
Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze patterns of contestation of EU foreign policy in the European Parliament (EP), while taking the example of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia in 2014-2015. It focuses on the rise of EU contestation after 2014 European elections and its impact on coherence of EP positions and consequently its role as an EU foreign policy actor. If EP position in the EU institutional game in the field of foreign policy is dependent on its normative activism and the ability to unite strong majorities behind value-oriented resolutions (Bickerton 2011, Braghiroli 2015), then growing internal contestation may result in weaker influence of EP on EU foreign policy-making. The main question guiding this research is whether growing number of eurosceptics in the EP has translated into their growing influence on EP positions. In order to answer this question 16 resolutions on Ukraine and Russia adopted during the 7th and 8th parliamentary term were examined by means of a comprehensive quantitative - qualitative analysis. This analysis focused on: 1) coalition and voting behaviour of political groups, as well as their relative quantitative impact on the content of resolutions; 2) core arguments underpinning eurosceptic contestation of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia, as well as its inter- and intra-group coherence.

Key words

European Parliament, political groups, Ukraine, Russia, eurosceptic, contestation

1. Introduction

This paper aims at analysing main patterns of contestation of EU foreign policy in the European Parliament (EP), while taking the example of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia since the tragic events in Kyiv in February 2014. It contributes to several strands of EU studies literature linking research on EP role in EU foreign policy with research on euroscepticism and political groups in the European Parliament. Until recently European Parliament was considered a Europhile bastion and EP specialists largely neglected eurosceptic MEPs who were considered a weak minority with very limited opportunities offered by the institutional system. Questions about the role and strategies of eurosceptics in the European Parliament - whether they tend to engage or withdraw from parliamentary work ("exit or voice") - became more pertinent with their relative success in May 2014 European elections. As a result, scholars are now engaging in discussing various aspects of eurosceptic contestation of European integration and opposition towards the EU is now increasingly considered a pervasive and enduring phenomenon. EU policy with regard to Russian-

---

2 See for example: M. Longo, P. Murray, Europe's Legitimacy Crisis: from Causes to Solutions, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 80-100. A number of panels or entire sections have been recently dedicated to the topic of contestation at major conferences: 22nd International Conference of Europeanists, Paris, 8-10 July 2015; ECPR Trento SGEU Conference, Trento, 16-18 June 2016 (section: ‘Euroscepticism and the Rise of EU Contestation’);
Ukrainian conflict provides a very interesting, timely and relevant case for studying contestation of EU external action (policy contestation) and of the European integration project more broadly (system contestation).

Analysis of patterns of contestation can also provide fresh insights into the role of EP in EU foreign policy. When analyzing institutional aspects of EU external relations, scholars usually focus on the intergovernmental process, i.e. Council decision-making, interests of major Member States, domestic sources of EU external policies or Europeanization of national officials and diplomats seconded to the European External Action Service (EEAS). Literature on international role of the European Parliament has been until recently rather limited as scholars only rarely focused on EP influence on EU foreign policy, though with some notable exceptions. Empowerment of European Parliament by the Lisbon treaty led some authors to announce a ‘parliamentary turn’ in the analysis of EU external relations. This has inspired a new wave of research on the role of EP in EU foreign policy.

But the ‘parliamentary turn’ literature seems to focus a great deal on the normative activism of the European Parliament, seeing the EP itself as a ‘civilian power’ and underlining ‘growing evidence of EU being a normative actor and the EP being an additional actor that goes in the same direction’. Limited attention is attached to challenges posed to EP normative power by complexities of its internal decision-making process, as well as contradictions and inconsistencies of its own activities. There is surprisingly little in the literature on how EP positions on key foreign policy issues are being prepared, negotiated and internally contested. This paper seeks to close this gap, by providing a thorough quantitative-qualitative analysis of formulation and contestation of a set of EP resolutions that concern a major issue on EU foreign policy agenda.

As a result, the paper contributes to discussing a long standing efficiency - deliberation dilemma in light of the growing eurocentric representation in the European Parliament.

---


7 One example of growing research interest was PACO Conference, Brussels, 18-19 February 2016 (Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy in Europe and beyond. Theories, Practices and Comparison).

8 D. Irrera, Introduction..., op. cit., p. 3.


one hand, EP can be viewed as a united, coherent and efficient actor that is capable of gathering overwhelming majorities in support of normatively principled positions on EU foreign policy that send strong messages to the Commission and the Council. On the other hand, it can be perceived as a mere forum of deliberation that is subject to growing inter-group and intra-group tensions and cleavages, which compromise strong stance on issues of human rights, democratization or compliance with international norms. The rise of eurosceptic parties in May 2014 EP elections provides an opportune moment to grasp internal parliamentary dynamics that could affect EP position in EU foreign policy-making.

2. State of the art and research design

Christopher Bickerton argued that there were no a priori reasons for the European Parliament to be so interested in the EU foreign policy. EP activism in this area is a by-product of institutional turf wars with the European Commission and Member States. In its resolutions European Parliament often criticizes other EU actors for their overly accommodating approach towards Russia or China and the tendency to neglect human rights' concerns and conditionality principle. In fact, EP draws its legitimacy on the role of European conscience, while a uniform, coherent and value-oriented parliamentary position provides an important political asset in the EU-level inter-institutional game. The argument stipulates that values unite and interests divide. Thus focus on human rights and democratization makes it easier to foster consensus and EP coherence which then translates into greater chance of playing an important role in EU decision-making - punching above its weight as EP competences in foreign policy remain limited. However, there are two major problems here. Firstly, uniformity for the sake of efficiency is problematic for legitimacy and representation of citizens' diversity of opinions. Secondly, and more importantly for this analysis, growing divergences within the Parliament on foreign policy issues could easily compromise EP leverage in negotiations with the Commission and the Council.

