





# A right-wing alliance against sustainability?

German MEPs from CDU/CSU want to abolish or to hollow out the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive – if necessary, together with far-right factions

by Karolin Seitz and Armin Paasch

After two years of negotiations, the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) officially came into force on July 25, 2024. From July 2027, it will require large companies to respect human rights and the environment throughout their supply chains and to draw up and implement climate plans in line with the Paris Climate Agreement. Although the directive has some gaps, for example with regard to the financial sector, it is an important milestone on the road to a sustainable global economy.

On February 26, 2025, however, the EU Commission proposed the so-called "Omnibus I Package" to "simplify" several EU sustainability laws, which would largely undermine the CSDDD and render it ineffective. It soon became clear that the German conservative parties CDU and CSU were not satisfied with this. During his inaugural visit to the EU on May 9 in Brussels, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz stated: "We will repeal the national law in Germany, and I also expect the EU to follow suit and repeal this directive."<sup>2</sup>

Under pressure from the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), the German Federal Government has officially taken a different position, and Chancellor Merz has also backtracked somewhat. However, amendments proposed by Angelika Niebler, Markus Ferber, Daniel Caspary, and other members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) in the European Parliament (EP) leave no doubt that abolition remains their goal. Statements by Angelika Niebler (CSU) and the Swedish EPP lead negotiator Jörgen Warborn also show that they are not afraid to form an alliance with far-right groups in the European Parliament to achieve this goal. While the CDU/CSU continues to invoke the firewall against the far-right party AfD in the Bundestag, its demolition in the EP may be imminent when the Legal Affairs Committee (JURI) votes on its position on the Omnibus I Package on October 13.

# Postpone - undermine - abolish?

Originally, the implementation of the CSDDD by its member states was planned for July 2026. In April 2025, however, the EP voted in favor of ex-

tending the deadline to July 26, 2027, using the socalled "stop-the-clock" procedure. Companies will then only have to implement the regulations from

<sup>1</sup> See Armin Paasch: Von der Leyen 2.0; Farewell to the Green Deal? In: Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik, April 2025: https://www.blaetter. de/ausgabe/2025/april/von-der-leyen-20-abschied-vom-green-deal, and the same author: Rollback of the Green Deal? A briefing by the Initiative Lieferkettengesetz, February 13, 2025: https://lieferkettengesetz.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/BRIEFING\_Initiative-Lieferkettengesetz\_EU-Omnibus-3.pdf.

<sup>2</sup> Own translation.

July 2028. In doing so, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) followed one of the Commission's proposals in the Omnibus I Package. However, the package is not just about postponement, but about a far-reaching hollowing out of the CSDDD in line with a list of wishes from the Federation of German Industries (BDI) and its French and Italian counterparts MEDEF and Confindustria.

Specifically, due diligence obligations would initially be limited to direct suppliers, meaning that the actual risk areas further down the supply chain - such as environmental destruction in mining or exploitation on plantations - would generally be ignored at first. The EU-wide uniform civil liability rule would be abolished, leaving those affected with little chance of compensation and redress. The Commission wants to decouple the amount of fines from a company's turnover, so that large corporations could pay them out of petty cash without changing their behavior. Companies would still have to draw up climate plans, but would no longer need to implement them, meaning they could feel at ease leaving them to gather dust in a drawer. A revision clause in the CSDDD, according to which the introduction of due diligence obligations should be examined for financial market transactions as well, would also be deleted.

The EU Member States already commented on the Commission's proposal on June 23, 2025. They are

in favor of a partial, even more drastic weakening of the CSDDD than the Commission. This would raise the scope of the CSDDD to companies with 5,000 or more employees, which, according to estimates by the German government, would mean that only 120 companies would be covered: just four percent of the companies that are already implementing the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (LkSG) today. Germany did not object to this "general approach" in the Council, even though the Federal Ministry of Labor (BMAS) and the other SPD-led ministries had clearly spoken out against it. During the negotiations, the German government, under pressure from the CDU/ CSU, also strongly advocated for the removal of civil liability - together with Hungary and Romania and against France, Spain, and Portugal.

