobbying leads to policy failure.

3.1. Case 1: Nature Restoration Law – Navigating Polarisation

This section shows that the level of politicisation surrounding the Nature Restoration Law was high. With 68 speeches during the plenary session, it was the most extensively discussed legislative act among the three regulations. Moreover, political groups produced the largest volume of materials related to this regulation, reflecting its prominence in the political discourse within the institution. Additionally, a significant amount of interest groups were actively engaging in lobbying. The close vote on the committee draft report during the committee stage, with 44 votes in favor and 44 against, resulted in a recommendation for rejection in plenary (European Parliament (Multimedia Centre), 2023). This supports the first theoretical expectation, which posits politicisation can lead to a decreased chance of policy adoption. However, as the proposed regulation targets the restoration of wetlands and rivers, forest and agricultural ecosystems (Regulation 2022/0195), it was also subject to business lobbying from three sectors: agriculture, forestry and fishery. Despite the simultaneous presence of a high level of politicisation and intense intense business lobbying, the policy proposal was not rejected by the European Parliament.

I start by examining the volume of publications by the political groups and the amount of speeches and point out the dividing standpoints between the political groups. The core arguments of the political groups revolved around either supporting the regulation, emphasizing its crucial role in biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation, while also highlighting its potential benefits for farmers (S&D, Greens/ EFA, Renew Europe, GUE/NGL). Conversely, the remaining political groups (EPP, ECR, ID) strongly opposed the regulation, expressing concerns about its potential negative impacts on agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, particularly regarding food security and the burdens imposed on farmers. This division highlights a pronounced left-right split, with criticism from the right countered by the left's accusations of spreading misinformation. This finding confirms Burns' (2021, p. 128) observation that the growing internal heterogeneity within the EP has significantly complicated the process of reaching consensus on environmental policies.

The biggest political group of the EP, the European People´s Party (EPP) opposed the Nature Restoration Law, releasing numerous publications criticising the regulation. The group published 26 written texts on the topic of nature restoration. The EPP Group Chief Negotiator, Christine Schneider, viewed the proposal for the regulation as “an attack on European agriculture, forestry and fisheries” (EPP, 2023a). Similar arguments as in the case of the SUR proposal were made as farmers interests and food security are to be protected. In a news article published almost a year later, the group declared that it is going to vote against the draft proposal in the upcoming plenary session (EPP, 2024a). The political group welcomed the fact that the EPs report differs substantially from the Commission's proposal as this was “ideologically driven, practically unfeasible and a disaster for farmers, forest owners, fishermen and local authorities” (ibid.). Nevertheless, the group argued that the best solution is to vote against the proposal in the EP and to start from scratch.

The S&D group group strongly supported the Nature Restoration Law, portraying it as a vital tool for addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. The group has released 25 publications containing information about the regulation. It strongly supported the proposal for the regulation and viewed it as a crucial part of the European Green Deal (S&D, 2023a). The legislation was seen as beneficial for the European society and the farmers. As farmers are one of the societal groups suffering most from climate change and biodiversity loss, the group argued that the proposed regulation protects farmers instead of harming them as claimed by the EPP (S&D, 2023b). The S&D group criticised the EPP for starting a campaign “riddled with

myths, falsely claiming that the law would have a detrimental effect on various sectors, including agriculture" (ibid.). The group viewed itself as the successful political actor in ensuring that the EP adopted the nature restoration law as it succeeded in ensuring a progressive majortity (S&D, 2024a).

The Greens/EFA group viewed the Nature Restoration Law as essential for reversing biodiversity loss and condemned the EPP group for their standpoints. The group released 22 publications on the Nature Restoration Law arguing that in the face of a severe decline in biodiversity, there is an urgent need for action and the nature restoration law is a key element in this. As society depends on healthy ecosystems bringing back nature is viewed as essential (Greens/ EFA, 2023a) The group believed that there is a possibility of reversing nature loss and restoring biodiversity (Greens/ EFA, 2023b). Similarly to the S&D group, the Greens/ EFA group blamed the EPP group for blocking the proposed regulation. The Greens/ EFA groups shadow rapporteur for the draft report, Jutta Paulus, has stated: "The EPP are moving at a dangerous pace towards the far-right. With its sabotage of European legislation, the EPP is adopting a well-known pattern of the extreme right." (Greens/ EFA, 2023c - 31.05.2023). After the adoption of the report by the EP in July 2023, the Greens/ EFA group, similarly to the S&D group, viewed themselves as the reason for this victory. The group published a video titled: "We saved the Nature Restoration Law" (Greens/ EFA, 2023d).

The Renew Europe, ID, ECR, and GUE/NGL offered diverse perspectives on the Nature Restoration Law, ranging from full support to criticism over its perceived burdens on agriculture and other sectors. The Renew Europe group has published 2 publications on the topic of the Nature Restoration Law. Both of them were published after the adoption of the text by the EP and both of them are in support of the regulation (Renew Europe, 2023a; Renew Europe, 2024a). According to the group, for a strong European Green Deal and the protection of biodiversity, the nature restoration law is needed (Renew Europe, 2023a). The ID group has released one article on the subject of nature restoration in which it explained its strong opposition towards the proposed regulation (ID, 2024a). The ECR has released three publications about the Nature Restoration Law. The group made similar arguments to the EPP stressing the burdens of the legislation to farmers and fishermen (ECR, 2024). Although the group expressed its content towards the fact that the nature restoration law has been watered down immensely compared to the original proposal by the European Commission, it is still too ambitious at "the expense of food production, housing, transport and even energy transition" (ECR, 2023a). The GUE/NGL group released six publications on the topic. The group

supported the initiative. In the fact-check paper, the group debunked ten lies about the proposed regulation. Most of the lies concern farmers' well-being, food security and regulatory burdens (GUE/NGL, 2023a).