This paper contributes to literature on EP role in EU foreign policy by looking precisely at the rise of divergences and tensions between and within political groups in the aftermath of May 2014 elections. It argues that, whereas during the 7th EP term opposition was voiced mainly by the Group of European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL), the 8th term has witnessed considerable growth in eurosceptic contestation.

Stefano Braghiroli also suggested that Parliament's actual influence on EU foreign policy grows - despite still limited formal competences - as a result of value-oriented resolutions and recommendations directed at the Council and Commission. Normatively, the EP has more room for maneuver than the Council. It is not directly involved in international negotiations and is, consequently, less constrained by their dynamics. In this vein, the EP is more autonomous and less dependent, when compared to the Council, on direct utility to the Member States and thus more oriented towards promotion of European values. For instance, deputies' activism concerning the continuous breach of human rights in Russia has often made EP positions much more principled than those of other EU institutions. At the same

---

13 C.J. Bickerton, European Union Foreign Policy..., op. cit., p. 70.
time, resolutions and recommendations adopted before the EU-Russia summits have had certain impact on strategies and actions of the Member States. Meanwhile, this paper scrutinizes the alleged uniformity of EP positions with regard to promotion of European values and warns against overestimating EP coherence on foreign policy issues.

In this context it is worth mentioning work done already in the late 1990s by Donatella Viola who looked at EP debates and political groups’ voting patterns with regard to wars in Yugoslavia and in the Gulf. Her key focus was on Europeanization of MEPs and more precisely, whether the EP has succeeded in transcending state frontiers or whether conflicting national interpretations were still at the heart of parliamentary debates. To account for group cohesion, Viola took foreign policy - one of the most sensitive policy areas - as yardstick and in addition focused on two cases of potentially highly divisive international crises. The quantitative-qualitative approach was designed in order to 1) trace positions of each political group before during and after the war based on debates and motions for resolutions tabled by each group; 2) assess group cohesion; 3) assess MEPs national allegiance versus political group loyalty to see which nationalities were particularly loyal/ disloyal to political groups; 4) examine patterns of intergroup cooperation (joint motions for resolutions).

This article looks closer at the alleged normative activism and coherence of the European Parliament. It looks at EP positions with regard to a major international conflict at EU doorstep, where issues of security and economic interests on one hand and human rights and democracy on the other are at stake. Thus the article broadly follows Viola’s approach by focusing on a major international crisis - the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. As this conflict has not come to an end, the period analyzed empirically covers 2 years: 2014-2015. Within this timeframe, events have moved from violence on the streets of Kiev to war in Donbas region, annexation of Crimea, EU sanctions towards Russia and change of geostrategic balance in the Black Sea Basin. However, different questions guide this research. The starting point is not Europeanization but contestation, namely how EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia in the years 2014-2015 has been contested inside the European Parliament and how this contestation has affected the coherence of EP position and consequently efficiency of its role as an EU foreign policy actor.

Importantly, the timeframe chosen allows for comparison between resolutions and debates at the end of EP 7th and in the first half of 8th term. As elections in May 2014 brought a surge in eurosceptic vote, eurosceptic voices in EP have become more numerous. But do the growing numbers translate into growing influence of eurosceptics? In order to answer this question a comprehensive quantitative - qualitative analysis of all resolutions adopted in 2014-2015, which concerned Ukrainian-Russian conflict or internal situation in Ukraine and in Russia, was carried out. The sample consisted of 16 resolutions (R). 6 resolutions were adopted in the 7th term (first half of 2014) and 10 resolutions - in the 8th term (from July 2014 to September 2015). Resolutions were also divided into 2 groups according to their main theme: those dealing mainly with Ukrainian and Russian-Ukrainian conflict and those dealing mainly with human rights issues in Russia (Table 1). In line with the above-cited literature it is hypothesized that greater unity and coherence should be achieved with regard to human rights than internal and international conflicts, the latter being potentially more divisive along both political and national lines. 6 resolutions concerned human rights issues (1 adopted in 7th and 5 in the 8th EP term), whereas 10 resolutions concerned Ukrainian and Russian-Ukrainian conflict (5 in each term).

D.M. Viola, European Foreign Policy and the European Parliament in the 1990s..., op. cit., p. 4.
### Table 1: Resolutions under examination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R 13.03.2014 on Russia: sentencing of demonstrators involved in the Bolotnaya Square events</td>
<td>R 23.10.2014 closing down the Memorial (Sakharov Prize 2009) in Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R 15.01.2015 on Russia, in particular the case of Alexei Navalny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R 12.03.2015 on murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R 30.04.2015 on the case of Nadiya Savchenko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R 10.09.2015 on Russia, in particular the cases of Eston Kohver, Oleg Sentsov and Olexandr Kolchenko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>R 06.02.2014 on the situation in Ukraine</td>
<td>R 17.07.2014 on Ukraine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R 06.02.2014 on the EU-Russia summit</td>
<td>R 18.09.2014 on the situation in Ukraine and the state of play of EU-Russia relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R 27.02.2014 on the situation in Ukraine</td>
<td>R 15.01.2015 on the situation in Ukraine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R 13.03.2014 on the Russian invasion on Ukraine</td>
<td>R 10.06.2015 on state of EU-Russia relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R 17.04.2014 on Russia’s pressure on Eastern Partnership countries, especially destabilization of Ukraine</td>
<td>R 11.06.2015 on strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section seeks to identify changes in quantitative terms. The two independent variables (7th - 8th term and human rights - conflict resolutions) are then used to analyze available data and answer 3 questions: 1) how many and which groups were able to agree on and sign a joint motion for resolution? 2) what were the voting patterns: which groups voted for, against or abstained and which groups suffered from major splits/ experienced low voting coherence? 3) which groups had greatest influence on the content of resolutions? The latter question is addressed by a comparative analysis of the content of joint motions for resolution and individual groups' motions tabled earlier. Since a joint motion consists almost entirely of copy-pasted passages from individual motions, it is possible to establish which groups' motions have been taken on board in the final draft and to what extent.

