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UNCOVERING EU-SAAMI RELATIONS

An exploratory research on the relationship between the European Union and Saami political mobilisation.

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Abstract

In recent years, relations between the European Union and the Saami, the indigenous people of Fenno-Scandinavia who are mobilising to claim their rights, particularly in terms of rights to land and resources, cultural preservation and political representation, have multiplied. Despite mounting evidence, little research has been done on this relationship, largely due to the lack of recognition of indigenous rights by the EU.

Drawing on the theoretical foundations of social movement, Europeanization and contentious politics research, and using a triangulation research method combining document analysis and semi-structured interviews with experts and elites, this thesis aims to explore the nature of the relationship between the European Union and Saami political mobilisation.

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Abbreviations

EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
CEE	Central and Eastern European countries
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
UNDRIP	UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
ECJ	European Court of Justice
EBLUL	European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages
POS	Political Opportunity Structure
LOS	Legal Opportunity Structure

1. Introduction

During the Barents Euro-Arctic Indigenous Sámi Summit in Brussels on 22-24 March, which welcomed representatives from the three Saami parliaments and civil society, including the Saami Council, to discuss issues such as the Arctic and the green transition, the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, said in her opening speech that the Saami are the only indigenous people in the EU and that they are at home here in the European Parliament and that the Parliament will always be there to listen to them. *"As people who live in a traditional way and in harmony with nature, their values should be shared and celebrated."* (European Parliament, 2023).

This welcome by one of the most influential figures in the European Union is a symbol of the growing relationship between the Saami and the European Union. Since 2016 and the launch of the EU's Arctic policy (EUR-LEX, 2016), the European Union has decided to enter into an official dialogue with the Saami by organising numerous events, such as the Saami Week in February 2022 (EU-Saami Week, 2022). In February 2023, the EU also organised a conference in Nuuk to which Saami and Inuit representatives were invited (EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples' dialogue, 2023).

The Saami are an indigenous people living in the northern part of Fennoscandia and the Kola Peninsula, divided between Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Heinämäki et al, 2017). The Saami are mobilising to claim their rights, protect their culture and defend their interests as an indigenous group, particularly in terms of land and resource rights, cultural preservation and political representation.

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between Saami political mobilisation and the European Union, drawing on studies of social movements and contentious politics and contributing to the literature on social movements and Europeanization.

Although many studies have focused on the relationship between collective actors and the European Union (Porta and Caiani, 2009, p.1-36), in particular, collective actors representing minorities and/or marginalised communities exploiting the European Union perceived and defined as a structure of political opportunity (Ram, 2010), there is almost no research exploring Saami political mobilisations and the EU. Like other sub-national actors, through its Saami parliaments and civil organisations such as the Saami Council, the Saami have mobilised to claim their rights and make their voices heard. Their strategic fields of action have developed both in national arenas and in an international dimension. The Saami Council, which was founded in 1956 and defends Saami interests internationally (Loizzo and Tiano, 2019), has proven contacts with the EU and has been listed in the European Commission's transparency register since 2018, which lists organisations that try to influence EU law-making and policy implementation (Transparency Register, 2023). As part of its cohesion policy, the EU has funded no fewer than 60 Interreg projects since the 2000s, focusing on the Saami, their cultural revival and, more generally, their economic and social development (Interreg.eu, 2018). There are several data that highlight the interactions between Saami mobilisations and the European Union, but to date this relationship has been little studied.

One of the main reasons for the lack of research into the interactions between Saami sub-actors and the EU is the EU's non-recognition of indigenous rights. According to Bellier (2020), the EU cannot be an opportunity for the Saami because EU Community law does not contain any legislation to protect indigenous peoples. The only legally binding source of international law for the protection of indigenous peoples is Convention 169 of the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 1989). It recognises the right of indigenous peoples to self-determination, defined as the right to their own political status and to participate in decisions that affect them, including the protection of their lands and resources. This convention has not yet been ratified by the EU or by Sweden and Finland (Bellier, 2020). Finally, from a European point of view, apart from this Convention, matters relating to indigenous claims, i.e., cultural safeguarding, fall within the competence of the Member States, as defined in Article 167 of the TFEU (12008E167 - EUR-Lex). Alice Kuhnke (2021), in her parliamentary question, asked the Commission

what measures it would take to protect the Saami heritage, particularly in the context of the establishment of mines in Kalla in Sweden, as permitted by the Swedish government, and its harmful effects on reindeer herding in the region? And the Commission (P-005607/2, 2021) replied that although Saami culture is an integral part of Europe's cultural diversity, the protection and conservation of cultural heritage is a national responsibility and in this sense the EU can only encourage cooperation between member states to protect it.

Although the EU has no hard politics to directly influence member states, a body of literature on social movements and contentious politics applied to the European Union has demonstrated that the EU can represent a political opportunity structure for sub-national actors to advance their claims (Marks and McAdam, 1996). It turns out that the lack of recognition of law and *acquis communautaire* is not a conditional factor for defining the EU as an opportunity structure.

In some cases, the EU has provided other resources including funds and organising arenas for transnational mobilisations (Ayoub, 2013), in others the absence of law has been ultimately compensated by the impetus of civil actors who have defined their strategy through legal disputes resulting in the creation of a new EU jurisdiction (Cichowski, 2013).

1.2. Aim

This thesis aims to uncover the relationship between Saami political mobilisation and the EU.

Based on the theoretical field of social movements and contentious politics applied to the European Union, this study seeks to answer the following questions: How does the EU represent a political opportunity structure for Saami political mobilisation? Focusing on our research topic with existing studies (McCauley and Ruggeri, 2020). In order to frame and delimit this question, several sub-questions have been defined in order to add clarity and connect it even more with the existing studies and which are the following:

1. Why should the EU be receptive to Saami political mobilisation?
2. What are the advantages provided by the EU to the Saami political mobilisation?
3. What are the limits of the EU-Saami relationship?
4. How is the Saami mobilisation configured?

In order to answer these questions, this thesis will employ a triangulation method, using both expert interviews as a grounding method and document analysis to get a better perspective of the global picture.

1.3. Context: The EU, Indigenous affairs and Minority governance

Indigenous peoples face practical and legal problems that prevent them from pursuing their way of life and existing peacefully on what they consider to be their ancestral lands and the resources found there, which are not sufficiently recognised by State law, which explains why indigenous peoples have taken their claims to the international arena and therefore also to the EU (Laurent, 2020).

Before we can answer the question of how the EU can constitute a structure of political opportunities for mobilisation, we must first describe the legal-political structure of the EU within which Saami mobilisations exist. In other words, what we officially know about Saami-EU relations. The EU does

not officially have an indigenous policy, a status that defines both Saami identity and demands (Bellier, 2020). More generally, despite official declarations on the protection of minorities, especially in the Lisbon Treaty, the EU does not really have a minority policy (Barten, 2015). The protection of minorities remains an exclusive competence of the member states. However, despite the lack of a hard policy in this area, the EU can help minorities and collective movements by providing resources and influence (Toivanen, 2001).

1.3.1. The EU and Indigenous affairs.

Firstly, the indigenous status that defines Saami identity and claims is not really recognised by the EU in the sense that it is not part of the EU's legal-political system. Secondly, as a national minority spread across Sweden, Finland and Norway (which is not part of the EU but is part of the European Economic Area and the EU's cohesion policy), the Saami also have a 'limited' relationship with the EU, as the EU does not really have the competences defined in the Treaty to deal with situations related to minorities.

Since 1997, when the European Commission issued a communication proposing measures to promote the rights of indigenous peoples (Pigrau et al, 2020), the EU has 'officially' incorporated cooperation and assistance to indigenous peoples into the broader framework of its development cooperation programme, from the perspective of assistance, assuming that these communities are facing economic, social and political marginalisation and recurrent human rights violations. European law "normatively" recognises indigenous rights and aims to give them some protection, but this recognition has never led to any real measures enabling indigenous peoples to advance their claims (Laurent, 2020).

As Bellier (2020) puts it, the dualist nature of the EU's political and legal system, i.e., the intermingling of Community law and national law ultimately prevents indigenous peoples, at least legally, from mobilising within the EU to claim the right to self-determination.

Even if the EU's position on the extension of human rights is in favour of extending these rights, indigenous issues are not part of the *acquis communautaire* and therefore fall within the legal framework of the Member States (Kanner Arias & Gurses, 2012). Achieving a common position on the protection of indigenous peoples is complicated by the fact that each Member State has its own definition of what constitutes a minority.

There are several sources of international law on the rights of persons belonging to minorities, the first being the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007), which recognises the right of indigenous peoples to preserve their cultural, religious and linguistic identity. Although this declaration has been endorsed by all Member States and the EU, it is non-binding and subject to interpretation by individual states. Secondly, ILO Convention 169 (1989) is an international instrument that aims to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples by recognising their right to preserve their cultural identities, traditions, institutions and customs. It also aims to ensure their participation in decision-making processes affecting them and to promote their economic, social and cultural development. Although it is legally binding, it has only been ratified by Denmark and Norway, but not by Sweden, Finland or the European Union, the countries where the Saami live (Bellier, 2020: Semb, 2012).

In 2016, faced with a change in its political agenda and the growing importance of the Arctic region, indigenous issues and their omnipresence in the Arctic region joined its general concerns. In its document on Arctic policy (EUR-LEX, 2016), the Commission states that it will establish a dialogue with Inuit and Saami indigenous organisations, citing the fragility of the ecosystem from which they draw their livelihood. The securitization of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic is one of the main reasons given by the EU (Hossain, 2016, p. 415) for justifying its presence in the Arctic (Bellier,

2020). The securitization is understood here as a community in need of security, Indigenous communities as the referent object of security (Hossain, 2016, p. 415). Finally, despite growing attention, European governance of indigenous peoples' rights still needs to be developed, one reason being that Bellier argues that the notion of minority is still predominant.

1.3.2. The EU and minority governance.

Although indigenous status and the concept of minority are not the same thing, the definition of indigenous implies a cultural connection to the land on which these communities live, and this connection shapes the nature of their claims (MRGI, 2023). It turns out that these two categories ultimately overlap as part of a common experience of being marginalised, discriminated against and disempowered (Benedikter, 2020). As Bellier (2020) suggests, it is indeed the notion of minority that predominates in the EU context, leading to the Saami being considered a minority rather than an indigenous people. For this reason, it is necessary to draw up an account of the EU's model of governance in relation to minorities.

The concept of minority is indeed an important component of the EU's political system. At least on paper. Respect for minority rights is now enshrined in the Treaty on European Union, since the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, in Article 2, which lists the common values on which the Union is founded (Barten, 2016). The European Union recognises the vulnerability of minorities and the need to grant them specific protection.

The protection of minorities is also present in secondary legislation through Directive 2000/43/EC, also called the Race Equality Directive (Bilgin, 2019), which provides for the equal treatment of persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, and the case law of the European Court of Justice.