The plenary debate on the Nature Restoration Law on 11th of July 2023 confirmed the deep divide between left- and right-leaning political groups (European Parliament, 2023a, Verbatim report of proceedings). A total number of 68 MEPs took the floor out of which, 36 MEPs were critical of the ENVI report (ibid.). Similarly, as in the case of the SUR proposal, most of the opposition to the report came from the EPP, ID, and the ECR. Although the Renew Europe group claimed in their press release which was released a day after the EP adopted the report that the outcome of the plenary vote was "the result of Renew Europe's tireless efforts and bridge-building proposals" (Renew Europe, 2024a), four members of the Renew Europe group spoke out against the regulation (European Parliament, 2023a, Verbatim report of proceedings). Most of the arguments against the regulation touched upon the well-being of farmers and the threat to the forestry sector.

Table 3: Standpoints of Political Groups and MEPs regarding NRL

Public stances of the political groups		Individual MEP stances during plenary	
In Favour	Against	In Favour	Against/Critical of
S&D Greens/ EFA Renew Europe GUE/NGL	EPP ECR ID	32 MEPs	36 MEPs

The policy-making process regarding the adoption of the ENVI report was accompanied by intense lobbying efforts, with the #RestoreNature Coalition leading environmental groups in advocating for stronger EU measures fight biodiversity loss and climate change. The #RestoreNature Coalition, comprising prominent environmental NGOs such as WWF, the European Environmental Bureau, and BirdLife Europe and Central Asia advocated for a quick adoption of the proposed regulation and for enhanced provisions where necessary to effectively address the ongoing biodiversity emergency and climate crises (WWF, 2023b; #RestoreNature Coalition, n.d). Regarding the ENVI draft report, the coalition welcomed the draft report as it "proposes several changes that will make the proposal stronger and more effective to tackle the twin crises of nature loss and climate change" (WWF, 2023a, p.1). The organisations did however propose several amendments to the draft report including a proposal to increase the overarching objective regarding the scope of land and sea areas to be restored from 20% to at

least 30% (ibid.; table below). The coalition seemed to be partly financed by the European Commission as BirdLife Europe and Central Asia receives funding from the European Commission and the EU LIFE Programme (#RestoreNature Coalition, n.d). This is not extraordinary as the Commission is a major funder of EU-level citizen interest groups (Greenwood, 2017, p. 125).

Besides environmental NGOs, business associations played a central role in lobbying against the Nature Restoration Law. The Committee of Agricultural Organizations in the EU/ General Committee of Agricultural Cooperation in the EU (COPA/COGECA), an organisation that represents over 22 million European farmers, is a powerful actor in EU agricultural policy due to its long history of informal lobbying of the EU institutions (Grant & Stocker, 2009, p. 235). COPA/COGECA possesses over extensive resources as it is ranked third among EU business associations in terms of staff size, exceeding even BusinessEurope (Greenwood, 2017, p.75). The association strongly opposed the Nature Restoration Law and allied with Europêche, the representative body of the fishermen in the European Union, to call for a rejection of the ENVI report (Europêche, 2023). According to the two organisations, the nature restoration law is an "ill-thought out, unrealistic, and unimplementable legislation that endangers farmers' and fishers' livelihoods and food production in the EU" (ibid.). Crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine as well as extremist environmental legislations that the EU is adopting that affect food production, already harm the fishing and agricultural sectors. The nature restoration law would increase the negative impact (ibid.). Even though business unity among the business associations seems to have been strong, a coalition of over 70 representatives from the European farming community signed a joint statement called "EU Farmers for Nature Restoration" calling for the adoption of the Nature Restoration Law (Earth4All, 2023).

Individual companies voiced diverse perspectives on the Nature Restoration Law and business unity was rather law. In a message to the EP, the member states, and the president of the European Commission, CEOs, and executives from over 80 companies demanded that the Nature Restoration Law should be upheld strengthened and enforced (Business for Nature, 2023). Bayer AG, a global enterprise which focuses on the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, claimed to be committed to the conservation and restoration of biodiversity in the agricultural sector through their services and technology (Bayer AG, 2023). At the same time, the company acknowledges that there are limitations to a wide adoption of measures enhancing biodiversity. These limitations are specially connected to financial risks as negative effects on

crop yield are possible and additional costs and efforts due to the implementation and maintenance would appear (Bayer AG, 2022a, p. 66). When adopting policies there is also a high risk that the measures are considered too strict and do not cover the varying opportunity costs farmers face when adopting those measures. The market conditions are not yet ready. To have farmers onboard with biodiversity-enhancing practices, these practices should be made more accessible and financial initiatives should be in place (ibid.).

In July 2023, preceding the European Parliament's plenary debate on the Nature Restoration Law, numerous farmers' protests occurred (Schauenberg, 2023). As previously established in the theoretical framework, corporate actors can influence policy-making not only through behind-the-scenes negotiations but also by appealing to the public (Keller, 2018, p. 291). While direct public support for the farmers' protests from the aforementioned business associations could not have been identified based on the publications released by associations such as COPA/COGECA, evidence suggests indirect involvement. The Bavarian Farmers' Association (in German: Bayrischer Bauernverband (BBV)), in a statement released around the EP plenary vote, reported that "COPA-COGECA will be holding a demonstration in Strasbourg on Tuesday morning to once again draw attention to the counterproductive consequences of the 'nature restoration law' for sustainable land management" (BBV, 2023). Another German association, the Rhineland Agricultural Association (in German: Rheinischer Landwirtschafts-Verband (RLV)), publicly supported the "Nature Restauration – Yes we can :: Nature Restauration Law – No we can't" initiative, developed by the European Farmers Association (RLV, n.d.). Although COPA/COGECA is not explicitly mentioned, heir involvement is likely implied.