The following section presents main discursive lines of eurosceptic contestation and reproduces core arguments used by 3 eurosceptic factions and non-attached MEPs to contest EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia. This part of analysis is based on 3 types of sources: a) motions for resolution tabled by these groups, b) MEPs' interventions in debates, c) stated explanations of the vote. The focus is on coherence of argumentation of the eurosceptic camp in general as well as within each of the three groups.

### 3. Quantitative analysis

How did the composition of the European Parliament change after May 2014 elections and what impact did these changes have on relative position of each political group and their coalition-building potential? First of all, whereas mainstream political groups such as European People's Party (EPP) or Alliance of European Liberals and Democrats (ALDE) have lost many seats, radical and eurosceptic parties recorded substantial growth in mandates (Group of European United Left - Nordic Green Left - GUE-NGL, Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy - EFDD and non-attached, which later formed Europe of Nations and Freedom - ENF). Share of deputies who openly rejected or heavily criticized European Union and - incidentally - happened to adopt a conciliatory position towards Russia rose from 13 to...
Important growth was also recorded by moderate (soft) eurosceptics but strongly anti-Russian European Reformists and Conservatives (ECR). Meanwhile, the traditional ‘grand coalition’ of EPP and S&D (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats) share of votes declined from 62% before elections in May 2014 to 54% in May 2016, mainly as a result of the EPP decline. Interestingly, an alternative mainstream coalition of EPP, ALDE, Verts/ ALE (Greens) and ECR share of vote declined in almost identical proportion (from 61.5% to 54.5%). The question is to what extent this decline has affected majorities formed with regard to resolutions analysed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009-2014 (05.2014)</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2014-2019 (05.2016)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EPP</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALDE</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verts/ALE</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUE-NGL</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFDD</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENF</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NI</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>766</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>99</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>152</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>750</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Throughout the period examined joint motions for resolution\(^\text{16}\) were tabled by a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 6 out of 7 political groups (8 since mid-June 2015) present in the European Parliament during both parliamentary terms. In total, joint motions were signed by 6 groups in 4 cases (25%), 5 groups in 9 cases (56%), 4 groups in 3 cases (19%). During the 7th term joint motions were signed by 6 groups in 2 cases (33%), 5 groups in 3 cases (50%) and 4 groups in 1 case (17%). Finally, during the 8th term joint motions were signed by 6 groups in 2 cases (20%), 5 groups in 6 cases (60%) and 4 groups in 2 cases (20%). One could thus observe a proportional decline in a number of joint motions signed by 6 groups, a corresponding rise in motions signed by 5 groups and a relative stability with regard to motions signed by 4 groups. The situation looks different if we divide motions thematically: whereas 50% of joint motions on human rights were signed by 6 groups (33% by 5 groups), only 10% of joint motions on the conflict were signed by 6 groups (and 70% by 5 groups). This confirms higher EP coherence on human right issues although actual voting patterns (see below) bring a more nuanced picture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 groups</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 groups</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 groups</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Number of political groups signing joint motions for resolution (according to parliamentary term)

\(^{16}\) All individual and joint motions for resolution are available on the website of the European Parliament, http://www.europarl.europa.eu.
There is a consistent pattern as to which groups tend to support joint motions and which groups repeatedly dissent. The radical left GUE-NGL group failed to sign 14 out of 16 joint motions (87.5%), whereas the right-wing radicals from EFDD failed to sign 13 (81%). However, it needs to be stressed that individual deputies from both groups signed joint motions on some occasions (in their own name and not on behalf of the group). Predictably, majority of them came from CEE countries, namely Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, but also from France and Italy. Among the non-attached MEPs only 1 deputy individually signed 1 joint motion and ENF did not sign the only resolution that was discussed after the group was formed. As to the mainstream groups, there were in total 4 cases of non-signature of the joint motion - 2 in case of Verts/ ALE (Greens) and 2 in case of S&D. When it comes to dissidence on human rights, GUE-NGL signed 1 and EFDD - 2 out of 6 joint motions. Thus in case of EFDD the proportion of signed human rights joint motions (33%) was significantly higher than proportion of signed conflict motions (10%).

Another question relates to voting patterns: to what extent the majority coalitions tend to be smaller due to growing number of eurosceptic mandates and what is the level of coherence among the groups, in particular among the eurosceptics. Unfortunately, there is a methodological challenge here as votes are recorded by the European Parliament only on request of political groups. Voting by name (so-called roll-call votes) took place only in 7 out of 16 cases discussed, which imposes important limitations on generation of conclusions. The voting took place twice in 7th term (1 resolution on human rights and 1 on conflict) and 5 times in the 8th term (2 resolutions on human rights and 3 on conflict).