However, despite all these sources of law on paper, the EU's governance of minority rights is indeed limited. Article 4 of the TEU states that competences not conferred on the EU remain exclusively with the Member States

The areas of competence in which minority rights fall, namely language, culture and education, and the regions, are not part of the EU's area (Barten, 2016). The EU can only adopt legally binding acts in areas in which it has exclusive competence (Art. 2(1) TFEU). Moreover, it is even hypothetically difficult to find a common ground given the different national perspectives and definitions of 'minority' (Arias and Gurses, 2012).

Finally, it must be said that the EU can only protect minorities in the areas covered by its competences, i.e., economic and social issues linked to single markets and territorial cohesion. The Feryn case (EUR-LEX - 62007CJ0054) describes this situation in a nutshell. One of the directors of Feryn, a company specialising in the sale and installation of doors, had stated that he did not want to employ foreigners because customers were reluctant to allow them access to their private homes while work was being carried out. The European Court of Justice ruled that this practice constituted direct discrimination against people on the grounds of ethnic origin in relation to Directive 2000/43/EC and exclusion from the labour market (Arias and Gurses, 2012). The approach of the ECJ in terms of minority protection has been established in the freedom of movement of persons, goods, capital and services (Bilgin, 2019).

As part of its role, the European Parliament has a strong focus on cultural and linguistic diversity and the protection of minorities. However, the resolutions that parliaments publish are advisory in nature and ultimately represent more of an opinion than a binding decision (Atikcan, 2010).

So although the EU promotes and defends minority rights and Indigenous rights, it does not have a legal framework that would enable it to force Member States to give more rights to their minorities. However, the EU's contribution manifests itself in a multidimensional interaction between minority groups, States and the EU (Asli Bilgin, 2019). Research focusing on these interactions is mainly defined in the academic theme of social movements and Europeanization.

2. Literature review

In order to explore the relationship between Saami political mobilisations and their connections with the European Union, the following literature review will first present research on the European Union as a POS for collective mobilisation, presenting cases of sub-state actors interacting with the EU in the literature on social movements and Europeanization. Next, research on Saami political mobilisations will be presented, and lastly, research on the relationship between the EU and the Saami will be outlined.

2.1. Research on the EU as a POS for collective mobilisation

Academics commonly have referred to Europeanization as "processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things', and shared beliefs and norms that are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated into the logic of domestic discourse, political structures, and public policies" (Radaelli, 2004 cited in Ayoub, 2013: 283).

The study of social movements and Europeanization lies at the intersection of sociology and political science and explores the interactions between social movements and the process of European integration. In particular, it examines how collective actors have influenced European policies through their mobilisation in a process known as Europeanization from below (Mcauley, 2011). In this thesis, we will focus more on the literature on Europeanisation and political opportunities, which highlights how collective actors have shaped their strategies and goals to reach the EU (Porta and Diani, 2009), and how the EU has been both a source of opportunity and a constraint for these groups (Imig & Tarrow, 2001).

In the case of the LGBT movement, the EU has represented both a vertical and horizontal POS that has put pressure on member states reluctant to grant rights to the LGBT community, while at the same time allowing LGBT communities the opportunity to mobilise transnationally through institutional means and freedom of movement (Ayoub, 2013). The Roma case illustrates a specific configuration of political activity (Princen and Kerremans 2008) targeting European institutions, turning the Roma from one of Europe's most fragile minorities into one of the most important political groups within the EU's social sector (Vermeersch, 2003). Finally, the disability and feminist movements, show a more precise form of the POS, namely the LOS, Legal Opportunity structure, in which collective movements use legal bases to combat the discrimination they face (Vanhala 2006).

I have chosen to present all these cases because they are well-documented and provide a complete and very detailed picture of the mobilisation of sub-actors addressing the EU, allowing this thesis to be firmly embedded in existing research and to capture the elements relevant to consolidating research on the relationship between Saami mobilisations and the EU.

2.1.1. The Roma movement

The situation of the Roma and their place in European politics is a textbook case and an interesting point of comparison in the construction of an analytical grid to study the Saami movement and its relationship to Europeanization. The Roma are defined as a national minority, and while there are some differences in categorisation with the indigenous status, the two categories overlap in the context of a shared situation of exclusion and marginalisation (Benedikter, 2008).

The Roma community is the largest minority in the European Union (between 8 and 12 million) (Ram, 2010) and is present in most European countries. Considered a problematic population, the Roma have historically been discriminated against and the majority live in difficult socio-economic conditions. Moreover, despite their significant presence in Central and Eastern European countries - 9.94 per cent of the population in Bulgaria, 9.2 per cent in Slovakia, 8.63 per cent in Romania and 7.49 per cent in Hungary - they have little or no political representation (Vermeersch 2017). As Melanie Ram (2010) points out, one of the interesting features of the Roma case is how one of Europe's most marginalised minorities, without any political influence or economic resources, has in the space of a few years become one of the most influential actors in the European Union and a symbol of human rights. In the context of the accession of CEEs to the European Union, the human rights situation of the Roma community and the need to put in place legal instruments to improve their situation became a condition of EU membership, notably through the Copenhagen criteria.

It's a very interesting question indeed, especially as the issue of minority rights didn't exist or hardly existed at all in the EU in the 1990s. As Princen and Kerremans point out (2008), for an POS to have an effective effect on a collective movement, its opportunities must be identified, the form of the collective movement must be in line with the structure of the POS and, finally, the collective movements must have the necessary resources to be able to exploit the potential opportunities of a given POS.

Clearly, the Roma community was unable to do this on its own. Influential NGOs acted as spokespersons for the Roma cause at European institutions, which then put pressure on the CEE governments wishing to join the EU after the fall of the Soviet empire. From the early 90s onwards, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International called for a better situation for the Roma after carrying out observation missions in Bulgaria and Romania and publishing reports on the precarious conditions and lack of human rights (Ram, 2010).

It was in this particular context that the Roma movement was born, with international NGOs using their influence to promote the Roma cause on an international scale, particularly with embassies and foundations benefiting from the German Marshall Fund and other supranational institutions such as the Council of Europe. Roma communities provided their NGOs with information to help them produce reports and evidence of their precarious conditions.

It was only towards the end of the 90s that the EU began to take an interest in the Roma cause, as NGOs set up offices in Brussels specifically dedicated to targeting EU institutions.

Although the EU provided funding for their cause, in particular via the PHARE programme, as well as organisational resources, in particular conferences and forums organised by the European Commission and the European Parliament (Sobotka, 2011), the political opportunities linked to the EU were essentially linked to vertical Europeanization. In other words, as part of the enlargement of the EU to include the Balkan countries, the EU has exerted considerable pressure on these countries to strengthen or even create policies to protect minorities and implement the legislation of the Council of Europe (Vermeersch, 2017).

Within this normative structure and the pressure exerted by the EU within the CEE, the Roma movement put forward its political agenda and its demands for more rights and denounced the countries applying discrimination and having human rights deficits with regard to the Roma by exploiting in particular the anti-discrimination directives established by the Treaty of Amsterdam, the Racial Equality directive 2000/43/EC (Sobotka, 2011).

But accessibility does not necessarily mean influence (Ram, 2010). If the Romas case has become an important item in European politics, it is because the EU has had an interest in making it so. Even if the EU does not only represent the sum of the interests of the member states, it has to articulate its policies

according to their interests nevertheless, and it turns out that the Roma were also considered a problem in the EU-15 countries. Faced with the growing influx of Roma coming through the CEE to escape violence, European countries have focused on tightening rules on asylum and visa policy. Finally, the EU has favoured promoting democracy and human rights in order to stabilise neighbouring countries and reduce migration.

After the effective enlargement and the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the Roma case moved from external to internal politics, which changed the opportunity structure for the Roma movement, as the EU had much less influence on the new European countries, moving from hard politics to softer politics (Sobotka, 2011).

The European Commission decided to organise Roma summits in 2008, 2009 and 2010 in order to bring together politicians, Roma activists and European representatives (Sobotka, 2011).

The constraints of Europeanization also manifested themselves in the definition of the Roma situation as a European concern, justifying certain governments in their failure to act because this minority was considered a European problem.

In summary, what we have shown in this subsection is that the Roma movement was first shaped by influential actors who advocated for access to the European Union. The EU was receptive to the Roma movement because it was in its interest to do so, as Roma migration was seen as a problem in the former EU-15 and solving the human rights problems was seen as a solution to prevent it. We have seen in this section that the EU provided an opportunity for the Roma movement to gain more rights by using the influence of the EU. But the POS is moving and its structure can also be a constraint, as soon as the CEEs joined the EU, the Roma case went from being an external issue to an internal one. This shift transformed the EU's significant influence into a soft policy.

2.1.2. The LGBTQ movement

The LGBTQ case is one of the European Union's normative success stories. The rights of LGBTQ people became one of the European Union's flagship issues, with the umbrella organisation ILGA acting as the EU's ambassador to Eastern European countries, representing democratic values and human rights (Ayoub & Paternotte, 2016). By means of an extremely organised NGOisation centred on ILGA, the LGBTQ community was able to make the most of the POS that Europeanization could represent. From a vertical point of view, the EU has imposed formal rules on Member States, notably through Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam and the Employment Anti-discrimination Directive. It has also funded and become the primary source of funding for ILGA to build its capacity (Ayoub 2013).

Horizontally, Europeanization has facilitated transnational activism through the principle of free movement of people allowing activists to target states while mobilising in other member states. To organise the 2005 Warsaw Equality March, considered illegal in Poland, LGBTQ activists used European networks and organised the event in Berlin (Ayoub, 2013).

If the EU represented such a virtuous structure of opportunity for the LGBT movement, it was because in the 1970s this movement rapidly took the form of an NGO, ILGA, which brings together 291 local organisations. This organisation, which was created in 1978, enabled the movement to share resources and information in order to develop tactics to promote the visibility of the LGBT community (Ayoub & Paternotte, 2016).

From the outset, the aim of targeting and lobbying European institutions was clear. The ILGA was attracted by the normative dimension of the European Union and the opportunities that European institutions could provide to put pressure on those states most resistant to the LGBT community.

Although ILGA began its mobilisation strategies with petitions and demonstrations, it soon shifted its focus to lobbying and advocacy. In order to achieve its goal of acquiring new rights, ILGA quickly began targeting both the European institutions and the Council of Europe. In particular, the NGO played a major role in the drafting of the report on discrimination against homosexuals approved by the Council of Europe in 1981, as well as the adoption by the European Parliament of the Squarcialupi report in 1984 which is a first attempt to combat discrimination in access to employment by homosexuals (Paternotte, 2015) and Roth in 1994. The effectiveness of ILGA's advocacy was such that its European franchise was created in 1996. ILGA Europe became an official partner of the European Commission and is its primary source of funding. This cooperation gave rise to the European Parliament's Intergroup on LGBT rights (Ayoub & Paternotte, 2016).

