The policy formulation stage of the EU policy-making process is difficult to grasp and relatively invisible. Most actors and their ways of interacting remain largely unknown. The Commission is responsible for making legislative proposals but has limited resources and is dependent on external expertise.

In this study, the telecommunications sector is in focus. The aim is to examine the actors at the policy formulation stage, where various private actors are very much involved. The research questions are: in what kind of a policy-making environment do the various actors function? What types of central actors are involved and how do they interact among each other? What kind of an actor can the Commission be considered to be?

While a coherent, general theoretical framework for understanding EU policy-making is lacking, three conceptual ‘lenses’ are used for the analysis. The EU is regarded as a ‘multi-level’ policy-making system. ‘Policy networks’ clarify the ways in which public and private actors interact, co-ordinate and exchange resources in a specific policy sector. The Commission is a ‘corporate actor’, a solution to problems of co-ordination in collective action among the member states, having autonomous action capacities and autonomous institutional self-interests.

The policy formulation process can be described as a ‘multi-level game’. This study focuses on an individual policy sector regarding it as a ‘meso-level’ of decision-making, where the question of ‘how to do it’ is resolved. Nevertheless, the issue of ‘what needs to be done’ is also relevant. The Commission and the private actors exchange expertise and information within policy networks forming arenas for bargaining and consensus-building in various committees and during public consultations. The fast development of technology generates new constellations. Some groups of actors have difficulties becoming included in the networks. The Commission is at the centre of the multi-level policy networks. It has employed an intentional strategy building up good relations with the market actors. The Commission has acted as a ‘driving force’.

However, the ‘political climate’ may restrain its actions.

This thesis is based on primary sources consisting of interviews and official documents, and secondary sources including books and articles from academic journals.