Majorities on human rights issues accounted for 94% of votes March 2014, 85% in October 2014 and 60% in September 2015. Thus resolutions on human rights issues in Russia have progressively become more contested. In October 2014 the 5 mainstream parties (EPP, S&D, ALDE, Verts/ ALE, ECR) unanimously voted on a resolution regarding closing down of Memorial in Russia. Eurosceptics were heavily split, between support and abstention (EFDD) and support, opposition and rejection (GUE-NGL). Almost all non-attached deputies voted against the resolution. More divisions were observed with regard to September 2015 resolution and not only in case of 3 eurosceptic groups, but also S&D. Traditionally, lowest level of cohesion was observed in EFDD. Splits also took place in GUE-NGL (26 against with 7 for and 5 abstentions) and ENF (29 against and 7 abstentions). The issue of human rights also divided socialists who achieved a low level of coherence (97 abstentions against 19 objections and only 44 votes in favour).

Meanwhile support for resolutions regarding Russian-Ukrainian conflict was also declining: from 77% of votes in April 2014 to 71% and 56% in June 2015. However, this is not exclusively a result of growing eurosceptic influence, but other factors - such as growing national divisions and stricter position on Russia taken by EPP in coalition with Greens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Rights</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 groups</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 groups</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 groups</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Number of political groups signing joint motions for resolution (according to resolution theme)

17 More on roll-call vote requests as a minority right which offers party groups an opportunity to shape the voting agenda and signal commitment to a policy proposal: S. Thierse, *Going on record: Revisiting the logic of roll-call vote requests in the European Parliament*, "European Union Politics", 17:2, 2016, p. 219-241.
ALDE and ECR (instead of S&D) - should be taken into account. For example, resolution on strategic military situation in the Black Sea Basin (11.06.2015), which gathered only 56% votes in favour, saw an interesting pattern of high coherence among eurosceptics rejecting the joint motion and low coherence among mainstream parties, where a number of splits were recorded, especially among S&D and Greens, but also ECR and even EPP. Deputies from mainstream parties who objected or abstained came mostly from Germany, France, Italy, Cyprus, Greece and Bulgaria, which confirms the traditional intra-EU divisions over policy towards Russia (more dialogue versus more containment). Whereas eurosceptics tend to rebel on human rights issues (some vote in favour of resolutions), mainstream parties tend to rebel on conflict resolutions (some vote against or abstain).

Finally, which groups determined the content of resolutions to the greatest extent and how this has evolved? The method used was to compare joint motions for resolution with motions tabled earlier by individual groups that have signed joint motion. In fact, joint motions largely consisted of directly copy-pasted or slightly reformulated passages taken from individual motions. Accordingly, it is possible to determine - in quantitative terms - which groups had greatest impact on the resolutions. Not surprisingly, eurosceptics had marginal influence as only a very limited number of isolated elements of their motions were accepted, which understandably led them not to sign joint motions. As their proposals were not accepted at the drafting stage, their strategy was to table amendments during the plenary session (see especially GUE-NGL and to a lesser extent EFDD), but those amendments were being consistently rejected by the majority.

The main evolution pattern that stands out in this analysis is the declining impact of S&D and growing influence of the EPP. Other sources confirm that EPP substantially tightened its grip on foreign policy agenda of the European Parliament in the 8th term\(^{19}\). This is surprising as judging by sheer numbers would lead us to different conclusions (EPP representation declined significantly, whereas S&D representation stayed roughly the same - see Table 2). Whereas the 7th term joint motions were formulated jointly by EPP and S&D or even mostly by S&D (with only marginal input from Greens, ALDE and EDR - in the order of influence), the 8th term joint motions were formulated mostly by EPP alone with additional input from Greens, S&D, ALDE and ECR. Thus impact of S&D was reduced to the level of much smaller groups. Whereas EPP practically dominated the content of resolutions, substantial input was also provided by Greens and ALDE. This was particularly true for human rights motions throughout the period analysed. In quantitative terms input of ECR was less visible although the group became much stronger after May 2014 elections.

It can thus be concluded that impact of eurosceptic groups on the content of resolutions is practically non-existent and this has not changed after May 2014 elections. Number of groups signing joint motions slightly decreased (especially with regard to conflict motions) and majority coalitions progressively became smaller. However, the latter is not only the result of growing numbers of eurosceptic MEPs, but also evolving composition of the majority coalition, where S&D is being increasingly marginalized (although this tendency could be issue specific and should not be a priori generalized beyond this case study). If this trend continues, contestation of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia will become more complex and pronounced, majorities will be more difficult to gather and EP unity will be compromised. While EP message to the Commission and Council based on EPP-ALDE-Greens-ECR majority is bound to be strong, coherent and principled, efficiency will be gained

\(^{19}\) Interview with former MEP (ECR), Warsaw, 28 August 2014; Interview with EP official (working for EPP group), Brussels, 10 September 2014; Interview with EP official (working for NI MEPs), Brussels, 11 September 2014.
at the cost of representativeness. This could generate stronger opposition within the EP and may not in the end translate into greater impact on other institutions.

4. Qualitative analysis

The quantitative analysis does not provide a full picture of eurosceptic contestation. This section outlines main discursive lines of eurosceptic contestation and reproduces core arguments used by GUE-NGL, EFDD and ENF (NI) factions to contest EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia. The analysis is based on 3 types of sources: a) motions for resolutions tabled by those groups, b) interventions in debates, c) explanations of the vote. Main arguments shared by all the 3 groups are presented below and divergences within the eurosceptic camp are highlighted at the end of the section. Common themes include: 1) EU’s pursuit of US instead of European interests resulting in policies that threaten peace and welfare; 2) EU applying double standards in foreign policy (talking values but acting geopolitics and criticizing others for doing just that); 3) EU pursuing imperialist policies in the East, thus not being a qualitatively different actor than Russia; 4) lack of EU democratic legitimacy. Crucially, contestation of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia in fact serves greater purpose, namely to challenge basic foundations of EU foreign policy as well as to undermine EU legitimacy not only at the policy but also at the systemic level (contestation of the EU governance system and the logic of integration process).

