Framing the EU's policy towards the neighbourhood: The strategic approach of the 7th European Parliament (2009-2014)

Introduction

National parliaments traditionally have a marginal role in foreign policy. This is generally limited to holding executives accountable, or the ability to regulate the range of international agreements governments can sign. The European Parliament (EP) is no exception. However, the EP is a transnational parliament which is not circumscribed to a unified political system predicated on a political identity shared by citizens across the European Union (EU). At the same time, since its creation, the EP has had limited power to influence EU foreign policy or to exercise accountability over the Council, Commission or the member states. Only in recent years it managed to expand its competences in foreign policy and act strategically in pushing for its interests and goals to shape this policy area – making the EP an emerging strategic actor in EU foreign policy (Gfeller 2014; Van den Putte et al 2014; Wisniewski 2013; Raube 2012; Monar 2010). In this sense, Rittberger (2014) argues that the adoption of the Lisbon treaty is

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partly responsible for increase in the EP's powers. At the same time, Koops and Macaj (2014) claim that the Lisbon treaty made the EP more assertive in trying to gain a salient role in setting the agenda in EU foreign policy.

The article aims to analyse the strategies used by the EP in framing EU foreign policy in a bid to shape this policy area. The analysis focuses on a specific geographical region, namely the EU's neighbourhood[1]. While analysing other areas around the world might paint a more complete picture of the way the EP strategically frames EU foreign policy, the neighbourhood arguably represents the most salient issue area in the EU's international relations. There is an underlying assumption here that if the EU is not able to have a strong presence in its neighbourhood it is unlikely to exhibit one at the global level. The EU's most pressing security challenges have also in the last decade originated from the neighbourhood. Hence, the neighbourhood can be seen as a testing ground, a mirror or a measure of success and effectiveness in EU foreign policy. Moreover, the EU's neighbourhood has been a key area of interest in terms of foreign policy for the EP. In practice since the mid-90s the EP has used a series of tools in order to influence to contribute to the EU's approach towards the neighbourhood: e.g. the activity of EP delegations in neighbourhood states, official visits, sending messages through reports and resolutions, hosting delegations, organising informal or fact findings missions,

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[1] The neighbourhood is the broad region composed of the EU's southern and eastern neighbours included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia in the south and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine in the east.

establishing parliamentary cooperation with other legislative bodies or through the activity of EP party groups (Huber 2015; Redei 2015; Portela 2015; Pace and Vella 2015).

The analysis focuses on the last (7th) mandate of the EP (2009-2014)[2] as it was the first to benefit from the treaty changes introduced by the Lisbon treaty. The treaty has extended co-decision to various policy areas, including the former third pillar of Justice and Home Affairs. For example, Kaunert et al highlight that with the Lisbon treaty the EP has become an actor in its own right in counter-terrorism policy. The EP has become a co-legislator 'on various policy matters that are related to the fight against terrorism, such as law enforcement cooperation, judicial cooperation, criminal justice cooperation, and data protection' (Kaunert et al 2015, 358). The Lisbon treaty also formalised the current practice in international trade whereby the EP has a salient role in the third phase of the negotiation process. In particular, the negotiations of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement set a precedent for the EP's power in international trade, which was acknowledged by the Commission, the Council, the member states and external actors (Van den Putte et al 2015, 66). At the same time, the EP, after the Lisbon treaty, is in a better position to be more assertive and demand 'improvements to the

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[2] Analysing the activity of several mandates of the EP would, nevertheless, provide a more detailed picture. However, the 7th EP was the first to benefit from the changes introduced by the Lisbon treaty and one which experienced the emergence of various crises in the EU's neighbourhood. Moreover, the literature points to the fact that EP has been aiming for the past two decades to gain a more salient role in the EU's foreign policy, which makes the case of the 7th EP a good testing ground for this claim (Viola 2000; Elles 1990; Stavridis and Irrera 2015).

EU's external human rights policy and to press non-EU countries to improve their human rights record' (Feliu and Serra 2015, 26). Nevertheless, Delputte and Verschaeve argue that the Lisbon treaty has not substantially expanded the power of the EP in development policy, which still remains at the discretion of the Commission and the Council (Delputte and Verschaeve 2015, 48).