In July 2023, at the time before the plenary debate of the EP regarding the Nature Restoration Law, many farmers protests took place (Schauenberg, 2023). As mentioned in the chapter where I introduced the theoretical framework, corporate actors can influence the policy-making process besides through negotiations that take place behind closed doors, but also by appealing to the public (Keller, 2018, p. 291). While the aforementioned business associations and large corporations did not publicly address the farmers protests, there are indications that COPA COGECA was involved. The Bayrischer Bauernverband reported surrounding the EP plenary vote on the regulation, that "COPA-COGECA will be holding a demonstration in Strasbourg on Tuesday morning to once again draw attention to the counterproductive consequences of the "nature restoration law" for sustainable land management" (BBV, 2023). Another indication was made by The Rheinischen Landwirtschafts-Verband (RLV) stated that it supports the „Nature Restauration – Yes we can : Nature Restauration Law – No we can't"

initiative of the European Farmers Association and posted a picture of a farmers protest (RLV, n.d.). Although COPA/COGECA is not explicitly named, they could mean them.

When assessing in how far amendments and speeches reflected business interests, it seems that the agricultural industry was successful in voicing their concerns to the MEPs. Amendment 191 which was tabled by 23 members of the EPP called for a rejection of the Commission proposal with the justification that the newly reformed CAP already includes measures that must be met with the objectives of nature conservation and protection of biodiversity. Another argument of the amendment is that the agricultural and forestry sectors play a fundamental role in food production, providing food security and in the aid of development in rural areas. Measures of the Nature Restoration Law should not hinder these functions and tasks. The Commission should withdraw the proposal and leave it to the member states to implement their own nature conservation measures. This should be done within the CAP national strategic plans (amendment 191). It is not only the EPP that proposed to reject the Commission proposal. The Renew Europe group called in amendment 190 for a rejection of the Nature Restoration Law referring to similar arguments. These arguments align with the standpoints of the agricultural business associations COPA/COGECA and Europêche.

Focusing on a concrete article of the draft proposal furthermore reveals the agricultural sector's influence, emphasising the need to prioritise social and economic considerations. Referring to article 9 on the restoration of agricultural ecosystems, members of the EPP fraction tabled amendment 1309 in which it is stressed that instead of member states having to adopt necessary restoration measures in agricultural ecosystems, member states should “take into account social and economic requirements“ (amendment 1309) when doing so. When putting in place these measures, aspects such as food security and securing socially and economically viable agricultural production should be taken into account. This speaks in favour of the agricultural interest groups and their demands of either removing Article 9 or taking important aspects into account when putting the measurements in place (Deutscher Bauernverband, 2022). According to the amendment, instead of adopting new indicators for nature conservation such as the grassland butterfly index or the farmland bird index as proposed by the Commission, the indicators should be based on existing ones such as from the CAP. Indicators proposed by the Commission for the agricultural ecosystem “are dangerous and inappropriate, because they can hardly, if at all, be influenced by the farmer” (amendment 1309).

During the plenary debate, MEPs frequently presented themselves as representatives of citizen groups who would be negatively impacted by the regulation. This aligns with the theoretical framework, which argues that MEPs are more likely to consider public opinion if the proposed legislation affects a large segment of the citizens. Edina Toth (NI, Hungary, original in Hungarian) stated that the regulation would "threaten the livelihood of farmers and can reduce food production in Europe by up to 30%." Another MEP from the EPP group claimed that "farmers and fishermen feel helpless and have said enough: enough of promoting disproportionate legislative proposals that directly attack their interests and endanger their livelihood and food security" (Gabriel Mato, EPP, Spain, original in Spanish). According to a German member of the EPP, Alexander Bernhuber, the nature restoration law should be renamed the "Forest and meadow set-aside law, rural expropriation law" (Alexander Bernhuber, EPP, Germany, original in German).

Table 4: Comparison of Suggetions regarding NRL

	Commission proposal	ENVI report	EP final report	Agricultural interests (COPA COGECA)	Environmental interests (Restore nature coalition)
Overall target (article 1)	by 2030, at least 20 % of the Union's land and sea areas and, by 2050, all ecosystems in need of restoration.	Rapporteur suggests that by 2030, at least 30% of the EU's land and at least 30% of the EU's sea area are covered by effective area-based restoration measures	by 2030, at least 20 % of land and *20 % of the* sea areas and, by 2050, all ecosystems in need of restoration.	Rejection of "unrealistic" targets	by 2030, at least 30% of the EU's land and at least 30% of the EU's sea area are covered by effective area-based restoration measures,
Article 9: restoration of agricultural ecosystems	Restoration and rewetting of agriculturally used drained peatlands: 30% of the areas by 2030, of which at least a quarter will be rewetted; by 2040, 50% of the areas with 50% rewetting and by 2050 70% of the areas with 50% rewetting.	Include 9 and add that share of agricultural land with high diversity landscape features, with the view to achieving the 2030 objective of covering at least 10% of the Union's agricultural area with high-diversity landscape features.	Include article 9 as agreed on in the trilogues with the Council	Removal of article 9	Include article 9 as proposed by the Commission.

In sum, the Nature Restoration Law was characterised by a high level of politicisation and a polarised debate, with a clear left-right divide dominating the discussions. While politicisation shaped the trajectory of the proposal, the strong influence of business interests and lobbying played a role in shaping its content and the intensity of the debate. Agricultural and fisheries business associations, such as COPA/COGECA and Europêche, were vocal in opposing the

law, stressing the burdens it would place on their sectors. This suggests the presence of significant business lobbying activity alongside a high level of politicisation. However, contrary to the expectation that such a overlap would inevitably lead to policy rejection, the EP approved the ENVI report.