4.1. Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left

In May 2016 the GUE-NGL group consisted of 52 members (7% of the EP) and experienced a substantial membership growth - by 33% - in comparison with the previous parliamentary term (see Table 2). This has notably translated into more speaking time during plenary debates and more opportunities to voice contesting arguments. GUE-NGL was also the most active group among the eurosceptics in tabling amendments during the plenary thus privileging voice strategy.20 Deputies who took floor during debates on Ukraine and Russia were: Helmut Scholz (Germany), Marie-Christine Vergiat, Jean-Luc Melanchon (France), Jiri Mastalka, Jaromir Kohlicek (Czech Republic), Miguel Viegas (Portugal), Sofia Sakorafa, Georgios Katrougalos (Greece), Pablo Iglesias, Javier Permy, Ines Cristina Zuber, Marina Albiol Guzman (Spain), Merja Kyyronen (Finland) and Nikola Vuljanic (Chorwacja). The following description of GUE-NGL contesting argumentation is based on motions for resolution tabled by the group, as well as statements made by the deputies during the debates and vote explanations.

With regard to Kyiv Maidan protests, the group underlined that violence was used by both sides of the conflict, while extreme nationalist groups were joining the protests and Ukrainian opposition forces failed to distance themselves from them. Both the government and opposition were blamed for failure to compromise. This differed sharply from the mainstream perception that president Yanukovich and his government were responsible for the conflict escalation. In addition, GUE-NGL considered the agreement brokered by foreign ministers of Germany, Poland and France to be broken unilaterally by opposition. Huge emphasis in group’s motions was put on nationalists’ (or even fascists’) influence among protesters (and in the new post-Maidan government), resulting threat for political pluralism as well as assaults and persecution of minorities and Communist Party of Ukraine.21 In general,

GUE-NGL was convinced that a coup d'état, actively supported and financed by some Ukrainian oligarchs, US and EU, took place in Ukraine. Chances for democratization were small as oligarchic rivalries, poverty and rampant corruption would not be eradicated any time soon. Ukraine needs a new political system established with the participation of all political forces and external financial help delivered jointly by EU, Russia and IMF. Another reason for concern was the fact interim president signed association agreement that would have a profound impact on the country, whereas such decision should be preferably taken by all Ukrainians in a referendum.

Although the group recognized that Crimea was seized by 'unmarked pro-Russian soldiers' who were 'politically, economically and militarily supported by Russia', it nevertheless attached greater importance to 'large pro-Russian rallies in several Ukrainian cities', increased US presence in the Black Sea Basin and 'racist and anti-Semitic actions' of Svoboda and Right Sector. The 'equal responsibility of both sides' approach was extended to war in eastern Ukraine, as both Russia-sponsored separatists and government forces were accused of ceasefire violations. In this perspective, main reason for the conflict was internal (extremism, corruption, falling social standards) and not external (Russia's intervention). GUE-NGL repeatedly called for an international commission to examine crimes committed by all sides, during Maidan and in Odessa.

As to human rights violations in Russia, GUE-NGL joined the majority and signed joint motion for resolution only once. Its representative nevertheless stressed during the debate that this special EU focus on human rights in Russia is hypocritical. Firstly, it is very difficult to obtain an EP debate on more severe violations in other countries. Secondly, until very recently, many Member States defended Russia for the sake of energy and financial interests. The group noticed rise of nationalist, racist, homophobic and right wing forces in Russia that target social activists, journalists, minorities and LGBT people, but consistently warned EU against 'political re-interpretation of human rights as a field of power struggle'. In fact, EU policy of sanctions and interruption of political dialogue deprived EU of channels and means to raise the issue of human rights violations in Russia. The group protested against EU using the murder of Boris Nemtsov for 'war propaganda' and 'anti-Russian hysteria'. It criticized Russia for violating human rights and exploitation of migrant workers in Sochi construction sites.

GUE-NGL saw EU as co-responsible for the political crisis in Ukraine: the EU did not offer real partnership terms to Ukraine, its policy of separating ENP from EU-Russia relations ended in failure and put Ukraine in an impossible position where it had to choose between rival geopolitical blocs. The group saw both the West and Russia exerting undue pressure on Ukraine and interfering in internal affairs of the country. They were 'extremely concerned' about Ukraine becoming a 'battlefield of geopolitical competition' between US and Russia and

22 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on situation in Ukraine, B7-0221/2014, 25.2.2014
23 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on Russian pressure on Eastern Partnership countries and in particular destabilization of eastern Ukraine, B7-0431/2014, 15.4.2014.
24 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on Ukraine, B7-0268/2014, 11.3.2014.
26 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on closing down the Memorial, B8-0169/2014, 21.10.2014.
27 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on Russia, in particular the case of Alexey Navalny, B8-0051/2015, 13.1.2015
28 European Parliament, Murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia (debate), Wednesday 11 March 2015 - Strasbourg.
29 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on the EU-Russia summit, B7-0159/2014, 4.2.2014
30 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on Ukraine B7-0161/2014, 4.2.2014
the EU role in this confrontation 'that poses a danger to peace and stability in Europe'\textsuperscript{31}. In the debate GUE-NGL representatives deplored the 'Cold War rhetoric' adopted by mainstream EP groups and their unconditional support for the Ukrainian ruling coalition that included 'neo-Nazis'\textsuperscript{32}.