The European Parliament is now due to take a position in October 2025. Jörgen Warborn (European People's Party, EPP) presented a draft of the Parliament's negotiating position on June 12, 2025, as rapporteur for the Legal Affairs Committee. Numerous members of the Legal Affairs Committee and other committees have submitted amendments to the draft. While the Social Democratic, Green, and Liberal shadow rapporteurs want to maintain the level of protection provided by the current CSDDD, EPP MEPs are pushing for further watering down of the directive.

#### CDU/CSU MEPs and right-wing extremists unanimously call for the abolition of the CSDDD

The radical nature of the amendments proposed by German MEPs from the CDU/CSU, led by Angelika Niebler, deputy chair of the CSU and president of the Wirtschaftsbeirat der Union, an interest group of Bavarian entrepreneurs, is striking. She receives support in the EPP particularly from German MEPs from the CDU/CSU such as Markus Ferber (CSU), Daniel Caspary (CDU), Marion Walsmann (CDU), David McAllister (CDU), and others. Equally striking is the agreement with farright committee members on this demand. They are unanimously calling for the complete abolition of the CSDDD. Niebler and her colleagues justify this demand by arguing that the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) already covers many aspects, even though it only provides for reporting obligations.3

The EPP MEPs are thus in agreement with the MEPs of the Patriots for Europe (PfE) group led by French Rassemblement National politician Pascale Piera and Polish MEPs Tobiasz Bochénski and Kosma Złotowski (both PiS) of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group.

The amendments come as no surprise, but reflect positions that Niebler and others have also publicly advocated. Shortly after the "stop the clock" vote, Daniel Caspary (CDU), chairman of the CDU/CSU group, and Angelika Niebler, co-chair of the CDU/CSU group, called for "the courage to make cuts": "However, the postponement can only be the first step. In the upcoming negotiations, we will continue to advocate for substantive changes. Europe needs the courage to make cuts. All

<sup>3</sup> These include: Angelika Niebler, Christian Doleschal, Stefan Köhler, Markus Ferber, Andrea Wechsler, Andreas Schwab, Christine Schneider, Ralf Seekatz, David McAllister, Oliver Schenk, Daniel Caspary, Norbert Lins, Sabine Verheyen, Christian Ehler, Isabelle Le Callennec, Laurent Castillo, François-Xavier Bellamy, Christophe Gomart, Céline Imart, Verena Mertens, Marion Walsmann

Amendment 566

Pascale Piera, Julie Rechagneux, Ton Diepeveen, Ernő Schaller-Baross, Raffaele Stancanelli

Proposal for a directive

Article 4 – paragraph 1 – introductory part Directive (EU) 2024/1760

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendmeni

Amendments to Directive (EU) 2024/1760

Repeal of Directive (EU) 2024/1760

Amendment 568

Tobiasz Bocheński, Kosma Złotowski

Proposal for a directive Directive (EU)2024/1760 Article 4 - paragraph 1 - introductory part

Text proposed by the Commission

Amendmeni

Directive (EU) 2024/1760 is amended as

Directive (EU) 2024/1760 is repealed;

Amendment 570

Angelika Niebler, Christian Doleschal, Stefan Köhler, Markus Ferber, Andrea Wechsler, Andreas Schwab, Christine Schneider, Ralf Seekatz, David McAllister, Oliver Schenk, Daniel Caspary, Norbert Lins, Sabine Verheyen, Christian Ehler, Isabelle Le Callennec, Laurent Castillo, François-Xavier Bellamy, Christophe Gomart, Céline Imart, Verena Mertens, Marion Walsmann

Proposal for a directive

Article 4 – paragraph 1 – introductory part Directive (EU) 2024/1760

Amendment

Text proposed by the Commission

Directive (EU) 2024/1760 is repealed.

