Agenda Shaper on Ukraine

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The European Parliament's Power Bid in EU Foreign Policy

Introduction

Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in 2022 has been a watershed moment for the European Union's (EU) foreign and security policy (Genini, 2025, 1-3), sparking a discussion about deeper integration, and the best way of supporting Ukraine. Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founding fathers, famously said that Europe "is forged in crisis, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises" (Monnet, 1976). In this spirit, this essay argues that the European Parliament (EP) attempted to shape and increase the EU's support to Ukraine whilst also making the case for stronger European integration and greater parliamentary involvement on foreign policy.

So far, little academic attention has been devoted to how the EP itself drives an increase in its powers (Wiesner, 2018, 375), and more specifically, to how the EP has utilized INI reports in relation to Ukraine's war effort in the past three years. Using the latter as a case study of the former, this article investigates how the EP used INI reports to shape the EU's support to Ukraine whilst reasoning an increase in EU-level and EP influence. It demonstrates how the EP used non-binding own initiative (INI) reports to shape the EU's long-term agenda beyond direct legislative impact, arguing for increased support to Ukraine's defence. This necessity and EU values in turn necessitate more EU-level actions in foreign policy and parliamentary inclusion, the EP has argued.

The essay first draws on literature on interinstitutional micropolitics and agenda shaping, to then analyse the EP's efforts to shape the EU's agenda through INI reports adopted since the start of the full-scale invasion until the end of the 2024 legislative term. This includes four interrelated aspects (see Graph 1): Firstly, heightened support to Ukraine; secondly, increased EU-level actions; thirdly, advanced engagement of the EP; and lastly, normative reasoning.

Graph 1: The European Parliament's Reasoning Chain, Agenda Shaping through INI Reports on Foreign & Security Policy

Interinstitutional Micropolitics as a Lens to Analyse the European Parliament's Quest for Increased Powers

Given that major conventional theories of European integration cannot systematically explain the EP's increasing influence (Costa and Brack, 2013, 47), this essay draws on recent literature on interinstitutional micropolitics. Accordingly, institutions and their members act politically and shape the EU's system from within, which provides a more nuanced lens compared with a mere focus on treaty changes and intergovernmental agreements (Wiesner, 2018). The EP's scope for increasing its power and shaping the EU system, and the success thereof, is contingent on four factors (Wiesner, 2018, 380-381): First, its existing powers enshrined in treaties and other rules; second, interparliamentary politics, with increased negotiating power the more united the EP stands; third, the political context that may open "windows of opportunity"; and fourth, the symbolical powers of the EP, including legitimization and scrutiny of the Commission.

The European Parliament as an Agenda Shaper on the EU's Response to the Ukraine War

In the absence of powers to initiate legislation, the EP attempts to impact policy outcomes through discursive agenda setting via own initiative reports, increasing the salience of issues through normatively convincing proposals (Deters and Falkner, 2020, 292-294). This constitutes an informal form of the broadly conceived agenda setting (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), which can be further distilled into the reactive part of "shaping" an existing

agenda, and the proactive part of "setting" the agenda (Kreppel and Webb, 2019, 388). Research has shown that such resolutions at own initiative – both binding (INL) and non-binding (INI) – are more likely to influence legislative outcomes when discussions on the respective topics are already ongoing so that the EP shapes the agenda, rather than setting the agenda by initiating discussions (Kreppel and Webb, 2019, 396). They particularly signal the EP's commitment to outlined views and proposals, as repeated reforms increased the obstacles for INI reports' adoption (Maurer and Wolf, 2020, 67). In foreign policy, primary agenda drivers are typically crisis events, opening "windows of opportunity" for informal agenda setting or shaping (Kingdon, 1995).