Interestingly, GUE-NGL saw both sides fighting in Donbas - government forces and separatists - as equally legitimate representatives of Ukrainian citizens. Moreover, they portrayed Russia's intervention on the par with US and EU involvement, stressing that both US and Russia provided military support to the respective sides, thus fuelling the conflict. Joint motions agreed by mainstream EP groups were repeatedly criticized for putting all the blame on Russia and failing to mention the fatal US policy\textsuperscript{33}. Meanwhile, it was not Russia, but the West that started to violate international law in Europe (case of Kosovo)\textsuperscript{34}. The US also pushed EU to maintain the dangerous policy of sanctions despite the fact that US trade volume with Russia was 40 times smaller than that of EU\textsuperscript{35}. NATO was condemned for misusing Ukrainian crisis to reinvent itself and thrive on confrontation with Russia\textsuperscript{36}. EU (and the majority in the EP) was in fact contributing with its resolutions to the escalation of the crisis and not to its peaceful resolution. Sanctions were considered to have negative economic impact on both EU and Russia, but little political influence. Moreover, trade war between EU and Russia further worsened situation in Ukraine. The European Parliament talked a lot about democracy and freedom, but the crisis was really about geopolitics, where EU - contrary to Europeans’ interests - accepted a role of a puppet in a US-led show.

4.2. Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy

In May 2016 the EFDD group had 46 members (6\% of the EP) and experienced a substantial membership growth - by 33\% - in comparison with the previous parliamentary term (see Table 2). This has translated into more speaking time during plenary debates and more opportunities to voice contesting arguments. Contrary to GUE-NGL, EFDD was not very active when it came to tabling amendments in plenary sessions. Moreover, it failed to propose its own motions for resolutions in 8 out of 16 cases discussed. The group proposed only 1 motion in 6 cases of 7th term but 7 motions in the 10 cases of 8th term. Thus EFDD has become considerably more active after 2014 elections. However, the data available do not allow for sufficient explanation as to whether this evolution resulted from growing concerns over this particular policy area or whether it was a consequence of a more general shift towards voice strategy as opposed to the earlier exit strategy. During the 8th term (2014-2019) the group is dominated by 2 national parties: British UKIP and Italian 5 Stars Movement. Deputies who took floor during debates on Ukraine and Russia in 2014-2015 were: Zbigniew Ziobro, Jacek Kurski (Poland), Valentinas Mazuronis (Lithuania), Nigel Farage, Mike Hookem, Jonathan Arnott, James Carver (United Kingdom), Daniela Aiuto, Fabio Castaldo, Ignazio Corrao (Italy), Kristina Winberg (Sweden). The following description of EFDD contesting argumentation is based on motions for resolution tabled by the group, as well as statements made by the deputies during debates and vote explanations.

\textsuperscript{31} European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on Ukraine, B7-0268/2014, 11.3.2014.
\textsuperscript{32} European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on Ukraine, B8-0056/2014, 15.07.2014.
\textsuperscript{33} European Parliament, Situation in Ukraine (debate), Wednesday 26 February 2014 - Strasbourg.
\textsuperscript{34} European Parliament, Strategic Military Situation in the Black Sea Basin following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia (debate), Wednesday, 10 June 2015 - Strasbourg.
\textsuperscript{35} European Parliament, State of EU-Russia relations (debate), Tuesday 9 June 2015 - Strasbourg.
\textsuperscript{36} European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on Ukraine, B7-0268/2014, 11.3.2014.
According to the group, EU association offer for Ukraine was a 'propaganda game' and tangible economic benefits were lacking. Once the conflict broke out, the EU should abandon the 'policy of wishful thinking'. In 2014 the group blamed German and French governments for lack of bold and determined EU approach towards European integration of Ukraine. It thus came as no surprise that president Yanukovich preferred concrete financial benefits offered by Russia. War in eastern Ukraine should be considered war led by Russia against Western civilization. Lack of decisive action is bound to lead to new attacks, possibly in the Baltic states. It is thus imperative to stop Russia in Ukraine, not only for the sake of Ukrainians but also EU citizens in eastern Europe.

However, the group position on Russian-Ukrainian conflict is far from homogenous. Internal differences often resulted in vote splits and group cohesion is low. This has become even more evident after 2014 elections. Whereas early 2014 statements reflected anti-Russian sentiments of Polish or Lithuanian group members, growing influence of British UKIP oriented the group towards a more Russia-friendly approach, while bringing forward a fundamental and unequivocal critique of European Union and its foreign policy. A good example of divisions is the debate on the resolution regarding the murder of Russian oppositionist Boris Nemtsov, where one EFDD representative bluntly ascribed responsibility for the crime directly to Russian leadership, whereas another claimed that 'demonization' of Russia evident from the proposed resolution provides one more argument for the nationalistic rhetoric of the Putin regime. Although the EP should strongly condemn human rights violations and defend principles of fair trial and rule of law, it should not exploit individual cases and use them to criticize Russia for other unrelated reasons.

After 2014 elections the group openly rejected ENP as a fundamental mistake. The EU completely underestimated Russia's resolve in eastern Europe and it was Ukrainian citizens that had to pay the price for this EU 'folly of neo-imperialism'. EFDD considered that military aggression of Russia was clearly unacceptable but so was ousting by force of democratically elected Ukrainian authorities. Nevertheless the group consistently voiced full support for unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, stressing that the conflict in Ukraine affected security and stability of the whole region and calling for a united position of all Member States when dealing with Russia. In its motion from January 2015 EFDD wrote about 'separatists that occupy eastern Ukraine' and called for an OSCE mission to 'monitor the entire Ukrainian-Russian border'. It also condemned 'unprecedented numbers of airspace violations and maritime intrusions by Russia in Baltic and North Sea region'.