Directive (EU) 2024/1760 is amended as

requirements that only create bureaucracy and add no value must be eliminated. The competitiveness of this continent must finally be strengthened."4

In July 2025, Niebler declared the abolition of the CSDDD to be the goal of the CSU European Group: "At the beginning of the year, the EU

Commission began presenting a monthly package of legislation aimed at reducing bureaucracy, known as omnibus bills. Further simplifications are to follow in the coming months, including in the areas of energy and the environment. We are committed to ensuring that these measures remain ambitious and are constantly refining them, including with regard to the abolition of the EU Supply Chain Directive."5

Tobiasz Bochénski made a similar statement on behalf of the ECR Group the day after the "stop the clock" vote: "Real deregulation means getting rid of burdensome, unnecessary rules - not wrapping them up in new packaging or kicking the can down the road. The Green Deal's regulatory machine has already caused enormous concern among business owners. What is needed is not delay, but deregulation."

The PfE faction and the Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) faction, which is associated with Germany's AfD party, have also repeatedly spoken out in favor of abolishing the CSDDD. In February 2025, MEP Christine Anderson (AfD) stated: "What Europe needs, but you stubbornly refuse to deliver, is: less EU, preserving combustion engines, an end to the supply chain law, an end to sustainability reporting, an end to the nature restoration law and, above all, an end to the unspeakable Green Deal."6 In June 2025, the AfD parliamentary group also submitted two motions to the Bundestag to stop the German Supply Chain Due Diligence Act and the CSDDD.

# A fallback option – undermining the CSDDD in line with the business lobby

In total, the group of German EPP MEPs led by Niebler submitted over 50 amendments to the Commission's omnibus proposal in JURI in case their main demand for abolition would not be accepted. However, the implementation of the amendments would mean a complete undermining of the CSDDD and ultimately come close to abolishing it. Like the EU Council, they called for the scope to be limited to companies with 5,000 or more employees and an annual turnover of €1.5 billion (Amendment 194). Pascale Piera of France's Rassemblement National made the same demand (Amendments 256 and 85).

In addition, Niebler wants to limit due diligence obligations even more strictly than the Commission and Jörgen Warborn, restricting them to direct suppliers who must also be based outside Europe. Furthermore, due diligence obligations should only apply in cases of actual human rights violations, while potential violations would no longer be taken into account. This would largely undermine the preventive nature of the directive. Niebler also wants to completely remove the obligation to draw up climate plans (Amendment 575), as does Italian ECR MEP Mario Mantovani. Furthermore, she supports the Commission's proposal to remove the EU-wide civil liability rule for

<sup>4</sup> Own translation.

<sup>5</sup> Own translation.

<sup>6</sup> Own translation.

companies that violate due diligence obligations and thereby cause damage.

In some respects, Niebler goes even further than her colleagues from the right-wing ECR. For example, she calls for EU Member States to be obliged to harmonize numerous provisions in the directive. This would prohibit Member States from introducing more far-reaching national regulations. The two ECR MEPs Tobiasz Bocheński and Kosma Złotowski believe that, with regard to harmonization, Member States should at least be allowed to introduce specific or less stringent provisions to adapt due diligence obligations to local conditions, the macroeconomic situation, and the economic policy of the Member State.

Many of the amendments proposed by Niebler and her colleagues in the parliamentary group are in line with the demands of business associations such as the Confederation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), the German Chemical Industry Association (BAVC), and the German Chemical Industry Association (VCI) and BusinessEurope (see table), and in some cases go even further. This applies, for example, to the demand for greater harmonization. The amendment to distinguish

between companies inside and outside the EU in the context of due diligence risk assessment is in line with the demands of the business associations as well. The EPP MEPs also support the business associations' demand that companies no longer be required to draw up and comply with climate plans.

Angelika Niebler has already been criticized several times for the similarity between her parliamentary activities and her side jobs, and she has been accused of conflicts of interest. In addition to her work as a Member of the European Parliament, she works for the law firm Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, which itself lobbies the EU. She is also a member of the supervisory boards of several companies, including metabion international AG, LVM Krankenversicherungs- AG, neoshare AG, and the board of trustees of the TÜV SÜD Foundation. TÜV SÜD is accused of sharing responsibility for the deaths of 272 people who died in a dam collapse in Brumadinho, Brazil, in 2019. A subsidiary of TÜV SÜD had confirmed the stability of the dam a few months earlier. In her declaration of her 19 secondary activities, Angelika Niebler states a monthly additional income of €12,539 (gross). This makes her one of the MEPs with the highest reported secondary income.