During the last mandate of the EP, the EU experienced the appearance and escalation of a series of key events, crises and conflicts which have shaped the politics and stability of the EU's neighbourhood: i.e. the Arab Spring, the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union or the Ukraine crisis. The article finds that in the context of the increasingly unstable neighbourhood the EP advocated a stronger role for the EU in the region. Moreover, the findings suggest that the EP aimed to carve for itself a clear role in setting the EU's foreign policy agenda towards the neighbourhood. Consequently, the article contributes to the expanding literature on the role of the EP in EU foreign policy, but also to the broader debate on the nature of the EU's foreign policy.

The articles analyses strategic policy frames in order to explore the way the EP envisaged the EU's foreign policy towards the neighbourhood. The focus on strategic framing is useful because policy frames express what is at stake in the way actors approach various issues, and how they seek to influence policymaking through their discourse (Daviter, 2011; Rasch, 2010). Hence, the analysis highlights the way in which

the EP perceived its role in EU foreign policy and the framing it used in order to push forward its interests and goals. The analysis of strategic framing also allows identifying the way the EP sought to position itself in relation to the other EU institutions, the member states or various other international actors. The article proceeds in the following way: the two next sections focus on the EP and EU foreign policy; section four outlines methods used to explores the EP's strategic framing efforts; the article then presents the empirical analysis and discusses the findings.

The EP and the EU's foreign policy towards its neighbours

The EP has traditionally shown a key interest in shaping the policy of the EU towards its neighbours, primarily supporting the EU's democratisation and normative agenda (Viola 2000; Viola 1998; Kostanyan and Vandecasteele 2015). The neighbourhood is a crucial geographical area for the EP, as this policy area has been perceived to be the most salient area of the EU's foreign policy. It can be argued that if the EU is not able to construct a successful and effective foreign policy towards its eastern and southern neighbours it is doubtful whether it could manage to have a strong global presence (Johansson-Nogués 2007). The neighbourhood is to that extent a measure for effectiveness and success in EU foreign policy. The EU's engagement with its neighbours has its roots in 1970s but started to be more developed during the end of the

1990s and was informed by its ambitions to have a more enhanced presence in the region at its borders – and globally (Whitman and Wolff 2010). This, in turn, was seen to have a positive effect on the EU's interests in various policy areas (such as trade or migration), and facilitate stronger ties between Union's neighbours and its member states.

The EU's approach towards the region was formalised though the ENP in 2004 which sought to construct privileged bilateral relationships with the countries in the neighbourhood that build 'upon a mutual commitment to common values (democracy and human rights, rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development' (European External Action Service 2015). In practice the EU endeavoured to condition the implementation of democratic reforms by linking them to various incentives of more or less financial nature (Langbein and Börzel 2013). It should be noted, that even though the Union offers enhanced and tailor-made partnerships to its neighbours, it has put off the table the prospect of membership. During the mandate of the 7th EP the ENP was revised (between 2010 and 2011). The 'new' ENP heralded a different approach bent on promoting in a more substantial manner democratic processes and the development of economic inclusiveness in the neighbourhood countries. In practice, through the new 'more for more' approach the EU sought to reward those countries that showed willingness and progressed well in

cooperating with the Union (Melo 2014). This new approach was supported by the member states and the EU's institutions (including the EP).

In institutional terms, the Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) are responsible for implementing and keeping surveillance on the ENP or negotiating with neighbours of the EU. The EP has had traditionally a more symbolic power in ratifying agreements with these countries. However, the adoption of the Lisbon treaty gave the EP the power to co-legislate alongside the Commission and the Council in policy areas contained by the former second pillar. In relation to the neighbourhood these new powers cover: energy, trade, border checks, human trafficking and immigration, common visa policy, deciding on the EU's agreements with the neighbours, or various aspects of cross border crime.