The European institutions have seen the LGBTQ community as a powerful symbol of their political project to defend democratic values and human rights. By associating Europe with the defence of LGBT people, activists have contributed to the project of building Europe from below, giving real legitimacy to a project that has long been considered elitist (Ayoub and Paternotte, 2015).

As part of the horizontal effects of Europeanisation, the EU has made it easier for activists to mobilise. The case of the Poland-Germany border is a typical situation of the opportunity given by the effects of the EU on social mobilisations (Ayoub, 2013). Polish and German LGBT activists have effectively used the resources and consultation spaces available in Berlin to organise demonstrations in Poland. This was the case with the 2005 Warsaw Equality March. In 2005, Poland, a newly European country, despite some progress, showed signs of resistance to the protective measures applied to LGBTQ communities, including a ban on their demonstrations. In order to make their case and organise their marches many Polish activists moved to Germany and used the resources available to them to enable the march to take place despite the ban in Warsaw.

European integration has effectively created "gay social spaces" on the whole since the 1970s. Establishing all over Europe and in particular the capitals, Amsterdam, London and Berlin, "gay cultural centres" accessible to all members of the LGBTQ community in Europe. In this both vertical and horizontal logic, the political opportunity structure extended not only to Brussels but also to all those strongholds of mobilisation scattered across Europe (Ayoub, 2013).

Finally, like any POS, Europeanization has its strengths but also its limits. Ayoub (2013) points out that while pro-LGBT movements can circulate in the public space provided by the EU, anti-gay movement can do the same, using the same mechanisms, with transnational networks also.

In conclusion, what we have shown in this sub-section is that the LGBTQ movement shaped its configuration and organised itself as an NGO, the ILGA, to target the EU. The EU was quite receptive because it saw the LGBTQ movement as a means to build a Europe from below. Europeanization as a POS was total for this movement, as it provided a strong ally and financial resources, but also, through the principle of free movement of persons, a way to mobilise in a more efficient way on transnational issues.

2.1.3. The Feminist movement

In the context of the feminist movement and its struggle for gender equality, the legal structure of the EU in particular has prompted individual actors, including feminist lawyers, to use EU law to pressure member states to implement EU directives and equal pay rules (Anagnostou and Millns, 2013). The dynamics of litigation have created a platform for these individual activists to form a transnational activist network.

From the beginning of the European Community, gender equality was enshrined in the provisions of the Treaty of Rome, which stipulated in Article 119 that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work. Although the Treaty had no legal force, this principle became a source of justification for feminist mobilisation in the 1950s and 1960s (Anagnostou and Millns, 2013).

In 1970, the EU adopted two directives that became the basis for gender equality in the EU: The 1975 Equal Pay Directive and the Equal Treatment Directive. The Defrenne decision (1975) and Defrenne II (1976), through the work of activist lawyer Elaine Vogel-Polsky, helped to develop the foundations of gender equality as a fundamental European right (Cichowski, 2013).

Their legal strategies developed over a period of 30 years and were reinforced by the development of transnational feminist networks, starting in the 1970s with the creation of the Women's Organisation for Equality, which enabled the exchange of information and the decisions of the European Court of Justice, provoking even more mobilisation and the use of Community law to win more rights and equality (Cichowski, 2013).

2.1.4 The Disability movement

In the context of the disability movement, the legal opportunity structure has indirectly contributed to the legitimacy and identity of the movement, allowing it to define itself as a social movement (Vanhala, 2006). Particularly in the UK, disability issues were managed in a paternalistic way until the 1990s, with disability organisations defining the issue as a medical and health issue. The legal structure of the EU (and also at national level) has given disabled people the opportunity to speak for themselves (creating disability movements rather than disability organisations) and to change the paradigm from a health and stigma issue to one of equal rights and opportunities (Vanhala, 2006).

British disability activists were the first to raise non-discrimination issues in Europe (Burke, 2004). Despite its presence in the Treaty, the EU had no powers to protect disabled people in the 1990s. From a global perspective, the EU faced cultural, institutional and technical barriers in the early 1990s. Faced with a lack of expertise, the mobilisation of the disability movement led to the allocation of funds for this purpose, such as the Helios II programme (1993-1996), which enabled the creation of the European Disability Forum (Vanhala, 2006) This organisation became a precise resource enabling disabled people's organisations to organise themselves and exchange information until the ratification of the Treaty of Amsterdam and the creation of Article 13, which gave the EU the necessary powers to take action against all forms of discrimination, including disability. From then on, this relationship began with soft policies and became more effective with real legal instruments.

Burke (2004) postulates that the reason why the EU paid attention to this movement in the 1990s was because this episode occurred during the controversy surrounding Joerg Haider's Freedom Party, a far-right organisation within the Austrian government that promoted racist ideologies. European representatives reacted by opposing these ideologies, claiming an anti-discriminatory position and supporting all movements that represented this position.

2.2. Previous research on Saami political mobilisation

“When you're talking about Saami mobilisation, you're talking about four different movements. All that happened to be Saami. Like the Norwegian mobilisation, the Swedish mobilisation, the Finnish mobilisation, it's kind of Gray there. There's a very complicated thing and then there is the lack of mobilisation, such as it is in Russia. I mean. There is communication across the borders. They are people of four nations. But when it comes to actually, you know, actually achieving their goals, you're dealing

with four countries and four different indigenous, no.. ethnic groups that all share the same kind of culture, language and.[...] And even then the tactics, the figures, what they achieved, How they achieved it, are wildly different. But you know the only way to really understand where the Saami are now is by doing that legwork. Because nothing, nothing that the Saami have done has been without context. “

(Mark, Interview 5, Expert)

In order to explore the relationship between Saami political mobilisations and their connection to the EU, it is necessary to take an overview of research on Saami mobilisations. The Saami case is unique in Europe, as the Saami are the only indigenous people within the borders of the EU, while the Inuit living in Greenland are not considered to be within the EU. Research on Saami mobilisation has been fuelled by interest in the development of indigenous status and the resulting international standards, especially those developed by the United Nations and the creation of UNDRIP, adopted in 2007 (Heinämäki et al., 2017). Consequently, the dominant perspective of this research essentially focuses on the relationship between the state and the Saami people, in particular their dialogue, the state's adherence to international standards and the resulting decisions (or lack of decisions) (Heinämäki et al, 2017).

As our topic is related to the EU, we will try to give an overview of research on the countries of Fennoscandia, i.e., Finland, Sweden and Norway, which, although is not part of the EU, is closely linked to it and form an integral part of its cohesion policy. There is little research on the Russian Saami and they remain an understudied subject that will not be part of this thesis.

Generally speaking, Saami culture experienced a renaissance in the three Nordic countries in the 1960s. They mobilised on a transnational level and founded the Nordic Saami Council in 1956 in order to develop solidarity between all Saami groups and to assert their right to self-determination together (Sillanpää, 1997). The Saami Council is now the umbrella organisation for the eight Saami organisations that exist in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Loizzo, Tiano, 2019) and has been in regular contact with the United Nations since the 1970s in order to defend the indigenous cause of the Arctic (Sole et al, 2020).

The Saami define themselves as a single people living since time immemorial in Sapmi, their traditional homeland, as declared at the 19th Saami Conference in Rovaniemi in 2008 (Mörkenstam et al., 2016). But despite this global definition, the Saami are scattered across four different countries and have experienced specific domination and colonisation that has structured their form of mobilisation as well as the modern nature of dialogue between the different states. As Mark, one of the informants for this thesis, pointed out on the quotation above, not everything the Saami do can be understood without context. However, the current state of research does not include all the details of political mobilisations. Research on the Saami continues to focus on history, assimilation policies and cultural manifestations (Valkonen et al, 2022). In the field of political science, most work on the Saami focuses on Norway, then Sweden, and finally there is some information on Finland, but this remains a poorly documented case. The explanation for this is that Norway is the country that has made the most effort with regard to its Saami, increasing their mobilisation and the resulting documentation. Sweden has a strong civil society focused on reindeer herding linked to its history, while Finland has the smallest Saami population of the three countries and reindeer herding was not exclusively a Saami practice in Finland (Heinämäki et al, 2017).

Although Finland, Norway and Sweden each have a Saami parliament and are considered models of human rights and indigenous self-determination, internationally referred to as 'moral superpowers' (Langford and Schaffer, 2014; Schaffer, 2020), each of these countries has different institutional parameters and specific issues that I will attempt to present.

2.2.1. Saami mobilisation in Norway

After a relatively aggressive assimilation policy towards the Saami, called Norvegisation, aimed at integrating the Saami into Norwegian society, Norway has made amends and has become the country where the Saami have the best position and dialogue with the state. The Norwegian Saami Parliament is the Saami parliament with the most autonomy and influence and has the largest budget of the three (Heinämäki et al, 2017).

Saami mobilisation in Norway grew enormously after the Alta event at the end of the 1970s (Ravna, 2014). This mobilisation was triggered by the development of a hydroelectric dam, which led to a massive protest that attracted media attention and became a national issue.

This event drastically changed relations between the Saami and the Norwegian authorities, put an end to Norwegianisation and led to the establishment in 1980 of a Saami Rights Committee with a special mandate to protect Saami culture (Ravna, 2020). The Saami Rights Committee proposed changes that were implemented, such as the Saami Act (1987) to protect Saami culture and language, and later the Saami Parliament (1989). In 1990, Norway was the first country in the world to ratify ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent States (Ravna, 2020).

In the 21st century, Norway incorporated the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights into Norwegian law (Ravna, 2014). In 2005, the Finnmark Act was passed, which relates to the Finnmark Estate and its exercise as a natural resource management area (Heinämäki et al, 2017). It concerns the management and ownership of land resources in the Finnmark region of northern Norway and specifically addresses the land and resource rights of the indigenous Saami people in the Finnmark region. It was an important step in recognising and addressing indigenous land and resource rights in Norway and in acknowledging the Saami's historical ties to the region. Despite its solid foundations, however, the Saami Act has limitations and has been subject to restrictive interpretation by the Norwegian Supreme Court.

2.2.2. Saami mobilisation in Sweden

The Swedish case is rather singular. The legislation that took place at the end of the 19th century separating the Reindeer herders from the remnants of the Saami profoundly shaped Saami mobilisations (Heinämäki et al, 2017). The Reindeer herders were considered to be the true Saami, while the non-Reindeer herders were assimilated into Swedish society. The Reindeer herders were separated from 'ordinary' society, with special rights such as the right to reindeer herding, hunting and fishing.

The result was that two categories of Saami were discernible, with two distinct systems of rights. Movements to defend Saami rights that did not speak on behalf of the reindeer herders had no chance of emerging as legitimate representatives of the Saami people. It was in this context that the SSR, Svenska Samernas Riksförbund, was born. The SSR represented the interests of the Saami people, as these interests were strictly limited to reindeer herding (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008).