At the same time, European Union was deemed responsible for creating a problem in the first place - EFDD assessed the attempt to sign association agreement with Ukraine in 2013 as 'utterly irresponsible'. EU wanted to add yet another country to its 'dictatorial empire'. According to UKIP leader, Ukraine is only one more item on a long list of EU foreign policy failures (Libya and Syria feature as prominent examples). Signature of association agreement with the new Ukrainian government, together with NATO military exercises on the Ukrainian territory, constituted another provocation of the Russian president.

39 European Parliament, Murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia (debate), Wednesday 11 March 2015 - Strasbourg.
42 European Parliament, Situation in Ukraine (debate), Wednesday, 14 January 2015 - Strasbourg.
43 European Parliament, Motion for a resolution on the situation in Ukraine, B8-0025/2015, 12.1.2015.
Meanwhile, the real threat for Europe was Islamic extremism, where EU needed to cooperate with Putin, instead of ‘playing war games in Ukraine’.\(^{45}\)

In addition, sanctions against Russia negatively affected EU citizens, with many Italian companies facing great difficulties or bankruptcy. EFDD refused to take sides of either Russian or Ukrainian authorities and called for objective assessment of the challenges facing EU. Conflict with Russia had negative consequences for Europe both in economic and strategic terms, whereas the true winner would be China. Russia is drifting towards Asia - China and Iran, which is a very negative development for the EU. It is thus imperative to revive diplomatic dialogue with Russia as soon as possible. Finally, the group criticized double standards and selective compliance with declared norms and values in EU foreign policy, as human rights concerns were many times sacrificed for the sake of energy interests in the EU-Russia relations.

4.3. Europe of Nations and Freedom Group (Non-attached)

ENF is the newest and smallest political group in the European Parliament, which was created only on 15 June 2015 by the formerly non-attached members, mainly from French National Front (half of the group), Italian Northern League as well as Dutch and Austrian Freedom Parties. In May 2016 ENF had 39 deputies (5\% of the EP). It is worth noting that after 2014 elections the number of non-attached deputies rose from 33 to 52 (by 37\% - see Table 2). After ENF group was established, the number of non-attached members dropped to 15 (as of May 2016). NI/ ENF deputies who took floor during debates on Ukraine and Russia were: Adrian Severin (Romania), Krisztina Morvai (Hungary), Andrew Brons (UK), Harald Vilimsky, Franz Obermayr (Austria), Gianluca Buonanno, Matteo Salvini, Mario Borghezio (Italy), Jean-Luc Schaffhauser, Gilles Lebreton, Louis Aliot, Marie-Christine Arnautu, Aymeric Chauprade (France), Udo Voigt (Germany). The analysis of NI/ ENF deputies' contestation of EU policies towards Ukraine and Russia is conducted only on the basis of debate statements and vote explanations, as 15 out of 16 resolutions discussed were adopted before the creation of ENF and NI deputies could not table their own motions for resolution.

The NI/ ENF assessment of Kyiv events was that allegedly democratic movement on Maidan carried out a coup d'état supported by American mercenaries. EU was co-responsible for Maidan tragedy.\(^{46}\) New Ukrainian government rejected any political solution with eastern Ukraine and simply wanted to gain time to better prepare military intervention in Donbas.\(^{47}\) EU policy in Ukraine was wrong: people lived together peacefully only to start fighting each other. Similarly to Ukrainian case, EU supported so-called Arab Spring and ousting of dictators, but those countries have note become more stable and better off as a result.\(^{48}\) EU must distinguish indifference from fuelling conflict and stop blindly accepting US policies. Instead it should adopt a neutral brokering role to be able to resolve conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

According to non-attached deputies European Parliament became victim of disinformation campaign of Member States, US government and media propaganda. MEPs yet again applied double standards by denouncing violence against protesters in Kyiv, but

\(^{45}\) European Parliament, Situation in Ukraine and state of play of EU-Russia relations (debate), Tuesday 16 September 2014 - Strasbourg.

\(^{46}\) European Parliament, Invasion of Ukraine by Russia (debate), Wednesday 12 March 2014 - Strasbourg.

\(^{47}\) European Parliament, Situation in Ukraine (debate), Wednesday, 14 January 2015 - Strasbourg.

allowing the new government to massacre people in eastern Ukraine. In this perspective, Russian majority in Crimea exercised their right to self-determination. EU should distinguish between situation in Donbas and Crimea, where referendum was held. Ukraine is a battlefield of strategic interests of the Euro-Atlantic bloc and Russia: 'it was all very well to call a referendum held by Crimean Autonomous Republic illegal, but this was no more illegal than removal of Yanukovich (...) there has been interference in Ukraine both from the West - US and EU - on the one hand and by Russia on the other'.

NI underlined that Russia is EU strategic partner and EU security depends on this partnership. Unfortunately, EU deliberately worsens relations by criticizing Russia's geopolitical identity and refusing to recognize Russia's 'specific tradition' and interests. A mere title of an EP resolution ('on invasion of Ukraine by Russia') is a blatant 'russophobic provocation'. Referendum in Crimea was also used by Hungarian nationalist MEPs to claim the rights of Hungarian minority in Ukraine to autonomy and self-determination.