Russia's war on Ukraine has provided the EP with such a "window of opportunity". As overall salience was high even though somewhat reduced towards the end of the 2019-24 parliamentary cycle, there has been more need to shape rather than set the agenda. The Parliament's over 30 non-legislative resolutions were mostly in response to statements by representatives of other EU bodies in line with rule 136 (2) of the EP's rules of procedures (Bącal and Drachenberg, 2024, 3; European Parliament i, 2024). Though, among them are also eight INI reports the Foreign Affairs Committee initiated that do not primarily focus on but explicitly relate to EU support of Ukraine, linking the Ukraine war with the need for increased foreign policy powers (see Table 1). Compared to ad-hoc resolutions reacting to statements, INI reports typically lay out a more structural, longer-term vision. Thus, this essay looks only at INI reports to investigate the link between the EU's engagement in the Ukraine war and its powers.

Table 1: INI Reports Referring to the EU's Security Policy and Russia's War on Ukraine, Tabled by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (Feb 24, 2022 – June 30, 2024)

Demands for Stronger Ukraine Support

The EP's strong push to support Ukraine in response to Russia's full-scale war in 2022 motivated political leaders of EU institutions to take a more ambitious stance, contributing to the EU's unified positioning (Zheltovskyy, 2023, 674). Given the prevalence of the war in 2022, the need and capacity for the EP to initiate INI reports on related matters was limited, leading to only one relevant report in 2022 compared with four in 2023 and three in the first half of 2024 (European Parliament, 2024, 1419).

In its INI report on security in the Eastern Partnership region from June 2022, the EP called on member states to "step up their military support to Ukraine and provisions of weapons" (Art. 2), including by providing anti-ship, anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons (European Parliament a, 2022, Art. 25), and for the Council to increase the European Peace Facility (EPF) budget used to finance increased weapons supplies to Ukraine (Art. 22). It also pushed the EU institutions to "provide a more ambitious integration agenda for Ukraine" through quick gradual integration steps (Art. 14), as this is inevitably linked to not only Ukraine's but also the EU's security

(Anghel and Džankić, 2023, 487-489). In a 2024 INI report on enlargement, it reaffirmed this link as "a geostrategic investment in long-term peace, democracy, stability, security [...] in the face of Russia's war" (European Parliament h, 2024, Art. 2), whilst stressing the need to "fund support to Ukraine from frozen Russian assets" (Art. 44).

In its annual foreign policy implementation INI reports for 2022 and 2023, the EP increased pressure for further Ukraine support. In the former report adopted on January 18, 2023, it had several provisions on support for Ukraine (European Parliament b, 2023, e.g., Art. 13, 36). Notably, it reinforced its call on member states for their "delivery of modern main battle tanks, including Leopard 2s [most commonly used tank in Europe]" (Art. 37), which contributed to collective pressure on Germany to follow suit as it announced it would on January 25 (McAllister, 2023). In the second annual report adopted on February 28, 2024, it still urged member states to "produce ammunition and provide it to Ukraine's armed forces" (European Parliament g, 2024, Art. 22), but overall, it toned down its demands for stronger Ukraine support. This may reflect growing "war fatigue" among the EU public (Goldhammer, 2024, 232-233) and frictions in the EP, as less than twice as many MEPs supported the resolution compared with those who voted against it, in contrast to the overwhelming 5:1 ratio for the resolution a year earlier. These examples illustrate how the success of the EP's agenda-setting power is contingent on its unity.

Advocacy for Increased EU-Level Decision-Making in Foreign Policy

Whilst the EP has selectively pointed to the need for greater EU-level engagement and EP powers in security-related decision-making in 2022 (European Parliament a, 2022, Art. 15, 21, 41), it increased emphasis and precision of these demands in following resolutions. For example, in its annual report 2022 it hosted a whole chapter with proposals for institutional changes (European Parliament b, 2023, Art. 13-27), including old proposals like Qualified Majority Voting (Art. 14a, b, 15) but also new ones like a European Security Council (Art. 14f). It also suggested a "coordinated EU initiative through the EU Military Staff" to organize the joint delivery of Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine (Art. 37).