Another organisation was created in 1980 (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008), the Landsförbundet Svenska Samer, LSS, a national organisation aimed at challenging the hegemonic position of the SSR.

Nevertheless, the work of the SSR has been very important for the Saami ethno-political movement in Sweden (Heinämäki et al, 2017). In 1992, the Swedish Sámediggi was created by the Sámi Parliament Act, which gave this institution the task of managing issues related to Sámi culture (Mörkenstam, 2019).

Nevertheless, the Sámi Parliament has been heavily criticised both internally and internationally, particularly because of its institutional design, which makes it a government agency under the Swedish government (Heinämäki et al, 2017).

Despite the creation of Parliament, the Saami politics is considered as an Organised hypocrisy (Mörkenstam, 2019).

2.2.3. Saami mobilisation in Finland

The Finnish mobilisation is the least well documented of the three cases. In Finland, reindeer herding was not exclusively a practice attributed to the Saami; non-Saami could also practise it. The current Finnish Saami Act dates from the mid-1990s, when the Saami parliament was established (Joona, 2020). The Finnish constitution grants Saami cultural autonomy in the north of the country, more specifically in the municipality of Utsjoki, Inari, Enonteki and the northernmost parts of the municipality of Sodankylä - in all, more than 30,000 km² (Semb, 2012). This cultural autonomy does not include land rights. One of the most important issues is the definition of a Saami person. There have been many discussions about the definition of Saami identity, and the current definition excludes many people from the Saami community and therefore cannot vote (Aikio and Åhrén, 2014).

2.3. Previous research on Saami relations with the EU

Returning to the Saami-EU relationship, Toivanen's article (2001) is the only one dealing with the relationship between the European Union and the Saami mobilisation. In her article, Toivanen examines the EU's potential support for Saami activists in their quest for greater independence from the three states in which they live. Through her analysis, she postulates that despite the support provided by the EU, in particular the Interreg funds that have financed cultural revitalisation programmes, the EU cannot provide direct support because of the omnipresence of the states in decision-making, especially in relation to cohesion policy and regional aid.

Toivanen's theoretical work is based on interviews with Saami activists during the EU accession negotiations that led to Sweden and Finland joining the EU in 1995. She highlights Saami activists' perceptions of the EU, which they see as both an opportunity and a threat.

In the 1990s, the concept of a Europe of the regions was indeed a hegemonic concept within the EU, conveying a federal perspective in which the regions could compete with the states (Loughlin, 1996). The Saami saw the EU and the Committee of the Regions as a means of making their voices heard and gaining greater independence from their respective states. As early as 1994, a delegation from the Finnish Saami Parliament was sent to Brussels to talk to EU representatives and understand the potential of the Saami as a minority in the EU.

Toivanen points out that the EU has made various resources available to the Saami, notably through the North Calotte and Barents Interreg programmes, which in 1995 provided 200 million dollars for language training and cultural revitalisation programmes in Saami areas (Toivanen, 2001).

As a linguistic and national minority, the Saami have also benefited from the support of the European Bureau for Lesser-Used Languages (EBLUL) (Atikcan, 2010). This institution, which no longer exists, was created following the 1981 Arfee Resolution of the European Parliament with the aim of preserving and promoting the minority languages of the member states. In Sweden, the EBLUL has particularly

helped Saami activists to have the Saami language recognised as a minority language. In the 1990s, Sweden was reluctant to recognise minority languages on its territory. When Sweden joined the EU in 1995, EBLUL officially recognised Saami as a historical minority language, which provoked a wide-ranging debate in the Swedish public sphere and strengthened the position of Saami activists and their political agenda and identity policy. Saami was officially recognised as a historical minority language by the Swedish government in 1997 (Atikkan, 2010).

Despite this support, some Saami activists were also sceptical about the EU, with a negative view of the EU's neoliberal ideology and complex bureaucracy. Since reindeer husbandry in Finland was open to everyone and not exclusively Saami as in Sweden, some Saami feared that in the name of free movement and the single market, other people would come to Finland to take up this activity (Toivanen, 2001).

Toivanen's main argument is that the EU cannot allow Saami activists to gain independence from their states because the funds provided by the EU are provided as part of the cohesion policy (2001). On the one hand, Interreg projects are funded by the states themselves, and on the other hand, the EU's regional nomenclature is drawn up by the member states, which ultimately decide which regions will receive EU support.

2.4. Key takeaways and contribution

It is now time to present the Key takeaways of this chapter and the contribution of this thesis to research. The research on the sub-actors targeting the EU has allowed us to glimpse the main characteristics of the mechanisms present in the research on social movements and Europeanization. First, Europeanization effectively shapes the strategies (litigation mobilisation for the disability and feminist movements) or forms of mobilisation (NGOisation for the LGBTQ movement) that movement use to target the EU (Porta and Caiani, 2009, pp1-36)

Secondly, the EU has been receptive to normative objectives linked to the values promoted by European integration, in particular human rights and equality. The EU's opportunities have varied from case to case. In the LGBTQ case (Ayoub, 2013), the benefits associated with the EU have been both vertical and horizontal, with ILGA using the influence of the institutions (vertical Europeanization) to assert the rights of LGBTQ people and the principle of free movement (horizontal Europeanization) to mobilise transnationally. In the case of the Roma (Sobotka, 2011), what was vertical Europeanisation gradually became soft power as the CEEs became EU member states. Finally, in the case of the feminist and disability movements, Europeanization was very much a legal process, mainly using the influence of the European Court of Justice to gain rights and influence.

At last, while the EU is a source of opportunity, it is also a source of constraint: if LGBTQ social movements can use EU principles to mobilise, so can anti-LGBTQ movements. For the Roma movement, the benefits of the EU have become extremely limited as EU policy towards Roma has shifted from an external to an internal policy.

The aim of this paper is to use these theoretical foundations to explore the relationship between Saami political mobilisation and the European Union. In the second part of this literature review we have presented the state-of-the-art of research on Saami political mobilisations in national arenas, and in the third part we presented the state-of-the-art of research on the EU-Saami relationship, represented mainly by Toivanen's article, which, although fascinating, dates from 2001 and finally deserves to be updated. The state of research on Saami mobilisations in the international and European frameworks is rather limited, so by drawing on work related to sub-actors targeting the EU, the aim is first to fill in the state

of research on Saami mobilisations targeting the European Union and to aggregate the case of Saami mobilisations in the literature on social movements and Europeanization.

3.Theory

After presenting a literature review on the state of research on Saami political mobilisation, Saami-EU relations and the main cases of sub-actors that have successfully targeted the EU, this section aims to present the theoretical concepts associated with this thesis with two objectives: firstly, to situate this study within the existing literature and, secondly, to present the analytical foundations on which this study is based. This study is based on the literature on social movements and contentious politics and its application to the European Union, framed as a "POS" (McAdam et al, 2001). Contentious politics, theoretically focuses on the dynamics of the relationship between political opponents, "strangers at the gate" as Tarrow (2012) describes them, seeking to mobilise, and institutional actors, as well as the effect of the political context, the political opportunity structure, which affects both the nature of these mobilisations and the strategies that emerge from them. As Tarrow defined it (2022) Contentious politics: " *Means episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when: (i) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims, and (ii) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants or objects of claims.* "

This conceptual approach has different definitions and conceptualisations depending on the case studied and its configuration (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). In his study of the Black Movement, McAdam (1982) highlighted the legislative changes that represented a political opening and an increase in the legitimacy of Black activism in the United States. In the context of the revival of the Maori cultural movement in New Zealand, Toon Van Meijl (1999) has highlighted the important transnational impact of the American Black Movement on Maori, which has served as a model for Maori to claim a better status in society.

3.1. Social movement

The concept of *social movements* is used in this thesis to describe the opposition and challengers, described by Tarrow as 'strangers at the gate'. Social movements are also a very broad concept that can be described very broadly as the study of collective action (Della Porta, Diani, 2015).

It describes and emerged from the need to analyse collective movements that were once considered deviant behaviour (Della Porta and Diani, 1996). This perspective changed in the 50s and 60s with the study of the American citizens' movement (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007).

There are many different approaches to this field of research, depending on the variables analysed. Despite the polysemic nature of the concept, Diani deserves credit for finding a synthetic definition that overcomes all the different approaches and defines social movements as "a network of informal interactions between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity" (Diani, 1992, p. 13). Within the contentious politics and political process approach, social movements are defined as opponents of the established political order on behalf of a disadvantaged or marginalised population living under the jurisdiction or influence of those in power (Tarrow, 1996).

Finally, in order to bring some clarity to this notion of opposition, Albrecht deserves credit for developing a typology of actors that are distinguished by their strategic and organisational differences, as well as by their relationship with the state and/or institutional actors (2013). He describes three types of actors: Regime loyal opposition, tolerated opposition and anti-system opposition. Although this typology is used in an authoritarian context (Wackenhut, 2017, uses it to describe the contentious politics

during the 2011 Egyptian uprising), I believe it is applicable in a democratic context to demonstrate the diversity of actors presented unilaterally as opponents.

Regime loyal opposition corresponds to opposition within the system, such as political parties. In our case, the Saami parliaments fall into this category, as they defend a minority and Saami interests with a mandate given by the respective governments of the three Nordic countries. Then there is the tolerated opposition (Albrecht 2013), which challenges the regime but operates in a more or less non-institutional form. The Saami civil organisations fall into this category, especially the Saami Council and national political organisations such as the SSR. Finally, the anti-system opposition, which does not exist in our case but represents groups that reject the system and seek to build a new political order. In short, Saami mobilisation is structured around loyal regime opposition and tolerated opposition.

3.2. Political opportunity structure

The political opportunity structure has become one of the main theoretical currents in social movement research, analysing not why social movements mobilise, but above all how (Wackenhut, 2017). POS emphasises the role of contextual factors in triggering or inhibiting mobilisation. Social movement researchers began to pay attention to the social and political-cultural context when they realised that these elements, independent of the will of movements, had consequential effects on these mobilisations (Tarrow 2012). The original and unidirectional conceptualisation of opportunities has been enriched by the notion of threats, which captures different phenomena that Goldstone and Tilly (2001) distinguish as current and repressive threats. Current threats are those that trigger protest and "and harms that are currently experienced or anticipated", i.e., issues that are common causes of protest. Repressive threat captures the costs or burdens that initiating protest would impose on the individuals involved. Kurzman (1996, p. 154) also mentions the existence of a perceived opportunity, based on McAdams's concept of "cognitive liberation" (McAdam, 1982, page 49), which I personally see as a threat in that it represents a false opportunity that can cost collective mobilisation.

3.3. Europeanization as a POS

The analysis of European integration as a political opportunity structure arose from the increasing involvement of civil society organisations in European integration (Porta and Caiani, 2009). These analyses suggest that the effects of European integration have created both opportunities and constraints for groups seeking to influence political decisions (Marks and McAdam, 1996, p. 249).