## Will the firewall in the fight against the Green Deal fall?

Shortly before the vote in the EP's Legal Affairs Committee on October 13, there is now great anticipation as to *what* compromises Jörgen Warborn, as rapporteur, will make, but above all *with whom* he will make compromises: with the political center or with far-right factions. The vote in the Legal Affairs Committee is considered indicative of the subsequent vote in the EP plenary, which is expected to take place in the following week of October. This will be followed by trilogue negotiations between the Commission, the Council, and the Parliament.

For many years, it was common practice in the EP for the democratic, pro-European political groups to try to find compromises among themselves. There was a so-called "cordon sanitaire" or firewall against the right-wing populist to far-right and anti-European political groups.

Since the 2024 European elections, however, the balance of power in the EP has shifted. A "plat-

form" of pro-European forces from the EPP, the social democratic S&D and the liberal Renew Europe had re-elected Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for another term. But the election of two vice presidents and three committee chairs from the ECR indicated that, at least in the eyes of von der Leyen and the EPP, this faction had become an acceptable partner.

In June 2025, plans by German EPP MEPs to tear down the existing firewall with regard to the Green Deal and, together with the right-wing populist ECR group and the liberal Renew group, to abolish the CSDDD or render it completely ineffective, became public. Angelika Niebler reported on these plans by some members of the EPP at a press conference on June 10, 2025. According to the French news agency aef info, Niebler stated: "If a compromise between the EPP, the S&D, the Greens and Renew is not possible, then a compromise between the EPP, Renew and the ECR would be possible." 7

<sup>7</sup> Own translation from French, aef info "Si un compromis entre le PPE, le S&D, les Verts, et Renew n'est pas possible, alors un compromis serait possible entre le PPE. Renew et ECR."

In an interview with Coolset at the end of July, Jörgen Warborn also expressed his willingness to cooperate with the far-right factions in the omnibus procedure: "Of course I would work with the Social Democrats and with Renew and the Greens. But if there is no flexibility from these political groups, then I have to go with another majority (...). If you get some of those groups together and some of them are to the right of us, well..."

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EPP Chairman Manfred Weber had repeatedly emphasized that they would only work with political groups that were "pro-EU," "pro-Ukraine," and "pro-rule of law." However, it is questionable to what extent these criteria apply to the ECR. According to an analysis by Green MEP Daniel Freund, the ECR's voting behavior clearly shows its anti-European and anti-rule of law stance. For example, the ECR has repeatedly voted against motions dealing with the restoration of an independent judiciary in Hungary. "(...) there are no members in ECR who meet these conditions," Freund said.

At the beginning of 2024, EPP chairman Manfred Weber announced that he would not rule out cooperation with the ECR wing around Giorgia Meloni or Petr Fiala: "Why shouldn't we work with right-wing conservatives such as Italy's head of government Giorgia Meloni and Czechia's Prime Minister Petr Fiala (...)? In the newly elected European Parliament, selective cooperation with pro-European conservatives is just as conceivable to me as cooperation with the Greens."8 However, he said there was a clear firewall against all right-wing radicals for the EPP. This rules out cooperation with the AfD, the Polish PiS party, the Hungarian Fidesz party, and the French right-wing radical Le Pen. Weber described these as "political enemies."