The EP adopts annually a series of resolutions on the way the ENP has been implemented and its future prospects, together with a series of resolutions which target the EU's bilateral relations with the countries in the region. Resolutions highlight the overall discourse of the EP and the messages it seeks to send to other EU institutions, the member states or public opinion, civil society or non-EU actors. They also highlight the main topics that MEPs consider in relation to the neighbourhood, together with the claims they make regarding the way the EU should act in the region or the role of the EP. Media frequently cite EP resolutions and present them as part of the EU's official discourse. While analysing resolutions can't tell us anything significant about the

impact of the EP on the EU's approach towards its neighbours, it highlights the way in which MEPs seek to strategically shape the Union's foreign policy agenda. Looking in more detail at the parliamentary debates that precede resolutions would provide an in depth image of the range of positions that MEPs hold, but would not really add too much in terms of the position that the EP is aiming to portray as a unitary actor. As with any other resolutions on foreign policy those concerning the neighbourhood are initially discussed in the Committee on Foreign Affairs[3]. A rapporteur is appointed to draft the resolution on the basis of the discussions in the committee. Amendments are added by other MEPs and then debated and voted in the plenary who decides on the final version of the resolution. To that extent resolutions highlight the message of the EP as a unitary actor and the way it strategically frames EU foreign policy.

EU foreign policy: two continuums

Empirically the analysis explores the way the EP strategically framed its policy discourse in relation to two broad continuums present in the literature on the EU's foreign policy: value/interest based and transnational/intergovernmental – detailed in

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[3] The Committee on Foreign Affairs plays a crucial role if not the most salient in shaping the EP's approach in foreign policy. Members are usually chosen according to their expertise and experience of working with EU partner countries. The committee usually contracts academics to draft assessments on the situation in various places around the world (including the neighbourhood) usually focusing for example on democracy promotion, the state of human rights, migration or terrorism.

table 1. While this approach might seem too simplistic, it does not overlook the complexity or the multilevel decision-making which characterises EU foreign policy. Hence, policies, issue areas or themes in EU foreign policy can be placed across these two continuums – and not only rigidly at their two ends.

-- *Insert table 1 here* ---

The first continuum focuses on the nature and scope of the EU's foreign policy by distinguishing between interests and values. The expanding literature on the EP's role in international relations has highlighted that MEPs promote in foreign policy approaches which emphasise both values (Gfeller 2014; Feliu and Serra 2015) and interests (Portela 2015; Van den Putte et al 2014). On the one hand, during the last decade the idea that the EU pursues a value based agenda in its foreign policy has flourished in the literature. Stemming from the Normative Power Europe debate, the value based perspective implies that the EU has at its core a series of universal values and norms which it diligently and altruistically promotes through its foreign policy (Birchfield 2013; Manners 2015; Larsen 2014). The main values that the EU promotes in foreign policy include democracy, human rights or rule of law, all of which are thought to contribute to the universal well-being of peoples around the world. The promotion of values also presupposes that rather than acting unilaterally or through the means of

negotiations between high level officials, the EU emphasises multilateralism executed by technocrats. Moreover, values are pursued through the proxy of technocratic and low level agreement with other states (Scheipers and Sicurelli 2007).

At the other end of the continuum the EU is considered by some scholars to behave similarly to a nation state, where the promotion of interests is the main rationale behind foreign policy. This means that rather than emphasising the promotion of values or norms, the EU focuses on its interests in the areas of security, economy or energy, both regionally and globally (Smith 2011; Howorth 2010; Hyde-Price 2008). The EU is not an altruistic actor, but acts self-interested and is conscious of the geopolitical structure of international relations. Interest based foreign policy implies that values are mentioned only in order to disguise the EU's real interests. At the same time, interest based foreign policy is executed through the avenue of high level diplomacy and involves areas of high politics rather than low level technocratic cooperation (Edwards 2013). Political leaders and not technocrats are crucial for advancing the EU's interests.

The second continuum focuses on the nature of decision-making in EU foreign policy. This debate was at the forefront of the literature in the 1990s when scholars enquired into the 'nature of the beast' (Risse-Kappen 1996). However, with the advance of constructivist approaches in international relations theory the discussion lost ground starting with the 2000s to the debate around the nature and scope of the EU's foreign

policy. At one end of the continuum the EU's foreign policy is seen as transnational[4], where the EU's institutions such as the Commission and the EP are the locus of decision-making. EU institutions strive and are successful in various degrees in coagulating a common approach among the member states. At the other end of the continuum the EU's foreign policy is viewed as essentially intergovernmental, where the member states or the Council are the main decisions-makers. From the intergovernmental perspective leaders in national capitals are more salient that the leaders of the EU's institutions. Moreover, the member states prefer dealing bilaterally in international relations rather than establishing or supporting common EU frameworks.