3.2. Case 2: Deforestation Regulation - Minimal Politicisation and Business Lobbying

The Deforestation Regulation stands out as the least politicised of the three regulations analysed. This is evidenced by several factors. Firstly, with only 24 speeches during the plenary session, it generated significantly less parliamentary debate compared to the other two regulations. Secondly, the volume of materials produced by political groups related to this regulation was notably lower. This relative lack of political attention may be attributed to the regulation's primary focus on the trade sector, which may have less immediate and tangible consequences for citizens compared to sectors like agriculture (impacted by the Sustainable Use Regulation and the the Nature Restoration Law) or forestry and fisheries (impacted by the Nature Restoration Law). Thirdly, the EP adopted the draft proposal in only 11 months which is less than the average length for a legislative act to be adopted during the first reading was 18 months (European Parliament, 2020, p. 50). As a result, the Deforestation Regulation did not face significant opposition and was approved by the EP relatively quickly, indicating that policy adoption tends to be more straightforward when political pressure and business lobbying are less intense.

I start by analysing the publications by the EP political groups. Six (EPP, S&D, Greens/ EFA, Renew Europe, GUE/NGL, ECR) of the seven political groups (no publications by ID) supported the regulation. The EPP, ECR and Renew Europe groups shifted their stance in 2024, criticizing the regulation as burdensome for European farmers and businesses. The overall themes regarding the regulation focused on the regulations environmental impact, its potential economic consequences, and the balance between ambitious climate goals and the burden on businesses. The regulation was largely framed by the political groups as a suitable tool for combating deforestation by ensuring that EU markets do not contribute to the destruction of forests.

The EPP group supported the adoption of the proposed regulation. The group released eight publications on the Deforestation regulation, but six of them after September 2024. Consequently, only two of these documents fall within the timeframe of this thesis, both published just before the plenary vote on September 13, 2022. Both of them were published

immediately before the plenary vote on the 13th of September 2022. In those press releases, the group supports the Deforestation regulation and states: “We want to make sure that no European company uses palm oil, cocoa, soy, wood, coffee, rubber and other commodities from illegally-deforested land in the Amazon, South America or beyond“ (EPP, 2022a). In the following press release, the EPP further clarifies the reasons for the need for this regulation as it is viewed as a way to halt the destruction of forests in the Amazon, South America, Asia and beyond (EPP, 2022b). Two years later, the group completely changed its stance towards the regulation with headlines such as “Deforestation law a "bureaucratic monster", must be delayed” (EPP, 2024b). The main reason for the opposition was similar to the nature restoration law and SUR: the deforestation law overburdens European farmers and businesses (ibid.).

The S&D group and the Greens/ EFA group strongly supported the draft regulation. The group published seven written materials on the Deforestation Regulation, six of those in 2024 and only one in 2022 following the plenary vote of the 13th of September 2022. The group supported the draft report stressing that it is a big step forward towards the goal of banning products linked to deforestation from accessing the European market (S&D, 2022a). In the press releases from autumn 2024, the S&D group strongly criticised the EPP as the group suggested to not only postpone the implementation of the regulation, but to amend it, which would result in another round of trilogue negotiations (S&D, 2024b). The S&D group was of the opinion if the EPP group amendments pass, the Commission should withdraw its proposal to delay the implementation entirely. The Greens/ EFA group released eight publications on the topic of the Deforestation Regulation and about half of them in the period between 2022 and 2023. The group strongly supported the proposed regulation from the beginning but pointed out its weaknesses and tried to make it even more ambitious for example by expanding the definition of “forest” (Greens/ EFA, 2022a). The adoption of the EPs position in the plenary in September 2022 was viewed as a great success as the Parliament included crucial improvements to the proposed text. The adopted ENVI report was seen as an important step towards “ending EU-driven global deforestation“ (Greens/ EFA, 2022b).

The positions of the Renew Europe group, ID group, ECR group, and GUE/NGL group on the Deforestation Regulation reveal a mix of strong support and cautious optimism. The Renew Europe group released two publications about the Deforestation law - one in December 2022 and one in December 2024. The group supported the adoption of the regulation and called it a “new landmark legislation” (Renew Europe, 2022) which will reduce the EUs impact on forests outside of the EU and make the supply chains more sustainable and transparent. The ID group

didn't release any publications specifically on the topic of the Deforestation Regulation. The ECR group mentioned the regulation in their overview about the plenary weak in April 2023. The group pointed out that the regulation "has the potential to significantly reduce these practices and the destruction of rain forests" (ECR, 2023b) and seemed rather in favour of the regulation. GUE/NGL group released one publication specifically on the regulation in November 2024 in which the group is in favour of the regulation (GUE/NGL, 2024)

The low number of MEPs participating in the plenary debate on the Deforestation Regulation suggests limited salience of the policy issue. During the plenary debate of the first reading on the 12th of September 2022, only 24 MEPs took the floor to hold a speech (European Parliament, 2022a, Verbatim report of proceedings). This is significantly less than in the case of the Nature Restoration Law (69 MEPs) and also less than in the case of the SUR (47 MEPs). This rather small number of MEPs taking the floor indicates that it was an issue of low salience. Most MEPs taking the floor belonged to the EPP group with seven speakers. Three MEPs held a speech from the S&D, Renew Europe and GUE/NGL (ibid.). Two MEPs took the floor from the Greens/ EFA and the ECR and one non-attached member stated their opinion. Out of the 24 MEPs taking the floor, one speaker from the ID group (MEP Aurélia Beigneux) and one from the ECR (MEP Anna Zalewska) were truly critical of the ENVI report. All of the remaining MEPs voiced some concerns but were overall in support of the legislation.