Nevertheless, in order to completely gut the CSDDD according to the ideas of Niebler's group,

or even abolish it altogether, the EPP would have to rely on cooperation with precisely these "political enemies." In fact, a coalition of the EPP, Renew, and ECR - as considered by Niebler would not have a majority. This requires 361 votes, which means that the aforementioned groups would still be 18 votes short of a majority. Additional votes from the far-right groups Patriots for Europe (PfE) and Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) would then be needed. This is all the more true given that the liberal Renew group - unlike the German FDP - is by no means unanimously opposed to the CSDDD. Former Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders, who spearheaded the development of the CSDDD proposal in the Commission, was himself a member of the Renew group. The current liberal shadow rapporteur in the Legal Affairs Committee, Pascal Canfin from France, is also vehemently in favor of maintaining an ambitious CSDDD.

Statements made by EPP rapporteur Jörgen Warborn on September 30 make it clear that an alliance between the EPP and the far-right wing of the EP is currently the most likely scenario: Warborn explained on LinkedIn: "My goal with the Omnibus has always been to simplify and cut cost for business. I have today presented two packages that delivers on that. One having a clear majority. Nevertheless I remain open to finding a solution for the final deal." In a press release, Renew explained that option 1 refers to "a majority among the right (EPP) and the far right (ECR, Patriots, ESN)." Warborn is thus openly threatening Social Democrats, Liberals, and Greens with a right-wing majority in the vote in the Legal Affairs Committee and in plenary if they do not move further toward the EPP. Warborn had recently tightened his original proposal to limit the scope to companies with 3,000 or more employees and raised the lower limit to 5,000 employees. Warborn continues to strictly reject the demand by S&D, the Greens, and the Liberals to retain the civil liability rule.

# Previous majorities with the right and isolation of German EPP MEPs

It would not be the first time that the EPP has pushed through its agenda thanks to votes from the far right in the European Parliament. On April 3, 2025, members of the European Parliament voted on the Commission's so-called "stop-the-clock" proposal in an urgent procedure. With 531

votes in favor and 69 against, the European Parliament decided to postpone the implementation of the CSRD and the CSDDD by two years and one year, respectively. In the end, a consensus was reached between the centrist political groups in this vote. However, the decision two days earlier

## The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)

The national-conservative, EU-critical European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, alongside the Patriots for Europe (PfE) and the Europe of Sovereign Nations (ESN) group, can be classified as part of the right-wing populist to far-right spectrum of the European Parliament. The EKR was founded in 2009, making it the longest-standing far-right faction in the European Parliament. In the 2024 European elections, it won 78 seats, including 20 for the Polish PiS party and 24 for the Italian Fratelli d'Italia. It has no German members.

Since the beginning of 2025, former Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (PiS party) has been president of the ECR. He takes over from Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who resigned from the post in December 2024.

At his inauguration, Morawiecki emphasized the ECR's cooperative approach and stated that the party had succeeded in creating majorities in parliament. He said that the party was working with both the EPP and far-right groups such as the "Patriots for Europe" and the AfD faction "Europe of Sovereign Nations" and saw itself as a "very active and honest broker" between the parties to its left and right.

The ECR's parliamentary group members include right-wing extremist politicians such as Nicolas Bay, who was deputy chairman of the French Front National and the Reconquête party, and Marion Maréchal, the grand-daughter of Front National founder Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) attests that the EKR is particularly close to the far-right factions in the European Parliament on issues such as migration, equality, and the rule of law: "However, their national-conservative orientation is clearly evident on issues such as migration, equality and the rule of law; and this makes it difficult to clearly distinguish the ECR from the PfE and ESN groups in terms of substance."

that the "stop-the-clock" proposal should be dealt with under the urgent procedure, as requested by the EPP, had been passed against the votes of S&D, the Greens and the Left, and only with the votes of ECR, ESN, PfE and Renew (a total of 427 in favor, 221 against and 14 abstentions). Dutch S&D MEP Lara Wolters explained her vote against the motion by saying that the urgent procedure was intended for crisis situations. She described the vote as a "hasty approach that currently relies on the support of the far right." She went on to say that it was "detrimental to trust and our common European values."

Another sign that EPP members are serious about their threat to cooperate with far-right factions was the vote on the opinion of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) on Warborn's draft negotiating position for the EP. The EPP MEPs, together with the votes of PfE and ECR, pushed through several radical amendments in the opinion against the votes of S&D, the Greens, and the Left. According to these amendments, similarly to the EU Council, ECON now calls for the provisions of the CSDDD to be amended so that they only apply to companies with 5,000 or more employees.