Europeanisation, traditionally perceived as the effect of European integration and the impact of the harmonisation of the *acquis communautaire* on Member States, is here defined as the emergence of multidimensional governance, consisting of a progressive shift in decision-making centres and new interactions between sub-national, national and supranational actors. (Porta and Caiani, 2009).

As challengers mobilising to gain access to political spheres from which they are excluded, social movements adapt their strategies to the different channels available in order to gain access to resources and potential institutional allies that could enable them to advance their demands (Porta and Caiani, 2009). Europeanisation through externalisation (Porta and Caiani, 2009, pp. 82–128) refers to the targeting of European institutions by collective actors with little influence in their national arena in order to trigger the boomerang effect (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) and put pressure on governments through international channels of influence.

However, various studies have shown that it is difficult for civil society organisations to reach European institutions (Porta and Caiani, 2009 p. 87), especially on all social issues, while business-related organisations find it much easier to reach the EU. For the EU to be an effective political opportunity structure, certain conditions must be met:

First, the group must not be internally constrained, either ideologically or organisationally. The collective movement must be able to mobilise transnationally (Marks and McAdam, 1996, p. 273).

Second, the EU must be receptive to the demands of its constituent groups. In the past, and particularly in response to criticism of the democratic deficits of its institutions, the EU has granted influence to certain civil society groups in order to use their interactions as instruments to increase its legitimacy (Porta and Caiani, 2009).

4. Method and material

4.1. Research design

After presenting the main foundations of this thesis, this chapter will be devoted to the method established to answer our research question: How does the EU represent a political opportunity structure for Saami political mobilisation?

This part is therefore related to present the type of research that will allow me to answer my research question convincingly (Halperin and Heath, 2020). It should be noted that this type of research is exploratory; I started with a hunch to explore the nature of the relationship between Saami mobilisation and the European Union (Halperin and Heath, 2020).

A relationship evidenced by certain data, recent events such as Saami Week (2022) and other summits organised by the European Union. The Saami Council is listed in the European Commission's Transparency Register, which lists organisations that seek to influence EU legislation and policy implementation (Transparency Register, 2023). It also has a unit that deals specifically with EU-related issues (EU Unit - Sámiráđđi, 2022). Most of the contemporary articles found on this relationship point to the EU's lack of legal recognition of indigenous peoples (Bellier, 2020) (and minorities in general) and conclude that this relationship, although mentioned, is non-existent.

Against this observation, I explored the literature on social movements and Europeanization, which mentions the relations between social movements, more described as sub-actors in this thesis, showing that the EU can have relations and bring benefits in soft politics, and that the legal aspect and recognition of a given statute is not a condition. The EU can indeed represent an POS by bringing other types of opportunities than legal.

With this in mind, this study takes the form of an interpretive case study (disciplined configurative), using the theoretical framework and explanations of other singular cases to explore the specific configuration of this particular case (Venesson, 2008, p. 227). The potential for generalisation to other cases is ultimately more related to a re-evaluation and refinement of the theories.

Although this study is not a process tracing study looking for causalities between independent and dependent variables to conceptualise the key components that served to “guide a discovery process” (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 138), the aim of this research is to explore the 'what' and 'how' of relationships between Saami political mobilisation and the European Union (Venesson, 2008, p. 232).

The key components of this research are represented by these four sub-questions:

1. Why should the EU be receptive to Saami political mobilisation?
2. What are the advantages provided by the EU to Saami political mobilisation?
3. What are the limits of this relationship?
4. How is the Saami mobilisation configured?

'What' asks about the nature of the relationship, from which sub-questions two and three follow. Is the EU an ally or a constraint for Saami mobilisation? The "how" asks whether the EU can be an actual POS for Saami political mobilisation. Sub-questions 1 and 4 are derived from research by Marks and McAdam (1996), who define two conditions for the EU to be a POS for a social movement. The EU must show a certain receptivity/openness towards the group, which explains sub-question 1. And the group must not be hindered in its efforts to mobilise transnationally, i.e., the interactions or configuration within collective groups must not be obstructed by internal conflicts, which explains question 4.

Now that the key components of the research have been conceptualised, I must point out that these sub-questions served as a compass for the discovery process and the basis of the data collection (Appendices I and II presenting the interview guides). Since I am studying a political process and a relationship, it seemed logical to collect information from the actors involved in this relationship, i.e., Saami political representatives, members of Saami parliaments, but also representatives of the European Union, as well as documents and reports on the link between European policy and Saami.

As Halperin and Heath (2020, p. 174) point out, the participants in the political processes we are studying are a source of information, and studying the documents they produce also makes it possible to establish greater reliability. The method of data collection is therefore based on triangulation.

4.2. Data Collection

This section is dedicated to present the type of data I have used to answer my research question. This research is supported by a triangulation method. The concept of triangulation is defined as the combination of different qualitative methods (Flick, 2018). In this thesis, triangulation has taken the form of using different data sources (Natow, 2020), including semi-structured interviews with experts and elites and document analysis. This method of triangulation has been described by Glaser and Strauss as 'slices of data' collection in a multifaceted investigation (1967, p.65). Davies (2001) postulates that triangulation is fundamental in research involving elite interviews in order to gain a better picture of the problem under investigation.

4.2.1. Elites and Experts Interviews

Although this study is based on a triangulation method, the main source of data is the semi-structured elite and expert interviews.

Expert and elite interviews are methods that belong to a traditional approach to the sociology of elites, based on the idea that because elites control society, their worldviews represent necessary data for understanding society itself and possible changes (Flick, 2018). More recently, the term 'elite interview' has been used to describe interviews with informants who occupy senior positions (Welch et al, 2002). From an exploratory perspective, expert and elite interviews represent one of the most effective ways of generating data (Flick, 2018).

After all, the elite and expert have knowledge that is difficult to obtain from other sources (Natow, 2020), especially technical knowledge based on facts and information, and process knowledge acquired through their routines (Flick, 2018).

It is difficult to access elites and high-level experts because they are naturally very busy and/or present themselves as not very available (Conti et al., 2007). This is even more the case when it comes to issues related to indigenous studies. This type of research has reached what Tom Clark has described as 'research fatigue' (2008). Saami are indeed "heavily burdened with science" (Helga West, 2020) and receive a lot of requests to study them, which makes them even more difficult to reach. In my case study,

this characteristic proved to be true, as out of 200 people contacted by email, only 6 responded positively to my request for an interview.

In order to explore Saami-EU mobilisation, political representatives and Saami activists were targeted and interviewed (4 interviews), as well as a researcher specialising in the Saami Council and finally an EU office manager working within the INTERREG Aurora programme (Appendix 1). All these interviews were conducted in English via Zoom, recorded and transcribed. All these interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1h30.

4.2.2 Documents as source of empirical data

As Natow (2020) states, triangulation is necessary in research that includes interviews with elites and experts in order to obtain a better representation of the situation being researched (2020). Beyond this specific configuration, it is a good approach to have different sources of information as it allows a research problem to be approached from different angles (Halperin & Heath, 2020). Although based on grounded interviews (Flick, 2018), documents are used here as a second source of data. Namely, 6 written documents, consisting of EU policy documents, as well as reports from NGOs and institutes, and one audiovisual document, namely the recording of the Barents Euro-Artic Indigenous Saami People Summit in Brussels, which took place on 22-24 March 2023. As Lebow (2001) reminds us, in order to avoid any bias or confusion between empirical findings and political narratives, it is necessary to distance ourselves from the documents analysed. Policy documents are produced to serve institutional interests, so it is essential to be aware of these biases (Halperin and Heath, 2020, p. 200).

4.3. Converting data into result.

The data analysis process was driven by theory (Wackenhut, 2017). The interview guide was designed by the key component that formed our sub-questions. After transcribing these interviews, the content was reorganised to answer these 4 sub-questions.

The documents were used and analysed in the same way, using these four sub-questions as a guide to the discovery process and used in the result to give a more qualitative perspective. (Halperin & Heath, 2012, page 200).

4.4. Ethical considerations

The process of conducting interviews calls for particular care when dealing with issues that are considered to be sensitive, in this case, for example, with a subject that incorporates indigeneity. First as mentioned in the interview part, Saami are among the world's most researched people (Helgawest, 2020). They have been searched in a colonial way that have caused trauma and a lot of mistrust and suspicion toward scholars. There is a saying in the Saami community: " According to a Sámi legend, a Sámi family includes not only a large family circle but also a researcher who tirelessly observes his exotically considered subject." (Helgawest, 2020). As a westerner myself I had to be careful with to not fall into "colonial research" and ask myself what would be the consequence of the knowledge collected

and produced about Indigenous people. Also, I had to be careful in order to not make people feel like an object of study but more like participants (Jacobsson, 2016).

Even though the people interviewed were not particularly at risk, as the Saami political sphere is relatively small, all names have been changed in order to preserve everyone's identity. As the SRA's ethical guidelines state, a social science researcher must try to minimise disturbance to the subjects themselves and to their relationships and environment (SRA, 2003, p.35).

5. Results

In order to empirically answer our research question, "How does the EU represent a POS for Saami political mobilisation?", this chapter will consist of four sections, which will answer our four sub-questions.

The first section will answer: Why should the EU be receptive to Saami political mobilisation? (1) As Marks and McAdam (1996, p. 258) postulate, European institutions must be open and receptive to a cause in order for a group to have access to the political opportunity structure, a mix of constraints and opportunities, that the European Union provides. The Roma case (Ram, 2010), the LGBTQ case (Ayoub, 2013) and the disability case (Vanhala, 2006) have indeed shown a strong interest in the success of these collective actions. What about the Saami case?

In the light of the cases presented in the literature review, with a focus on sub-actors targeting the EU, the following two sections will address the question of advantages and constraints: What are the advantages provided by the EU for Saami political mobilisation? (2) And conversely, what are the limits of this relationship? (3) this sub-section will explore the constraints that Saami mobilisations face in this relationship with the EU.

Finally, the question "How is the Saami mobilisation configured? (4) will provide the necessary elements to understand whether Saami mobilisation is able to adapt to the multi-governmental nature of Europeanisation (Porta & Caiani, 2009, 82–128). Indeed, mobilisations must be organised and able to organise themselves transnationally without internal conflict if they are to reach the EU (Marks and McAdam, 1996).