The EP has often joined hands with the Commission in trying to keep various policy areas from becoming too intergovernmental. Moreover, the EP has sought to forge alliances with the Commission in order to counterbalance the power of the member states and the Council. This has been evident in the area of financial governance where the EP and Commission worked together in the adoption of the six pack and the European Semester (Manoli and Maris 2015; O'Keeffe et al 2015; Fasone 2014). This level of cooperation also occurred in the area of climate change where the EP and Commission have put joint pressure on the member states who were unwilling

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[4] In the literature there is a tendency for views that underline the transnational nature of decision-making in EU foreign policy to be linked with value based perspectives (Sjursen 2011). The argument holds that the EU is a *sui generis* international actor which not only pursues values in its foreign policy, but also does this in a novel way through its transnational institutions (Wunderlich 2012).

to support the EU's ambitions position and emissions reduction targets (Biedenkopf 2015). The EP's interactions with the Council and the member states have been rockier. However, at times the EP has managed to mediate between the interests of the Commission and those of the member states. Gradually the EP has become to be seen by the Commission and the Council as a useful mediator that could help alleviate conflicts that arise between them (Servent 2015). In this context, by focusing on the two continuums the article highlights the strategies used by the EP to frame the nature of the EU's foreign policy foreign policy in the neighbourhood, but also the claims made by MEPs regarding the EP's role in influencing the EU's policy in the region.

Strategic framing

Strategic framing allows political actors to articulate their discourse or policies, getting them across to various actors (Rhinard 2010; Hänggli and Kriesi 2012; Schultz et al. 2012; Haenggli and Kriesi 2012). In turn, the method of frame analysis helps to identify the way in which the discourse of political actors is categorised around a series of central opinions and ideas. Hence, analysing frames allows understanding the strategies used by the EP to define its role in shaping the EU's foreign policy, and its relations

with the member states, other EU institutions or non-EU actors[5]. More generally, frame analysis underscores the connections made between different events, policies or phenomena in constructing and politicising discourse or policies (Entman 1993; Carvalho and Burgess 2005). In this sense, Eising and his colleagues (2015) find that increases in frames regarding policy debates are not a result of the desire of the EU's institutions to engage the general public in policy debates, but they are rather strategically aimed at shifting these debates and influencing policymaking. They contend that the EP must consider framing strategies that work towards building consensus with other EU institutions in order to have a chance to change the prevailing *status quo*. Rasch argues that most studies point to the fact that the strategic framing activities of EU institutions have a significant effects on policy outcomes. He also finds that a clear causal relationship between framing and policy processes is most times difficult to establish (Rasch 2010, 12). Consequently, the article does to highlight clear causal relationships between the EP's strategic frames and various outcomes in EU foreign policy. Moreover, the resolutions produced by the EP tend to be the result of a long policy process and thus can more shed light on the EP's strategic framing than looking at other official documents such as debates or plenary meetings.

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[5] While the focus on strategic framing can paint a clear picture of the way political actors seek to shape various policies, it can't provide valid insight about the way they affect policy outcomes.

In the analysis were included 165 resolutions which contain references to the ENP, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) or the Union for the Mediterranean[6] (UfM), the EU's individual neighbours, or the southern and eastern neighbourhoods. The frame analysis focused on a series of key issues areas in the EU's approach towards the neighbourhood which were selected according to their high rate of occurrence in the resolutions. The coding was conducted on the basis of a codebook composed of four questions which probed into the most frequent issue areas covered by the EU's approach towards the neighbourhood[7]: democracy promotion, human rights, rule of law, economic cooperation, conflicts in the neighbourhood, stability, the need to review the ENP, interacting with Russia in the neighbourhood, energy security and migration.

- How did the EP portray the issue area (i.e. what policy problems and solutions did it identify)?

- What was the nature of foreign policy identified by the EP (the first continuum values/interests)

- What was the nature of decision-making identified by the EP? Which actors did it address? (the second continuum transnational/intergovernmental)

- What were the claims made the EP regarding its own role?