Back in 2019, the EPP did not shy away from successfully rejecting a motion for a resolution in support of search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, together with the votes of the right wing, by only a narrow majority (290 votes against, 288 in favor, 36 abstentions). Since the new Parliament was constituted in 2024, there have been an increasing number of cases in which decisions have been made by a majority of the EPP and the farright factions.

In October 2024, the EPP group voted for the first time in favor of an amendment proposed by an AfD parliamentarian when it came to determining the Parliament's position for the EU budget negotiations. The AfD Member of Parliament responsible, Alexander Jungbluth, spoke of a "historic day" and a "huge success." In November 2024, a vote was held on postponing the deforestation regulation. The EPP's motion to postpone the EU deforestation regulation by one year would not have been passed without the votes of the right wing, including the AfD MEPs.

According to an **analysis by Politico**, it is clear that the EPP already voted similarly often with the ECR and against the S&D Group in the previous legislative period (2019–2024). However, thanks

to the new distribution of seats in favor of the farright groups, their joint voting behavior has been more successful in forming decisive majorities. The S&D and ECR groups also occasionally voted the same way and against the EPP. However, while the EPP and ECR vote similarly on politically charged texts, according to Politico, the joint S&D-ECR votes are mostly technical in nature.

A comparison of the voting behavior of German EPP members with that of their European colleagues shows that German MEPs often vote much more conservatively, especially when it comes to sustainability issues. In 2019, for example, German EPP MEPs voted unanimously against a motion for a resolution to declare a climate and environmental emergency, while almost half of the entire EPP group voted in favor of the motion. In the vote on the Green Deal in January 2020, only seven German EPP MEPs voted in favor (another 19 abstained, 2 voted against), while a total of 131 MEPs from the entire EPP voted in favor (another 35 abstained, 4 voted against). In their voting behavior

in the above cases, the German MEPs were joined by MEPs from the then far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) group and the ECR group.

A clear separation between the German EPP MEPs and their fellow group members ultimately became apparent when it came to passing the CSDDD in Parliament. Angelika Niebler and the German EPP MEPs had done everything in their power to prevent the directive from being adopted. Shortly before the vote on June 1, 2023, Niebler attempted to torpedo a compromise proposal by the Legal Affairs Committee, which had been worked out in advance with the EPP group and her German colleague Axel Voss (CDU), by submitting an additional amendment. Led by Niebler and the CDU/ CSU group, the EPP finally decided at the end of May 2023 to reject the compromise proposal in the plenary vote if no further amendments were made to the text. In the end, the German EPP MEPs voted unanimously against the adoption of the directive, while 46 of their European colleagues voted in favor.

#### Outlook

Unlike the group of predominantly German EPP MEPs led by Angelika Niebler, her Swedish EPP colleague Jörgen Warborn is not calling for the complete abolition of the CSDDD. Nevertheless, he too is threatening to vote with the far-right factions if the S&D, Greens and Renew do not make sufficient concessions to the EPP.

However, the German CDU/CSU group, with its 29 MEPs, is the largest and most dominant group within the EPP and provides with Manfred Weber (CSU) the party and group leader. Whether the EPP ultimately abolishes the CSDDD with the help of the ECR and other far-right groups or completely undermines it will likely depend not least on German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. Although

he himself called for the abolition of the CSDDD in Brussels, the German Federal Government he leads has at the same time spoken out in favor of maintaining and implementing the CSDDD in its coalition agreement.

The coming weeks will show how much the CDU/CSU's commitments to the firewall are still worth. Will it seek a compromise with the democratic center that at least preserves the core content of the CSDDD? Or will it finally tear down the firewall to reverse the CSDDD and other core elements of the Green Deal? The latter would send a fatal signal: for human rights, the environment, the climate, and the political future of the EU, as well as for Germany in the medium term.

# **Imprint**

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