5.1. The EU's great receptiveness to the Saami cause.

Following the example of the rest of the world, the EU's interest in the Arctic has gradually grown, particularly because of the region's growing strategic, social, economic and, above all, environmental importance (Schellekens, 2019). The EU has become increasingly receptive to Saami political mobilisation, as a good relationship with the indigenous peoples of the North is a significant asset in international affairs and relations relating to the Arctic (Koivurova et al, 2021). The indigenous peoples of Canada, Greenland and the Saami are indeed permanent members of the Arctic Council, the most important intergovernmental forum for Arctic affairs (Barry et al, 2020). The Saami effectively represent *"the gateway towards Arctic legitimacy"* for the European Union (Mark, Interview 5, Expert on Saami Council)

As the ice melts, the Arctic and the survival of its population is becoming an increasingly topical and politicised issue: *"People are interested in indigenous people, especially in the Arctic now, because the Arctic is melting and then it's on focus right now and we want to make our own impact in our own life."* (Wilma, Interview 2, Saami Council)

The European Union has officially expressed its ambitions through two official communications published in 2016 and 2021 (*EUR-LEX*, 2016: 2021). The first EU communication on the Arctic was published in 2007 (Schellekens, 2019), with the aim of warning of the impact of climate change on this region of the world.

The 2016 document, a joint communication between the Council of the EU, the External Service of the EU and the Commission, justifies an EU response to the importance of the region and its vulnerability to climate change, focusing a policy on three pillars: combating climate change and safeguarding the environment, sustainable development in and around the Arctic, and international cooperation on issues relating to the region (EUR-LEX, 2016).

To achieve this, the EU is proposing to fund research into combating climate change and to coordinate better international cooperation. The 2016 document makes particular mention of the indigenous communities of the Arctic and the need to establish a dialogue with them in order to make them full players in Arctic policy. In 2021, faced with criticism and inconsistencies in the document and the need to incorporate new geo-political components, the Commission updated the document (EUR-LEX, 2021), justifying its policy by indicating, firstly, that the EU was part of the Arctic and articulating the document on three new pillars: peace, ecology, and inclusion.

In its three pillars, the EU has shown itself to be receptive and open to the Saami mobilisations. The peace pillar concretely encompasses international cooperation while maintaining peace in the region. Within the framework of international cooperation, the EU participates in various forms of intergovernmental cooperation related to the Arctic region, in particular the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Nordic Council, the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians and the Arctic Council (Koivurova et al, 2021, 2021). The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum made up of the eight Arctic states: Canada, the United States, Denmark (via Greenland), Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Russia. It was established in 1996 to promote cooperation and coordination between countries on Arctic affairs (Barry et al., 2020). Although the Arctic Council has no executive powers, it plays an important role in promoting dialogue and cooperation and is the forum where decisions are discussed before being taken (Barry et al., 2020). The EU's ambition is to become an "*Arctic observer state*" (Mark, Interview 5, Expert).

Attention to indigenous issues is an important theme of the Arctic Council. Since its inception, the Arctic Council has included NGOs representing the interests of indigenous communities as permanent members. 6 indigenous organisations are permanent members: Aleut International Association, Arctic Athabaskan Council, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council (Barry et al., 2020, p. 2).

The EU has incorporated sensitivity to indigenous issues into its policy organising dialogues especially since the launch of the Arctic Policy in 2016. "*Some couple of years ago now, the European Commission, they were organizing Saami dialogues and then Arctic indigenous dialogues [...] and I was always there to those dialogues.*" (Wilma., Interview 2, Saami Council). Indigenous peoples therefore have a significant influence on Arctic governance and "*can exert considerable pressure*" (Allan, Interview 4, Sametinget). The European Union has indeed experimented with indigenous political power in the past (Koivurova et al, 2021). In 2009, on animal welfare grounds, the EU banned trade in seal products. This division provoked a strong reaction from the Inuit, for whom the sale of seal products primarily represents their traditional way of life and a significant source of income. At the same time, the EU had submitted an initial application for observer status on the Arctic Council but faced with political pressure from the Inuit concerning the EU's ban on trade in seal products, Canada rejected the EU's application on the grounds of a "lack of understanding of the interests of the peoples and states of the Arctic" (CBC, 2009).

Under the ecological pillar, the EU has stated its intention to fund research into innovative solutions for preserving the Arctic, in particular through the Horizons programme. This programme promotes scientific projects focusing on the causes and potential consequences of changes taking place in the Arctic environment (Horizon Europe, 2023).

In line with the principle of protecting the environment, official statements by the EU and its representatives indicate that the traditional knowledge of the Saami and indigenous Arctic communities in general is being taken into consideration in order to help preserve the environment. The traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples is declared to be necessary because it represents a significant amount of knowledge regarding an extremely fragile and sensitive ecosystem (Romero Manrique Lara et al, 2018). This report, "Arctic: Traditional Knowledge, Livelihood and Community Engagement", published in 2018 at the request of the European Commission, effectively advocates the use of traditional knowledge, described as being used in particular in fisheries planning, climate adaptation, biodiversity and marine protection (Romero Manrique Lara et al, 2018, page 7).

During the Summit of Barents Euro-Arctic Indigenous Sámi People in Brussels, Green MEP Heidi Hautala stated that the best way to protect bio-diversity is to let indigenous people be its guardians. Clara Ganslandt, speaking at the same conference, pointed out that the integration of traditional Saami knowledge is a stated concern of European Arctic research (Barents Euro-Arctic 2023)

Under the inclusion pillar, the EU has declared its intention to establish an internal Arctic policy, focusing on the European Arctic as an economically limited and sparsely populated area (EUR-LEX , 2021). This is the objective of cohesion policy. As Jean-Pierre Halkin (Barents Euro-Arctic 2023) so clearly described, the aim of the EU's cohesion policy is to support European policies in all its regions by putting in place approaches that correspond to the singularities of these regions. Cohesion policy in the EU's Arctic regions has put in place an approach to support regions with extremely small and dispersed populations. The Interreg programme is part of the cohesion policy aimed at strengthening the relationship and trust between the EU and its citizens. With the creation of the Interreg Aurora programme, the EU has shown a real willingness to be open towards the Saami, by officially integrating the Saami parliaments as full players in the cohesion policy focused on the Arctic.

In conclusion, we have shown in this subsection that the EU has been very receptive to Saami political mobilisation and has included them in the three pillars that make up its Arctic policy. This receptiveness can be explained by the EU's ambition to become an Arctic actor and to join the Arctic Council as an observer. In order to do so, it is useful to become or be defined as an ally of the Saami people because of their political weight in these Arctic-related issues.

5.2. The advantages provided by the EU to the Saami political mobilisation.

This part will be devoted to the elements that highlight the advantages of the EU-Saami relationship, in other words the way in which the EU has become an ally through the mobilisation of Saami. The EU-Saami strategy document recognises "that the EU and its policies and regulations - as well as its financial instruments that support Saami culture - have a direct impact on the daily lives of the Saami people" (Saami Council, 2022, page 4). These benefits have taken the form of dialogue organisations and funds allocated to the Saami in the context of linguistic cultural revitalisation in particular.

Since the official declaration of the implementation of the Arctic policy, dialogues have been set up, making the Saami, according to Helena Dalli (Barents Euro-Arctic 2023), EU Commissioner for equality, regular visitors to Brussels and the European institutions. Prior to the Barent-Euro Arctic summit, conference organised by Finland, which currently holds the presidency of the Barent-Euro council, other events welcomed the Saami. In 2022, an EU-Saami week was organised to raise awareness among EU-decision makers about the need to include the Saami people in EU policy making (Saami

Council 2022). In February 2023, a conference was also organised in Nuuk with the Saami and Inuit communities (EU Arctic Forum and Indigenous Peoples' dialogue, 2023).

These EU-organised dialogues are an opportunity for Saami activists to make their demands heard and to publicly criticise their respective governments. This case is reminiscent of the strategies described in the Roma case and their use of EU-organised summits where representatives of the movement could 'name and shame' governments that failed to meet human rights standards (Sobotka, 2011). During the Euro-Barent 2023 conference, Stefan Mickaelsson, Vice-President of the Swedish Saami Parliament, was extremely critical of the Swedish government representatives. He did not hesitate to question their official position, pointing out the lack of dialogue they had promoted since the beginning of the conference. Silje Karine Muotka, President of the Norwegian Saami Parliament, sounded a similar note, criticising the Nordic government's position in irresponsibly granting building permits to companies in the Sapmi geographical area, and did not hesitate to describe the government's actions as "green colonialism" (Barents Euro-Arctic 2023).

R. Wilhelmsen, representative of the Finnish Saami Parliament, denounced the Finnish government's inconsistent position on fishing, saying that the government forbids the Saami to fish salmon for ecological reasons, but allows tourists to do so. Finally, Aina Aslaksen, representative of the youth committee of the Norke Samers Rikseforbund (NSR), was also extremely critical of the Nordic governments, and did not hesitate to declare: "personally and all my peers, when it comes to the government, we have zero trust".

The EU has also financed projects and granted funds of various kinds linked to cultural revitalisation from different sources, in particular Erasmus in the context of education and Interreg, since Finland and Sweden joined the EU (Euro-Barent 2023).

One of my informants, Wilma, who has worked in various Saami organisations in both Finland and Norway, informed me that in the context of the resources allocated to the Saami:

"The [...] Saami [...] Institute that we have is part of certain projects funded by the EU. [...]" The EU has funded different types of projects. I was working at the Saami Institute of [...] for 10 years¹. In my time, we achieved a lot. We introduced virtual education long before COVID. We started to develop a virtual education language with European funding. We supported and developed reindeer farming, education, meat processing. We developed tourism with European funding. We supported cross-border education systems for reindeer and tourism on the Russian side. So, there were a lot of big projects" (Wilma, Interview 2, Saami Council).

Since 2021, the Interreg Aurora programme has been a centralised and declared source of EU funding. It has focused on the cross-border area between Norway, Sweden and Finland. It is the merger of 3 different programmes previously present in the region, "one was sub-area Sapmi, one program was North Callot it's the northern part of Sweden Finland and Norway. And then we had the Cold Arctic, it was between Northern Finland, Norway, Sweden and Russia" (Erika, Interview 3, EU). In this new configuration, the Aurora programme is divided into two parts: Aurora and Sapmi (Interreg Aurora, 2023).

One of the aspects of this programme compared with other European Interreg programmes is that it is designed specifically for a particular community. The brochure presents the different pillars of this Interreg programme, namely social inclusion, digitalisation and green transition, and shows how the EU could contribute to the development of the Saami community with these objectives, in particular by strengthening Arbediehtu, i.e. the traditional knowledge of the Saami people, in projects focusing on innovation and sustainable development. (Interreg Aurora, 2023). The project manager who was interviewed stated that "In another Interreg programme, they don't have the possibility to apply, for

¹ Some details have been hidden in order to not give away my informant.

example for the development of language, but Saami language is the core for the Saami culture.” (Erika, Interview 3, EU).

She also pointed out that this INTERREG programme was particularly *"flexible"* and *"humane"* with regard to Saami project applications. This programme effectively takes into account the lack of institutional capacity of the Saami organisations and is more accommodating, especially when it comes to the financial part of a project, which in other INTERREG programmes usually has to be filled in thoroughly, otherwise it will not even be considered. The three Saami parliaments are also represented in the decision-making process. *"Each Saami parliament has a representative on the steering committee that decides which projects to fund. [...] It's the Saami people who make the decisions [...] They know what's best for the Saami people."* (Erika, Interview 3, EU).