Table 5: Standpoints of Political Groups and MEPs regarding Deforestation Regulation

Public stances of the political groups			Individual MEP stances during plenary	
In Favour	Against	No publications	In Favour	Against/Critical of
EPP S&D Greens/ EFA Renew Europe GUE/NGL ECR		ID	22 MEPs	2 MEPs

The process leading to the adoption of the ENVI report was accompanied by lobbying activities, with the #Together4Forests campaign leading environmental groups in advocating support for the regulation. The campaign was created by ClientEarth, Conservation International, Environmental Investigation Agency, Fern, Global Witness and Greenpeace and led by WWF EU (WWF, n.d.). The campaign brought together 260 NGOs demanding a strong

EU Deforestation Regulation. In a position paper published by ClientEarth, it is stressed that a “green lane” for certification or third-party verification schemes should be excluded from the regulation. Moreover, strong sustainability requirements, based on objective criteria, should be implemented (ClientEarth, 2022, p. 9). Additionally, a stronger definition for forests, deforestation and forest degradation was called for.

Contrary to environmental NGOs and campaigns supporting the draft regulation, business associations voiced some concerns. From the EU grain and oilseed trade and animal feed industry, three associations - COCERAL; FEDIOL, FEFAC - have allied on the topic by publishing a joint statement on the ENVI report (FEFAC, n.d.). The associations expressed disappointment concerning two aspects of the ENVI report: the production area traceability and the country benchmarking system. They elaborated on their concerns regarding the implementation timeline which was viewed as too short. The organisations stressed the need for support for smallholders. Regarding the country benchmarking system they argued that the classifying countries as "high-risk” could stigmatize these regions and hinder private sector efforts to prevent deforestation (ibid.).

The analysis of lobbying groups revealed that major opposition to the draft legislation stemmed from companies and business associations from outside the EU. An example for this is the Indonesian Palm Oil Association (GAPKI). The association sent a letter to the EU Commissioner for Environment, the EU Parliament Rapporteur on the Deforestation Regulation and the Czech Presidency of the Council (GAPKI, 2022). The main concern of the association was that the Deforestation Regulation might hinder Indonesia's progress in reducing deforestation since it is not a collaborative approach that the EU has chosen. Small farmers of palm oil would be excluded from the EU single market and as a result, poverty would increase and sustainable development decrease. Instead of denying access of small farmers to the EU single market, an exemption, or cap, that would allow smallholders to operate with reduced requirements is needed. As the regulation does not recognize existing sustainability schemes, a duplication of measures will be the result for palm oil businesses. The traceability requirements established by the EU Deforestation Regulation raise concerns about potential overlap or redundancy with existing palm oil industry initiatives. Lastly, the criteria for designating a country as "high risk" under the EU Deforestation Regulation lack clarity. This raises concerns about potential fairness in its application (ibid.)

Business lobbying does not seem to have been successful in getting their demands across. As mentioned above, out of the 24 MEPs taking the floor, only two MEPs were truly critical of the report. Some of the discussion points were whether the financial sector should be included (MEP Hildegard Bentele), Another point concerned the access to justice for indigenous people (MEP Anna Cavazzini). However, several MEPs stressed the importance of lowering the burden to businesses, specially small and medium-sized businesses and local communities (MEP Henna Virkkunen). This reflects some of the standpoints of COCERAL; FEDIOL and FEFAC. Some MEPs pointed out the concern of a lack of coherence with other legislation such as the Renewable Energy Directive that includes the regulation of woody biomass (MEP Michal Wiezik). Lastly, it was stressed that duplications of obligations to reduce administrative burdens should be avoided.

In sum, the Deforestation Regulation was least politicised of the three analysed regulations, as indicated by fewer parliamentary debates, lower publication volumes from political groups, and quicker adoption by the European Parliament (EP). This reduced political attention may stem from the regulation's focus on the trade sector, which has less immediate impact on citizens than other sectors like agriculture and forestry. The analysis of EP political group publications revealed that most supported the regulation, with some groups, such as the EPP, shifting their stance in 2024. Environmental groups, led by the #Together4Forests campaign, strongly supported the regulation. In contrast, business associations, especially those in sectors such as agriculture and trade, expressed concerns about the implementation, potential disruptions to supply chains, and the negative impact on smallholders. Despite these concerns, business lobbying had little influence on the final plenary vote and the draft regulation was approved by the EP.

3.3. Case 3: Sustainable Use Regulation – Overlap of Political and Corporate Opposition

The Sustainable Use Regulation represents the case of a regulation that was highly politicised with the simultaneous presence of intense business lobbying. This is line with my theoretical framework suggesting that when the two pressures overlap, policy rejection is inevitable. The regulations implications were far-reaching for the agricultural sector, where it was predominantly perceived as a potential threat to the livelihoods of farmers. MEPs standpoints on the draft report were divided with 25 MEPs expressing support for the regulation and 22 MEPs voicing concerns. Political groups such as EPP, ECR and ID framed the regulation as impractical or even harmful to the agricultural sector and as a threat to food security. This

framing overlaps with the standpoints of corporate actors, suggesting successful lobbying. The draft regulation was eventually rejected by the European Parliament, confirming the theoretical expectation of the thesis that the overlap between a high level of politicisation and intense business lobbying results in policy failure.

I start by examining the volume of publications by the political groups and the number of speeches held in plenary and by illustrating the dividing standpoints between the political groups. The primary division among MEPs centers on those groups positioning ithemselves as defenders of European farmers (EPP, ECR, ID) and those groups viewing the regulation as a crucial step towards environmental sustainability (S&D, Greens/ EFA, GUE/NGL). The Renew Europe groups stance remains ambiguous with a focus on innovation and sustainable solutions for farmers. The debate during the plenary session demonstrated a pronounced divide between left-leaning and right-leaning political groups.