In addition, NI repeatedly opposed the policy of sanctions, which was detrimental to EU economy (including agricultural sector and energy policy) and only protected US geopolitical interests. One MEP expressed appreciation of a less Atlantic stance of HR F. Mogherini in comparison to C. Ashton when she considered lifting the sanctions. In general the EP was regarded as dominated by the 'party of war' and its resolution as containing a number of lies and half-truths (NI notably argued that both sides violated Minsk agreements, referendum in Crimea was legal and Georgian war was provoked by Georgia).

NI deputies were highly critical of EP concerns about human rights violations in Russia. On one hand, opinion was expressed with regard to trials and sentences after protests in Bolotnaya Square that sentences complied with Russian law and constituted a proportionate reaction given 'revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine. On the other hand, MEPs were concerned with human rights violations by the post-Maidan Kyiv government. Some stated that EP condemned Russia for being anti-democratic but in fact Russia was more democratic than EU, as EU was ruled by people who were 'not elected by anybody'. EU was also accused of maintaining dialogue with Turkey and turning a blind eye on grave human rights violations there. In fact, EU uses 'human rights' to pursue political goals and this is detrimental to human rights. Moreover, EU resolutions were deemed irresponsible, while only fuelling conflict. Instead EU should engage with Russia to boost trade and fight terrorism together.

While many contesting arguments were common to the eurosceptic camp, some inter- and intra-group divergences (along political and national lines) reduced coherence of the eurosceptic discourse. After May 2014 elections EFDD became more anti-EU and more pro-Russian although important national divisions persisted, especially between British UKIP and

---

50 European Parliament, Russian pressure on Eastern Partnership countries and in particular destabilization of eastern Ukraine (debate), Wednesday 16 April 2014 - Strasbourg.
51 European Parliament, EU-Russia summit (debate), Wednesday 5 February 2014 - Strasbourg.
52 European Parliament, Situation in Ukraine (debate), Wednesday 5 February 2014 - Strasbourg.
53 European Parliament, Situation in Ukraine and state of play of EU-Russia relations (debate), Tuesday 16 September 2014 - Strasbourg; European Parliament, Situation in Ukraine (debate), Wednesday, 14 January 2015 - Strasbourg.
56 European Parliament, Murder of the Russian opposition leader Boris Nemtsov and the state of democracy in Russia (debate), Wednesday 11 March 2015 - Strasbourg.
representatives of CEE countries (also reflected in proportionally greatest numbers of rebel votes among groups). Whereas all the 3 groups negatively perceived the EP role, both in terms of fuelling and not solving Russian-Ukrainian conflict and exploiting the human rights agenda politically, ENF (NI) MEPs expressed most ardent criticism and EFDD was rather supportive of the line adopted by mainstream parties. Also, GUE-NGL was very critical towards post-Maidan Ukrainian government (disastrous socio-economic policies and radical right extremism), whereas EFDD focused more on rejecting EU policy of intervention. Finally, it is worth noting that after May 2014 elections eurosceptics became more numerous and more vocal during parliamentary debates as proportionally more time was dedicated to their interventions. Thus they had a greater chance of their arguments being well developed and heard.

5. Conclusion

The paper contributed to analyzing the rise of EU contestation in the European Parliament after 2014 elections and its impact on EP role in EU foreign policy making. Empirically, the paper looked at how EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia in the years 2014-2015 was contested inside the European Parliament and how this contestation has affected the coherence of EP position and consequently its role as an EU foreign policy actor. If EP position in the EU institutional game in the field of foreign policy is dependent on its normative activism and the ability to unite strong majorities behind values-oriented resolutions, then growing internal contestation may result in weaker influence on Commission and Council. The main question guiding this research was whether growing numbers of eurosceptics in the EP have translated into their growing influence on parliamentary positions in the realm of foreign policy. In order to answer this question 16 resolutions adopted during the 7th and 8th parliamentary term were examined by means of a comprehensive quantitative - qualitative analysis. The analysis focused on: 1) coalition and voting behaviour of political groups, as well as their relative quantitative impact on the content of resolutions; 2) core arguments of the eurosceptic contestation of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia, as well as its inter- and intra-group coherence.

Research showed that impact of eurosceptic groups on the content of resolutions is practically non-existent and this has not changed after May 2014 elections. What has changed was that becoming more numerous eurosceptics also became more vocal during parliamentary debates as proportionally more time was dedicated to their interventions. Thus they had a greater chance of their arguments being voiced and heard thus expanding the EP discursive field. Moreover, coalitions became somewhat smaller both in terms of number of groups signing joint motions (especially conflict motions with human rights motions still gathering bigger coalitions) and votes cast. However, the latter is not only the result of growing number of eurosceptic groups/ MEPs, but also evolving composition of the majority coalition, where second largest group (S&D) is increasingly marginalized. If this trend continues, contestation of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia could become more complex and pronounced, majorities - more difficult to gather and EP unity - compromised. While EP message to the Commission and Council based on EPP-ALDE-Greens-ECR majority is bound to be strong, coherent and principled, efficiency will be gained at the cost of representativeness. This might generate even stronger opposition within the EP and further compromise EP unity and consequently - impact.

While many contesting arguments were common to the eurosceptic camp, some inter- and intra-group divergences (along political and national lines) reduced coherence of the
eurosceptic discourse. Basic common themes were the following: 1) EU's pursuit of US instead of European interests; 2) EU applying double standards in foreign policy; 3) EU pursuing imperialist policies in the East, thus not being a qualitatively different actor than Russia; 4) lack of EU democratic legitimacy. Finally, contestation of EU policy towards Ukraine and Russia served a more encompassing purpose, namely to challenge basic foundations of EU foreign policy (such as promotion of European values), as well as to undermine legitimacy of the European integration project and EU governance system.