The Aurora programme is relatively new and has not yet produced any visible results. However, through Interreg, the EU has funded around sixty Saami-related projects since the early 2000s (INTERREG 2018).

To sum up, we have shown in this subsection that the EU has provided soft political resources for Saami political mobilisation, such as the organisation of dialogues that have given Saami representatives the opportunity to confront national governments. It has also provided funding, mainly through the INTERREG programme. In addition, the new Interreg Aurora programme is specifically designed to address Saami challenges, at least that is how it has been officially presented.

5.3. Constraints and limits of the Saami-EU relations

This section is devoted to the limits of the Saami-EU relationship. Theoretical work on the political opportunity structure identifies the constraints or threats associated with a given structure.

In the case of the limits associated with POS, the work of McAdams (1982) and Tarrow (1994) in particular deals with opportunities that are only perceived. Although this perceived opportunity is described as being perceived by activists who may perceive opportunities where none exist (Kurzman, 1996, p. 154), in our case this cognitive bias is ultimately present in the official statements and reports of the EU, and the activists and representatives interviewed shared a rather sceptical view of the EU: *"Saami people too, as a general, have been very skeptical of the EU [...] It's supposed to be very liberal"* (Tove, Interview 6, NSR). Other informants also highlighted the distance *"between Sapmi and Brussels"*, that the decisions taken there were not in line with their way of life and reindeer herding (Christian, Interview 1, SSR). The scepticism of Saami activists towards the EU had already been described in Toivanen's article, namely the lack of trust in supranational institutions and latent neo-liberalism (2001).

This scepticism eventually turned into resignation towards the EU among the people interviewed. This quote from Wilma sums it up perfectly, as she tried to work something out with the EU, but in the end her expectations were not met: *"My motivation to work towards the European Union was to get them to give us better power in our homelands [...] But I don't know, I gave up. I was doing a lot and I was trying a lot but never managed to achieve anything."* (Wilma, Interview 2, Saami Council). Ultimately, this quotation represents the paroxysm of the limits of this relationship. The first of the dialogues organised by the European institutions generally remain symbolic and do not lead to decisions being taken. During the Euro-Barents Arctic conference, Saami representatives criticised this characteristic. Since the first EU conference on a possible indigenous policy in 1997, the various dialogues inviting the Saami have been described as *"false dialogues"* (Aina Aslaksen during the Euro-Barents Council 2023) in which their consultation remains ultimately symbolic. The perspective was shared by one of

the informants, who described the dialogue cynically as *"limited, at least it was in my time. They were talking, we were listening! And then they wanted us to present only one project which they have been funding with that little money"* (Wilma, Interview 2, Saami Council)).

Our contact in the Swedish Saami Parliament, who has been in post since its creation and in contact with the EU since 1997, told us that the situation had not changed for 25 years. *"So the dialogue with them, with the European Union, has been going for at least 25 years. 25 years ago, I was at the round table discussion in a conference in Brussels with the European Union Commission where they established Policy for indigenous peoples outside the Union. And now, they don't have any policy for indigenous people inside the Union. They just want to have a dialogue. What we can hear every time they want the dialogue, but it's a dialogue on their conditions. So it's not beneficial for the Saami people or the well-being of our culture."* (Allan, Interview 4, Sametinget)

As far as Interreg funding is concerned, although the Interreg Aurora programme manager said during the interview that the Interreg Aurora programme has taken into account the difficulties of civil organisations and the lack of population by helping the various organisations to participate in the call for projects, it is ultimately complicated for Saami organisations to apply. Not only does it have to be a transnational project, but the EU also funds 65% of the project, and the rest must be raised by the organisation, *"which is of course helped by the EU"* (Erika, interview 3, EU). Finding the rest of the funding requires work and resources that are not always available, especially for small organisations. Moreover, as the expert I interviewed realistically added : *"Interreg is project based, which means that once a project is done the funding stops and if you want to fund an organization like say the Saami Council or even just a basic association, it means you're constantly applying for more funding and coming up with new projects continuously, which means you will always have a sense of being precarious. [...] Yeah, and the response usually from Saami organizations is yes, and we are already a shoestring organization that barely has enough staff to fully fulfill the paperwork. "* (Mark, Interview 5, Expert)

Finally, as Goldstone and Tilly have conceptualised, POS can also be a source of threat (2001). In the case of the EU, the EU's actions and policies, particularly those related to the Green Deal, constitute a present threat: 'harms that are currently experienced or anticipated', i.e. reasons for protest (Wackenhut, 2017). The EU seems to be responsible for the challenges and difficulties that the Saami face in their daily lives. The literature on social movements and Europeanisation speaks in particular of the strategy of externalisation by civil actors to put pressure on their member states and trigger the boomerang effect (Porta and Caiani, 2009, pp82-128; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Moreover, it seems that in this situation, the EU almost gives more influence and legitimacy to the actions of the Nordic states in their treatment of the Saami. *"The government, they often say: "We hear what you're saying but this is the law, this is the European side of view".* (Christian, Interview 1, SSR))

Christian, a member of Svenska Samernas Riksförbund and also a reindeer herder, informed me that one of the issues on which his political organisation has been most active is the Habitats Directive. Adopted in 1992, the Habitats Directive (Council Directive 92/43/EEC) is a EU directives (EUR-LEX,1992) that requires all member states to protect certain animal species. As the Habitats Directive is a crucial tool for the conservation of Europe's biodiversity and the promotion of sustainable development within the EU, this directive has the negative effect of increasing the number of reindeer predators in Sapmi. The number of predators such as brown bear, wolf, wolverine and lynx is increasing in the area. The reindeer herders, who make their living by selling reindeer meat, are losing a lot of money because these increasing numbers of predators are eating the reindeer calves, resulting in significant losses for the herders.

"The predators have really strong protection. They kill thousands and thousands of animals, and we don't get paid by the government, we get a maximum of 30% of our losses. It's a daily topic of conversation in every reindeer husbandry family. We talk about it at breakfast, in the evening and at dinner, it's always there somehow, we struggle with it every day in our daily work. [In our herd, we only received 20,000 Swedish kronor for reindeer killed by bears. And the research we have been doing for the last few years has shown that the real loss is over a million Swedish kronor every year. Just for our herd. "(Christian, Interview 1, SSR)

Finally, the EU is indirectly responsible for what is actually the biggest cause of revendication for the Saami. The biggest challenge for the Saami is the exploitation of Sapmi *"by logging, wind power and mining companies"* (Christian, Interview 1, SSR).

The political mobilisation of the Saami raises concerns about the negative impact of resource extraction, such as mining, logging, oil drilling and large-scale infrastructure projects, on their lands, cultures and ways of life, which are generally defined as indigenous land and resource claims against the exploitation of territorial resources. As presented by our informant from the Swedish Parliament, this territorial resource exploitation goes against their goal of self-determination: *"The right to decide on our own culture, livelihood, traditional land and water"* (Allan, Interview 4, Sametinget).

What we thought and was presented as nationally driven territorial resource exploitation is in fact, and this is where the EU's responsibility lies, exacerbated by the EU's Green Transition project. The EU is pushing for this exploitation to find resources to produce green energy sources. The European Green Deal (2021) is a set of policy initiatives introduced in 2019 that aims to make Europe a climate-neutral continent by 2050, and to do this the EU is driving the energy transition by accelerating the production of renewable energy sources such as offshore wind farms, solar power and energy storage. The Sapmi region is an ideal location for this, not least because it is sparsely populated. The Saami people are therefore affected by climate change, but also by the proposed green transition solution, which involves increased exploitation of their land.

Reindeer husbandry in particular requires large areas of land so that the reindeer can find food on the tundra, but the increasing exploitation of this land is reducing the space available enormously, and when the state proposes to pay the reindeer herders for the land that can't be used, the Saami react: *"You can't eat the money, and the reindeer can't eat the money. Do you understand the problem? You need land to feed your animals"*. (Christian, Interview 1, SSR) Although the EU is not currently the target of the Saami's political mobilisation, Sweden, Finland and Norway still seem to be held responsible for the exploitation of land resources.

In conclusion, we have shown in this section that the resources provided by the EU for Saami mobilisation have been limited, not only the dialogues, which are perceived as symbolic and do not lead to any decisions, but also the Interreg funds, which are actually difficult to access because the EU only finances part of the project and the applicants have to find the rest of the funds with their own resources. Paradoxically, the funds intended to strengthen Saami organisations and help them build institutional capacity are difficult to access because they require institutional capacity. Moreover, some of the EU directives and projects are actually a threat to the Saami people and a source of mobilisation. The Habitat Directive and the EU's Green Transition project directly interfere with the Saami's traditional way of life and are a source of exploitation of land resources for the EU's Green Transition.

5.4. Configuration of Power

One of the conditions for the EU to represent a structure of political opportunity for collective actors is for these actors to be organised in such a way as not to experience internal conflict and to be able to mobilise transnationally (Marks and McAdam, 1996). On paper, the Saami represent themselves to others as a single nation and a single people mobilising in the four countries in which the Sapmi region is spread for a single goal, *“to achieve self-determination and the right to choose their own culture and to control their land”* (Allan, Interview 4, Sametinget). During the Euro-Barents 2023 conference, various representatives recalled this configuration (2023). Áslat Holmberg recalled that the Saami Council was founded on the principle that Sapmi was a nation. Håkan Jonsson also pointed out that *“Our nation, Sapmi, is not recognised as a country”*.

On the EU side, our Interreg informant corroborated this view, indicating that within Interreg Aurora *“here we see Saami, as one people, as one nation”* (Erika, Interview 3, EU), a perspective also presents on the programme notice (Interreg Aurora 2023).

Despite a unified aspect, and a transnational representation that seems unilateral through the Saami Council, which represents the Saami cause internationally at the United Nations and the Arctic Council. Saami mobilisation is in fact *“4 distinct mobilisations”*, in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Mark, Interview 5, Expert). These populations are part of 5 distinct nations and even if they share the same ethnicity, they are trying to achieve self-determination in different ways. All the Saami mobilisations have always taken place in a very specific context. The three Nordic countries have civil societies as well as parliaments. The configuration and construction of these civil societies is a function of historical reasons, as Mark tried to explain to me during my interview with him. *“So for example, in Norway, one of the largest political parties in this Norwegian Parliament is NSR [...] from Sweden, the big one is SSR or the Swedish Saami Reindeer union”. These civil societies existed long before parliaments and were unified transnationally by the Saami Council. In addition, there are the Saami parliaments in the three separate countries, which are also supposed to represent the Saami and are grouped together transnationally through the Plenary Council.”* (Mark, Interview 5, Expert).