The EPP group was the most vocal political group in opposing the Sustainable Use Regulation as it released the highest number of written materials with 26 different publications on the topic of pesticide reduction. The political group presented itself as the protector of European farmers and agriculture (EPP, 2023b). The EPP opposed the SUR proposal and stood "[…] ready, if necessary, to throw out ill-considered legislative proposals […]" (ibid., p. 10). The political group suggested postponing the SUR proposal in its current form as it would "jeopardise European food production during the war in Ukraine" (EPP, 2023c). The EPP furthermore labels the regulation as an "extremist approach" (EPP, 2023d) that would result in an increased amount of bans and rules which would lead to a reduction of food production in Europe.

The S&D group strongly supported the draft proposal, emphasising its benefits for farmers and food security. The group released four publications on pesticide reduction which is significantly less than the EPP group. The S&D group viewed the proposed regulation as a positive progress. Instead of labelling the regulation as a negative cause for food security and a threat to farmers, the group stressed the benefits of the SUR (S&D, 2023c). The political group positioned itself as the leader in pesticide reduction, citing the 2019 European Parliament report they drafted, which called upon EU member states to implement stricter pesticide reduction measures and targets (S&D, 2019). The tight voting outcome in the ENVI committee was regarded as a result of the EPP boycott on the policy proposal (S&D, 2023d).

The Greens/ EFA group advocated for stronger pesticide reduction measures, emphasising the regulation's role in protecting biodiversity and European farmers. The group released 14 publications on SUR and on the topic of pesticide reduction in general. In their factsheet from the 15th of February 2023 on "How pesticides harm our food production" the group stressed that while food security is not currently threatened in the EU, the use of pesticides poses a risk to biodiversity, which is essential for future food production (Greens/ EFA, 2023e). The argument is that pesticides harm farmers and using less of plant protection products is profitable for farmers. At the request of the Council, the European Commission published additional data to the impact assessment of the SUR in July 2023. According to the Greens, this request was viewed as an attempt by the Council and the EPP to slow down the policy-making process on the SUR (Greens/ EFA, 2023f). The group strongly defended the need for the regulation in its publications and attempts to strengthen the proposal by raising its ambitions.

The Renew Europe group seeked balanced solutions, while the ID and ECR groups opposed the SUR proposal, and the GUE/NGL group criticised these opposition alliances and industry lobbying. While the Renew Europe group didn't publish any written materials specifically on the topic of pesticide reduction, it organised a seminar on the topic of plant protection products (Renew Europe, 2023b). It doesn't become clear whether the Renew Europe group fully supports the SUR proposal. The purpose of the seminar was to seek solutions for achieving zero pollution while ensuring sustainable solutions for farmers (ibid.). The ID group published one news article regarding the SUR proposal linking it to the farmer's protests taking place all over Europe (ID, 2023). The ECR group also published one article about the SUR proposal in which the group strongly opposed the proposal in its current form as an ENVI draft report (ECR, 2023c). Within the last four years, the GUE/NGL group published five articles on the need of pesticide reduction and one specifically concerning the SUR proposal. In it, the group blames the alliance of EPP, ECR and ID for blocking the approval of the SUR proposal and the pesticide industry for successfully lobbying against the proposal (GUE/NGL, 2023b).

The plenary debate on the SUR proposal which took place on the 21st of November 2023, highlighted a sharp divide between left- and right-leaning MEPs, with significant opposition from the EPP, ID, and ECR groups. During the plenary debate, 47 MEPs took the floor to hold a speech. Out of the 47 speeches, 22 MEPs were critical of the SUR report (European Parliament, 2023b, Verbatim report of proceedings). In the case of the SUR, most MEPs taking the floor included members of the EPP group with eleven speakers. This was followed by the S&D group with nine and the Greens/EFA group with 20 seven speakers. The Renew Europea

and ECR groups had five MEPs taking the floor. The GUE/NGL and ID groups had three MEPs taking the floor. Additionally, four non-attached MEPs held a speech. Most opposition to the report came from the EPP, ID, and the ECR groups. Out of the political groups identified as advocates for the adoption of the proposal, two MEPs from the Renew Europe group and two MEPs from the S&D group voiced concern over the report.

Table 6: Standpoints of Political Groups and MEPs regarding SUR

Public stances of the political groups			Individual MEP stances during plenary	
In Favour	Against	Unclear	In Favour	Against/Critical of
S&D Greens/ EFA GUE/NGL	EPP ECR ID	Renew Europe	25 MEPs	22 MEPs

As an expanded circle of actors is an indicator for politicisation, I will analyse the interest groups involved. Environmental NGOs publicly stated that a strong SUR regulation is needed. Most of the campaigning was carried out by organisations such as PAN Europe and FoEE which are both environmental networks uniting several national organisations with thousands of local groups (PAN Europe, 2022; FoEE, 2023). The topic of pesticide reduction was considered to be of high salience to the public as the organisations pointed out that more than a million Europeans have signed the Save Bees and Farmers' Initiative in which they demand a reduction of synthetic pesticides of 80% by 2030 and a gradual phase-out of synthetic pesticides in Europe by 2035 (Save Bees and Farmers, n.d.; FoEE, 2022). PAN Europe stated that the SUR proposal did not represent a ground-breaking regulation, but a more binding form of the previous SUD which was implemented in 2009 (PAN Europe, 2022). FoEE is pointing out that agricultural interest groups and the industry are using crises such as the war in Ukraine to undermine the SUR proposal arguing that a reduction of PPPs will create obstacles in the supply chain and result in lower yields and increased prices (FoEE, 2022).