To "adapt the structure of the EEAS [European External Action Service]" so that it could "lead on EU action" in a new geopolitical environment, the EP introduced a specific INI report in March 2023 (European Parliament c, 2023, Art. 1t). The report focused on further operationalizations of both military and diplomatic means which have been increasingly specified in EU strategic thinking over the past 20 years (Koukakis, 2024, 6). For example, it suggests to "convert the EU delegations into genuine EU embassies" (Art. 1af) and to bolster and centralize military command and control structures and capabilities, especially for operations for the EU rapid deployment capability (Art. 1az) – the EU's de-facto first step towards some kind of European army. Similarly, the EP pushed for expanding EU space capabilities and readying the mutual assistance clause under Art. 42(7) TEU (European

Parliament, 2024 e, Art. 24), and transforming the rapid deployment force into a permanent structure (European Parliament g, 2024, Art. 14). Remarkably, in its INI annual report 2023 it prioritized the ends over the means favourable to its influence, by calling for the development of new intergovernmental legal instruments to circumvent Hungary's vetoes on tools like the EPF (Genini, 2025, 27).

By embedding all these demands within current geopolitical contexts at times of political momentum, generating significant simple majorities on the aforementioned resolutions (5:1, 11:1, 3:1, and 2:1 respectively; see Table 1), and both backing and pushing ahead existing EU actions, the EP developed significant negotiating power to shape the EU's agenda beyond direct legislative impact, despite limited formal competencies (Wiesner, 2018, 380-381).

Push for Increased Parliamentary Involvement

In conjunction with fostering EU-level powers, the EP aimed to increase its role. It did so by proposing a role for the EP in decisions on security missions (European Parliament b, 2023, Art. 14i) and demanding oversight powers to supervise the EU's military command and control structures (European Parliament d, 2023, Art. 16), among others. Aiming to strengthen its role as an own diplomatic actor (Bajtay, 2015, 10), the EP used INI reports to underline the "distinct role and value of EU parliamentary diplomacy in complementing and reinforcing the visibility and impact of EU foreign and security policy" (European Parliament f, 2024, Art. 2).

The EP has since Lisbon, beyond influencing the EU Executive, advanced its curation of own initiatives and diplomatic channels to impact foreign policy (Goinard, 2020, 109). A prime example the EP repeatedly highlights are the "innovative approaches such as the committee-to-committee cooperation [with Ukraine's Parliament]" (Art. 31), which it deemed as "valuable cooperation at political and technical level" in support of Ukraine (European Parliament g, 2024, Art. 28). In its annual report 2023, the EP moved from outlining general policy shifts and ad-hoc responses previously to providing an elaborate list of means and tools to impact EU foreign policy (European Parliament f, 2024, Art. 6-17).

Normative Reasoning

First, it premised the need for structural changes to enhance EU and EP powers (e.g., European Parliament b, 2023, Art. 13-27) on the overarching vision of enhancing the EU's "role as a credible values-based foreign policy player" (Art. 1). Second, connecting the development of a military force under EU structures with the objective to "protect the Union's values" helped justify such a significant proposed step (European Parliament d, 2023, Art. 2). Third, the emphasis on the value centrality in the Treaties, the UN Charter, and other legal texts provided the basis for the aforementioned elaborate foreign policy toolbox for the EP and the need for increased EU powers (European Parliament g, 2024, Art. 3). Fourth, it reasoned continued and increased support to Ukraine by stating it "pays tribute to the brave

people of Ukraine, who are [...] courageously defending [...] European values and security" (Art. 8). Fifth, it underscored that the one issue on which the EU will not sacrifice to speed up accession is the "EU values and fundamental principles (European Parliament h, 2024, Art. 6).

Conclusion

As this essay demonstrated, the European Parliament has not only sought to bolster support for Ukraine in the latter half of the 2019-24 parliamentary term, but also to strategically leverage this crisis to push for deeper European integration and a stronger parliamentary role in foreign policy. Its use of INI reports reveals a deliberate, normatively grounded effort to shape long-term EU action beyond immediate legislative influence. Whether the EP can sustain this momentum throughout the 2024-29 cycle, will depend on its continued unity, political salience, and eventually, the translation into more formalized structures and rules (Wiesner, 2018, 380-381). Increased "war fatigue" and parliamentary frictions evident in the decreased majorities for relevant INI reports towards the end of the 2019-24 cycle pose challenges to the EU's sustained agenda shaping ability.

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