Finally, despite seemingly shared objectives, the Sapmi nation is plagued by internal conflict. Parliaments in particular are sometimes considered to have little legitimacy due, for example in Sweden, to an incoherent institutional design, as it is supposed to represent the interests of the Saami but is also a government agency under the responsibility of the Riksdag (Lawrence and Mörkenstam, 2016). Our informant from the Svenska Samernas Riksförbund described the Sametinget as a *‘governmental organization where the Saami people doesn't have much to say. The power is really in the Swedish Government's hands’* (Christian, Interview 1, SSR).

In contrast, the informant from the Swedish Saami parliament described the parliament as more legitimate because it represented the Saami electorate, in other words a more democratic alternative. He also added that the Swedish Saami Parliament did not cooperate with the Saami Council because the two entities ultimately had their own agendas (Allan, Interview 4, Sametinget). Mark tried to sum up this “configuration” by describing the Saami political landscape as follows: *“In the end, there are 5 presidents in Sapmi. There is the president of each of the Saami parliaments. There is the President of the Saami Council and the President of the Saami Plenary Council. This means that when it comes to the European Union, for example, they are united, but there are, of course, a lot of internal politics.”* (Mark, Interview 5, Expert).

Finally, despite appearing homogeneous, the configuration of power is conflictual, which makes it relatively complex to mobilise transnationally. Even the person in charge of the Interreg programme showed signs of confusion during the interview: *“If you read our program documents, we have specifically... how to say, development steps for the Saami communities and it's written by 2-3 Saami from Saami parliaments. Saami Council, sorry, not the parliaments. It's the Saami Council. But they have the same... No it's the Saami parliaments. I have to see. I'm mixing those.”* (Erika, Interview 3, EU)

In conclusion, we have shown in this section that despite presenting themselves as one people and one nation, the Saami political mobilisations are four different mobilisations, and that they are subject to internal conflict, as the regime-loyal opposition and the tolerated opposition (Albrecht,2013) have different perspectives on what is best for the Saami people.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Discussion

Having presented the results, we can now answer the research question "How does the EU represent a POS for Saami political mobilisation?"

It turns out that, according to the axioms presented by Marks and McAdams (1996), the EU cannot currently be a POS for Saami mobilisation. However, in response to sub-question 1, it is argued that the EU does have a real interest in Saami political mobilisation as a resource for achieving the goal of Arctic observer status, and that the axiom of EU receptivity (Marks and McAdams, 1996) is therefore respected. Saami political mobilisation is too fragmented (sub-question 2) and subject to internal conflicts that limit its ability to mobilise fully transnationally. Even though the Saami Council represents a very effective NGO that defends Saami interests at the United Nations and has been a member of the Arctic Council since its inception, the Saami Council does not represent the interests of all Saami. As Albrecht (2013) presents in a typology of opposition actors, the Saami movement is defined by the articulation of a regime-loyal opposition, the Saami parliaments, which are governmental bodies responsible for addressing Saami interests, and a tolerated opposition composed of civil organisations, such as the SSR. However, these two types of actors do not necessarily see eye to eye and have their own agendas and ways of defending Saami interests, which prevents the Saami movement from mobilising transnationally because it is subject to internal conflicts.

Finally, as the second axiom has not been achieved, I would like to interpret the results by pointing out that the EU is a structure of political constraints rather than a structure of opportunities. The constraints of a POS have been described by McAdams (1982) and Tarrow (1994), who enriched this theoretical model by adding the concept of threat. Although the EU is not a POS for the Saami mobilisation, this does not prevent the relationship between the two from intensifying, especially in the context of the increasingly present dialogue on the Arctic and the existence of an INTERREG programme that puts the Saami at the forefront, something that does not exist in other INTERREG programmes, at least not to this extent. What remains impressive is that, once again, the Saami represent a very small minority, especially when compared with the Roma, who number 12 million in Europe, while the Saami number less than 500,000.

Finally, I have to say that this is a structure of constraint, because despite the numerous but limited advantages, which could be interpreted as the EU defining the Saami as one of the trophies of its normative showcase, this relationship is currently more of a burden than a real advantage.

At last, the EU represents a current threat to the Saami (Goldstone and Tilly, 2001) in that it is partly, if not mainly, responsible for the green transition and thus for the increase in mining, deforestation and the installation of wind turbines on Saami land, which is the main reason why the Saami are mobilising.

The weight of European citizenship is also becoming increasingly heavy for Saami organisations, and Roberta Metsola has pointed out that the EU has instructed Saami councils to cut off all contact with Saami living in Russia because of the war in Ukraine (European Parliament, 2023).

Despite what I believe to be a genuine motivation on the part of the EU to be open to the cause, this political structure is more of a constraint than a real source of opportunity. It should be added that this relationship is very recent. It has only officially existed since 2016. And research shows that it takes years for sub-actors to gain access and influence (Ayoub, 2013).

6.2. Limits

As far as the limitations of this study are concerned, I note with great reflexivity that the Saami movement is much more complex than I had previously interpreted it. It represents a plethora of different actors and unique relationships between different governments and forms of mobilisation linked to a political and historical context. If I had to start again with the information I have now, I would have concentrated on the case study of one country rather than all of them. Nevertheless, it was quite difficult to find people to interview and, once again, out of 200 requests for interviews, only six responded positively to my request. The collection of data and the nature of the data in my possession ultimately determined the form of this study. Secondly, the time available for a thesis is not enough to devote to such a topic in its entirety. You must target the right people to interview and gain their trust in the field, which cannot be done in just a few months' work.

6.3. Conclusion

In conclusion, despite an intensifying relationship and current benefits for Saami mobilisation. Ultimately, the EU is a source of constraint and threat rather than a real ally. However, this relationship is very recent, and it is quite possible that it will change for the Saami in the future. In particular, the theoretical model suggests that if the Saami were better organised, they could access opportunities and supply the EU.

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Appendix I

List of Interviewees:

1.	Christian	Member of Svenska Samernas Riksförbund; Reindeer Herder
2.	Wilma	Part of the programme Saami-EU strategy of the Saami Council, Commissioner in the International Saami Film Institute, Former member of Finnish Saami Education Institute.
3.	Erika	Interreg Aurora Program Officer
4.	Allan	Member of the Swedish Saami Parliament
5.	Mark	Searcher in Political science and Phd student on research on Saami Council and Saami international mobilisation
6.	Tove	Member of NSR, Norske Samers Riksforbund (Norwegian civil society)

Appendix II

Interview guide for Saami representatives and searcher

1. Introduction:

- Presentation of the researcher

- Structure of the interview

- Introduction to the study

- Confidentiality, participation, risks and spreading of results, integrity.

- Ok, to record?

- Do you have any questions or comments before we start?

2. Overview: Defining Saami Political Mobilization

- Can you introduce yourself? What is the Main mission of the institution you're working for? (For a researcher/Expert: What is your main area of study?) / What does your job involve in this institution?

- Could you describe the aims and motives of your institution? What goals does your organization seek to achieve? (Institutional point of view?) / What are the main obstacles today that you and your organization face? / (For a researcher/expert: What are you trying to study?)

- What is your connection with the Saami Political Mobilization? / For a searcher/expert: What have you learn about Saami Political Mobilization?

Following up question: Could indicate what are the main challenges for Saami Political mobilization /What are they excluded from? (Cf: Political approach of social movement: What is the situation of the Saami).

3. Configuration of Power

This part is to understand, how do the Saami Political Mobilization coordinate when they interact with the EU, are they exclusively communicating through the Saami Council, or each institution has its own interaction?

- Could you describe your organisation's contacts and relations with the EU? And if there isn't, why is that? (Dynamics of Transnationalism)
- For a Searcher/Expert: (Could you describe in international policy matters the contact between Saami Political Mobilisation and the EU?)

- How would you describe the Saami Council's role in Saami-EU relations? / (How is the Saami Council defending the interest of your institution?) (Umbrella organisation)

- Could you name some EU institutions you have had contacts with? What were those contacts?

- What are the main projects that have been achieved with the help of the EU? In which subject does your institution OR the Saami Council cooperate with the EU? If the answer is "no": Do you work with other international organizations? Like the Council of Europe or Regional Organisation? and why them more than the EU institutions?

4. Defining the EU as an ally: how does the EU help? With what resources? Where is the EU interest?

- What kind of resources the EU has given you? Maybe Fund, Organising Events, Forum? (Institutional assets available with EU political opportunity)

- Could you describe your organisation's transnational networks on EU issues?

- How, if at all, does the EU alter your leverage vis-a-vis national policymakers? (Boomerang effect) Meaning was it easier to interact with the National Parliament thanks to the EU? Providing a social platform? (Horizontal mobilisation)
- How do you perceive the interest of the EU? Are those institutions asking something from the Saami Political Mobilization? (Reasons for accessibility and influence)

5. Strength and limitation of European Process

- Overall, what are the/some advantages for the Saami people of having access to EU institutions? What are the main disadvantages?
- Is there some Weakness? Some limitations that you have experienced.

6.Contact details of other interviewees

Who else do you advise me to contact in order to discuss that issue?

Appendix III

Interview Guide for INTERREG manager.

1. Introduction

- Presentation of the researcher
- Structure of the interview
- Introduction to the study
- Confidentiality, participation, risks and spreading of results, integrity.
- Ok, to record?
- Do you have any questions or comments before we start?

2. Overview

- Can you introduce yourself? What is the Main mission of the institution you're working for? / What does your job involve in this institution?
- What is Interreg Aurora Program? How does it benefit Saami? What are the goals that Interreg seeks to achieve? What are the main obstacles today that you and your organization face?

3. Configuration

This part is to understand, how do the Saami Political Mobilization coordinate when they interact with the EU, are they exclusively communicating through the Saami Council, or each institution has its own interaction?

- Could you describe Your interaction with a Saami Political Representative? What is the frequency of those interactions?
- Could you name the Saami political organization you had contact with? Do you have contact with the Saami Council? Parliaments? Other organizations?
- What are the main projects that have been achieved? In which subject does your institution OR the Saami Council cooperate with the EU?

4. **Defining the EU as an ally.**

how does the EU help? With what resources? Where is the EU interest?

- What kind of resources was given by the EU to Saami Community? Maybe Fund, Organising Events, Forum? (institutional assets available with EU political opportunity)
- Do you think that the Interreg Program and the EU helps the Saami Community in their interaction with the national policy makers?
- When did the Interreg Aurora Program Start? (Saami Lobbying)
- Why had the EU created a fund program specially dedicated to Saami? Who were the mai actors that made this project exist? Could describe the nature of the collaboration (Saami Lobbying)
- What was the interaction between your organization and the Saami Political Representative before the Interreg Program started? (Saami Lobbying)

5. **Strength and limitation of European Process**

- Overall, what are the main advantages of the Interreg Program? What are the main disadvantages? (EU interest)
- In which way could you consider this program as a success for the EU? (Interest in EU's perspective?)

- Is there some Weakness? Some limitations that you have experienced.

6. Contact details of other interviewees

- Who else do you advise me to contact in order to discuss that issue?