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[6] The EaP is an initiative set up by the EU and the eastern ENP countries which seeks to foster further enhanced cooperation. It was set up in 2009 in the wake of the Russian-Georgian war following a joint Polish-Swedish proposal and seeks to advance the mutual values and interests of the EU and the eastern neighbours. The UfM is an intergovernmental organisation composed of the EU and the southern ENP states. Set up in 2008, it aims to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation in the region.

[7] The analysis focuses on key issue areas rather than broad events such as the Arab Spring or the Ukraine crisis.

The article proceeds to present the empirical analysis centred on the key issues areas in the EU's approach towards the neighbourhood. In each case, the analysis will first briefly survey the EP's formal competences and its track record, followed by the frame analysis based on the codebook described above.

The EP's strategic framing

Democracy Promotion, Rule of law and Human rights

These issue areas were usually present together in the EP's discourse and had the highest rates of occurrence. The formal powers of the EP in this case are limited, only its ability to co-legislate in relations to human trafficking standing out particularly. Informally, the EP has traditionally focussed on the promotion of democracy, human rights and rule of law in the neighbourhood. It achieved this through developing a distinct type of parliamentary democracy based on for example: electoral monitoring missions, financial support for civil society, hosting delegations from the neighbourhood countries, establishing cooperation between EP parliamentary groups and parties in the neighbourhood countries or awarding the annual Saharov prize to human rights activists from the region.

Democracy, rule of law and human rights were framed as value based areas of EU foreign policy. MEPs stressed that the EU had an inherent duty to promote these values in the neighbourhood. They argued that democracy involves the development of reformed institutions which can guarantee independent justice systems or independent media. The development of strong civil society was also often linked to democracy building, as it can have a major 'contribution to processes of governance and societal transformation' (European Parliament 2012a). Moreover, the EP supported the EU's 'more for more' approach in the ENP, arguing that the Union should reduce its support for countries in the neighbourhood whose rule of law standards were constantly decreasing. Nonetheless, the EP on multiple occasions pledged to support the neighbourhood in their efforts to foster rule of law through the creation of viable justice systems. Among them Moldova and Tunisia received constant praise for their efforts to consolidate its democratic institutions and justice system. In terms of human rights, the EP welcomed the Commission's initiative to infuse the EU's development policy with a human rights based approach, which in practice meant that 'human beings and their welfare, rather than governments, should be at the heart of cooperation objectives' (European Parliament 2012c). In this sense, MEPs claimed that the EU should try to prioritise the promotion of human rights rather than economic policies in its approach towards the neighbourhood.

In these three issues areas the EP understood decision-making to be characterised by transnationalism. The EP viewed the Commission to be the most important EU actor in terms of designing and implementing the EU's policy towards the neighbourhood – and promoting democracy, rule of law and human rights. Most claims made by MEPs were addressed to the Commission and sought to convince it to devote a more salient role to the EP in the promotion of these three value based issue areas. The EEAS was presented as an avenue for weakening intergovernmental control over the ENP. Hence, the EEAS was framed by the EP as an arm of the EU meant to implement the ENP and promote the EU's image in the neighbourhood. Especially in relation to civil society organisations, the EP addressed the EEAS claiming that the EU should strengthen the role of civil society in the ENP countries. The EP envisaged a clear and salient role for the High Representative in monitoring democratic processes (such as elections) and making them transparent to the EP; it also asked the EEAS to provide support on the ground for election monitoring missions organised by the EP. Nevertheless, the EP aimed to have a more autonomous role in promoting democracy, human rights, or rule of law in the neighbourhood. This is evidenced by the fact that EP frequently addressed in its resolutions the states in the region and the Council of Europe (CoE) or the Organization Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). These efforts mainly

focused on strengthening in the EP's presence in the region in the region through electoral monitoring missions or to signal breaches to democracy and human rights.

