

## **The Growing Demand for ‘White Gold’ to Accommodate the ‘Green’ Transition: The Role of Discourse in Shaping the Cooperation Between the European Union and Chile on Lithium**

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### **Abstract**

Academia and the international political arena consider lithium, also called ‘white gold’, as an essential component in the ‘green’ transition to a carbon-neutral society. However, the socio-environmental challenges linked to the extraction of lithium, as well as other minerals that are labelled as ‘critical’, raise the question of whether this transition can actually be called ‘green’. This thesis critically examines the role of discourse in shaping the geopolitics of lithium, which is based on the post-structuralist notion that social and discursive practices are linked. To research this, a critical discourse analysis is conducted, which analyses how the lithium cooperation between the EU and Chile has been shaped by their respective dominant discourses on critical minerals. The lithium cooperation between the EU and Chile is an important geopolitical topic, as Chile holds the greatest lithium reserves globally and in the EU demand for the mineral is increasing drastically as a result of the initiatives to electrify the European society. Building on the assumptions of critical geopolitics and political ecology on the relationship between discourse, knowledge and power, this thesis not only demonstrates that discourses, narratives and practices on critical minerals within the EU and Chile have shaped their cooperation in this field, but also identifies the underlying elements that are of explanatory value in understanding this process. Overall, it is displayed how the geopolitics of lithium and the balance between increasing lithium extraction and minimising socio-environmental challenges on a local level will be shaped by the ‘criticality’ that is discursively attributed to lithium and the perception of its role in accommodating the ‘green’ transition.