Besides environmental NGOs, business associations were vocal about the SUR proposal. COPA/COGECA, an association representing European farmers (Bouwen, 2004, p. 477) has released several publications on the subject. Their demands differ substantially from the suggestions of the environmental NGOs. COPA/COGECA criticised that the Green Deal´s objectives were presented before the COVID-19 crisis and do not factor in this crisis and other more recent events such as the war in Ukraine. The goal of reducing PPPs by 50% by 2030 is „clearly overambitious and irresponsible considering the current socio-economic and political

challenges" (COPA/COGECA, 2022a, p. 4). According to the association, the ENVI committee made the Commission's proposal, which COPA/COGECA didn't support in the first place, even more unbalanced and out of touch with the realities of farmers day to day lives by raising the overall reduction target from 50% to 65% (COPA/COGECA, 2022b, p. 4). An example of this would be the inclusion of nationally binding targets in addition to the Union-wide targets.

Intense lobbying was also evident from the pesticide industry. CropLife Europe a trade association consisting of companies such as Bayer AG, BASF, Syngenta and Corverta, big corporations that sell plant protection products opposed the SUR proposal. In December 2022, CropLife argued to the European Commission that achieving a transition to low-risk and chemical-free pesticides by 2025 is not feasible (European Commission, Response to Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572, p. 217). Recognising the importance of committees as primary lobbying targets within the EP, as highlighted by Bouwen (2004, p. 484) who stresses the value of committee hearings for industry-MEP dialogue, Bayer AG successfully leveraged this opportunity. Dr. Cristina Alonso Alija, representing Bayer AG, participated as an expert speaker in an EP hearing on "How to make sure that pesticide manufacturers disclose results of toxicity studies" (European Parliament, 2023c). Regarding the SUR proposal, the company stated that the objectives of the current SUD, which the SUR was going to replace are already ambitious enough (Bayer AG, 2022b). In their publications, the company admits that a reduction of chemical use in crop protection can be achieved. Innovation can help apply these products precisely and verify their effectiveness (Bayer AG, 2023). However, it becomes clear that the company is not actually in favour of a reduction of the volume of pesticides. Instead of reducing the volume of pesticide use (reduction of PPPs by 50% by 2030), the reduction of the impact of pesticides on the environment should be focused on.

The positions of the agricultural industry (COPA/COGECA) and pesticide industry (Bayer AG) aligned suggesting high business unity not only within a business sector but across. Similarly to the agricultural associations, Bayer AG stressed that before the introduction of reduction targets, effective and affordable solutions need to be made accessible to farmers. The introduction of electronic record-keeping requirements to document crop protection intervention and the application of Integrated Pest Management can be very burdensome for farmers (Bayer AG 2022a). The company stated that "the assumption that replacing chemical tools with non-chemical alternatives will always lead to reducing the environmental impact of farmers interventions has indeed no basis in fact"(ibid., p. 4).

Table 7: Comparison of Suggetions regarding SUR

	Commission proposal	ENVI report	Agricultural business (COPA/COGECA)	Environmental interests (FOEE, PAN Europe)
Overall reduction goal	Reduce the overall use and risk of PPPs by 50% and the more hazardous ones by 50% by 2030	Reduce the overall use and risk of PPPs by 50% and the more hazardous ones by 65% by 2030	Abandon reduction goal	Reduce the overall use of PPPs by 50% by 2025, 80% by 2030 and 100% by 2035.
Sensitive areas	**A ban on all pesticides in sensitive areas:** Buffer zone: the use of PPPs in sensitive areas and within 3 meters of such areas is prohibited.	no pesticides can be used in sensitive areas, except for biocontrol products and products allowed in organic farming. Allows derogations from these general rules. Buffer zones of 3 meters, extended to *5* meters for areas frequented by the general public and vulnerable populations in human settlements.	excluding the use of any PPP is too extreme and very detrimental for many regions Abandon the buffer zone as a 3-metre ban on the use of PPPs would considerably reduce the amount of land farmed	**A ban on all pesticides in sensitive areas:** The proposed 3 or 5 meters buffers around sensitive areas can't provide effective protection of citizens and biodiversity and should be higher.

In November 2023, at the time before the plenary debate of the EP regarding the SUR proposal, farmers revolts were still ongoing (Finger et al., 2024). As corporate actors can influence the policy-making process various channels, including behind-the-scenes negotiations and by shaping public discourse by approaching news outlets (Culpepper, 2011, p. 178), it is crucial to analyse in how far business associations made use of this strategy in the context of the SUR proposal. While direct public support for the farmers' protests from major agricultural business associations could not be proven, indirect evidence suggests potential industry involvement in shaping the public narrative surrounding the SUR proposal. Alexandra Brand, Chair of the Board of CropLife Europe, authored an article in Brussels Times (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2023). In the article, she emphasised the multifaceted challenges faced in developing new technologies to reduce pesticide use. Brand (2023) argued that it is "vital to prioritize the needs of farmers and speed up innovation and access for farmers to new

technologies." This statement, while not directly related to the farmers' protests, highlights the industry's engagement in public discourse to shape policy debates around pesticide use.

The arguments of corporate actors were reflected in the speeches of MEPs from the EPP, ID and ECR groups indicating successful lobbying. In her speech, MEP Sylvia Limmer from the ID group admitted that she is not the only one who received countless letters from farmers who are worried about their existence (European Parliament, 2023b, Verbatim report of proceedings). According to her, the SUR would be the end of many agricultural businesses. Therefore, all of the EPP members should vote for their amendment rejecting the report as a whole. Other arguments by the ID group included that there is no scientific base for the reduction goal, the funding for the search of alternatives to PPPs is insufficient and the entire agricultural supply chain would be at risk. The ECR voiced similar concerns as MEP Bert-Jan Ruissen stated that the ENVI report does not reflect achievable goals (ibid.). MEP Alexandr Vondra voiced concern over the definition of sensitive areas as it is insufficient and there are no alternatives for the farmers available. Similarly to the ID group, MEPs from the ECR group such as MEP Mazaly Aguilar stressed the fact that the economic survival of farmers is at play and the risk of interrupting the food security is high.

The EPP group proposed significant amendments to the SUR, expressing concerns that the legislation undermines food security and emphasising the need for farmers to be able to continue using pesticides. MEP Alexander Bernhuber, the chief negotiator of the EPP has tabled amendments 463-613, watering down the legislation by deleting articles and raising the goal to 2035 as well as replacing the word rules with guidelines. Bernhuber stated that “the current law proposal is not fit for purpose” (EPP, 2023c) as it undermines food security and raises the cost of food. In the plenary debate on SUR, Bernhuber said that in order to guarantee stable yields, it must be recognized that pesticides are the basis. To guarantee food security, farmers need all the tools they need. Calculation factors, reference years and reduction targets do not make sense without looking at the entirety. Instead, rapid access to alternative pesticides must be guaranteed. It is unacceptable that the Greens want to ban almost all pesticides (European Parliament, 2023b, Verbatim report of proceedings).

In sum, the statements, and amendments of the ID, ECR, and EPP groups overlapped significantly with the arguments of corporate actors from the agricultural and pesticide industries. Both industry players and MEPs stressed issues such as food security, the need for science-based reduction targets, and the need for the availability of quick alternatives for

farmers. Both entities also expressed worry over the existential threat that the SUR proposal would cause for farmers. Bayer AG and COPA/COGECA were successful in reaching MEPs even though these corporate actors might not have been in a favourable position for negotiations (Kluger Dionigi, 2017) as issue of the SUR was highly politicised, and the level of counter-lobbying was high. Additionally, the ENVI committee instead of the AGRI committee was appointed lead committee of the legislation and a MEP from the Greens/EFA was made rapporteur.

4. Conclusion

The European Parliament, traditionally seen as a pioneer in advancing environmental policies, has shifted its stance toward EU environmental legislation. During the period when the EP's powers were more limited and it was not yet a co-legislator in most policy areas, the institution was considered a pioneer of issuing ambitious recommendations on environmental legislation (Rasmussen, 2012). Recently, the EP has taken on a more oppositional stance towards the policies of the European Green Deal. This thesis set out to explain this shift in the EP's stance from being an environmental champion to seemingly becoming an environmental laggard.

There were two theoretical starting points. Firstly, based on literature on electoral politicisation it was argued that politicisation, characterised by the increased salience of an issue and polarised debates, enhances electoral pressures on MEPs to respond to voter concerns. It was hypothesised that a high level of politicisation increases the likelihood of policy adoption to diminish. Secondly, drawing from research on business lobbying, it was argued that corporate actors seek to protect their economic interests, maintain the regulatory status quo and possess significant resources to exert influence on the policy-making processes. The expectation was that a high level of business lobbying to also increases the likelihood of policy adoption to diminish. Based on these two theoretical starting points, a novel theoretical framework was developed that focused on the interplay between the concepts of politicisation and business lobbying. In the presence of a dual pressure from politicised public scrutiny and persistent business lobbying, political compromise becomes nearly impossible. The expectation was that in this case the rejection of a policy is inevitable.

The research objective was met through the use of the comparative method. Three regulations proposed by the 2019 - 2024 von der Leyen Commission - the Nature Restoration Law, the Deforestation Regulation, and the Sustainable Use Regulation - were analysed. The thesis applied a Most Similar Systems Design to compare these cases as the regulations share common institutional and procedural characteristics but differ in their outcomes. The data used for the analysis consisted of a variety of sources including institutional documents from the European Parliament, such as committee reports, amendments, and transcripts of plenary debates. Additionally, public statements by political groups, official communications from business associations, and environmental NGOs were analysed. Data were collected from official EU databases, including EUR-Lex, the Legislative Observatory, and plenary session transcripts. Further insights were gathered from interest group publications. The document analysis as the employed research method allowed for a comprehensive

understanding of how each regulation was discussed, framed, and voted on in the European Parliament.

The empirical analysis of the three cases confirmed that the two factors (politicisation and business lobbying) have an impact on the policy outcome by acting as obstacles to policy adoption. The Deforestation Regulation, which encountered low levels of politicisation and limited business opposition, passed smoothly through the legislative process. This shows that business lobbying and politicisation have an impact on politicisation as the absence of both factors led to swift policy adoption. The main finding of the thesis was that when both politicisation and business lobbying converge, the likelihood of policy rejection increases. This goes against the initial expectation that stated that while either politicisation or business pressure increase the likelihood of policy rejection, the convergence of both definitly results in policy rejection. Both factors were prominent in the debates surrounding the Nature Restoration Law and the the Sustainable Use Regulation, but only the latter resulted in policy rejection.

This suggests that while politicisation and business lobbying tend to hinder policy adoption, policy rejection is not guaranteed when both factors converge. Therefore, further research on this is needed. Future research could focus on the importance of the scope of a legislative act or the position within the electoral cycle meaning the timing of the legislative process relative to the election schedule of the European Parliament. The Nature Restoration Law impacted multiple industry sectors, while the Sustainable Use Regulation focused specifically on agriculture. This narrower focus could have intensified lobbying and deepened the political divide. While the Deforestation Regulation was adopted in 2022, the Sustainable Use Regulation was debated in late 2023, just before the upcoming 2024 elections.

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