Economic cooperation

In the area of economic cooperation the Lisbon treaty granted the EP the power to co-legislate on trade issues and a more salient role in ratifying trade agreements with other third parties – i.e. the Agreements (AA)[8] and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA)[9] which were under negotiation with some the eastern neighbours during the tenure of the 7th EP. The EP viewed economic cooperation with the neighbours as an area where both the values and interests of the EU should be promoted. In this sense, MEPs highlighted the need for the EU to maintain or even increase its financial assistance towards the ENP countries, as the Union has a direct interest in providing financial support to the countries in the neighbourhood. This would decrease illegal migration to the EU through supporting the economies of the neighbourhood countries and bringing down unemployment rates (European Parliament 2009). The EP also sought to reinforce the approach of the Commission by highlighting

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[8] The EU signs with its partners AAs which set up a broader framework of cooperation in areas such as: trade, politics, culture, education, transport, energy or society.
[9] The EU establishes free trade areas with partners around the world, however, in the case of three eastern neighbours (Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine) the AA included a DCFTA. This is an enhanced free trade area which establishes preferential trade relations and gives access to their own markets better than those offered to other partners. DCFTAs also include the removal of import duties for various products.

the value of the AAs and DCFTAs as a basis for 'boosting the competitiveness, economic output and performance' of the region, whilst also having a positive impact on the overall business climate (European Parliament, 2013b). More generally, the EU's economic policies and instruments towards the region were seen to be crucial for establishing long-term trade relationships with the countries in the neighbourhood and promoting democracy or human rights in the region. In this regard, the EP also argued that the EU's trade strategy in the neighbourhood had to be effectively coordinated with various actors in the countries in the neighbourhood. One way in which the EP envisaged that coordination could be strengthened involved creating a stronger presence of EU trade officials in the delegations in the neighbourhood countries.

The EP frequently argued that the Council should work with the Commission in order to foster effective economic cooperation with the neighbourhood countries. Decision-making was thus viewed to be characterised by a mix of intergovernmentalism and transnationalism, where economic interests of the members and the broader overall normative agenda of the EU played an equal role. The EP's strategy here was twofold. One the one hand, it demanded that the Commission was fully transparent and open, communicating to MEPs on a routine basis progress made in signing the AAs with the ENP countries. On the other hand, in situations where the Council was not acting decisively the EP pushed for more concrete actions to be taken. In this sense, in their

five year mandate MEPs regularly made a case for the Council to sign the EU's part of the AAs with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia states as soon as possible.

Security in the neighbourhood: regional stability and conflicts

In the areas of security, conflict resolution and more broadly stability in the neighbourhood the EP has the smallest degree of formal influence. Here the 7th EP sought to strategically position itself as a strong advocate of an enhanced engagement of the EU in the security of the neighbourhood. This can be seen as a clear articulation of its aims to play a more salient in the EU foreign policy (Stavridis 2015). The EP made the case for an enhanced role for the EU in dealing with conflicts in the neighbourhood. This is substantiated in the resolutions by the fact that the development and wellbeing of peoples in the region was intrinsically linked to assuring peace and stability. An enhanced role for the EU was thus justified both on the basis of advancing the Union's values and its interests. The EP was also keen to show its support for the further development of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions in the neighbourhood, as they could have a positive effect on fostering the rule of law in the countries in the region, whilst also 'helping to prevent state failure and eliminate safe havens for transnational criminal and terrorist activity' (European Parliament 2012c).

Moreover, MEPs claimed that the Union should be both effective and efficient in engaging with conflict situations in order to have a real impact on the ground.

The solutions (although sometimes very abstract in content) proposed by the EP for creating more stability in the region involved enhancing the EU's regional strategic dialog with a whole range of local and regional actors. The EP also frequently highlighted the EU's lack of decisiveness in engaging with frozen conflicts in the eastern neighbourhood. According to the EP, the EU had to engage in a coherent manner with the frozen conflicts in the Caucasus by 'developing a strategy that would combine its soft power with a firm approach, in agreement with the countries of the region and complemented by bilateral policies' (European Parliament 2010).

In terms of conflicts and regional stability the EP perceived both the Commission and the member states to be responsible for constructing a stronger EU presence – hence viewing these issues as a mix of intergovernmentalism and transnationalism. The EP was very critical of the member states and the Commission for their lack of willingness to make coherent progress in engaging the EU in security issues in the neighbourhood. In its bid to attain an increased role in shaping the agenda of the EU's conflict resolution efforts, the EP asked on repeated occasions that the Commission would keep it fully informed and consult it regarding all developments in conflict areas in the neighbourhood. The EP also expected the EEAS to attain a greater role in working

towards a diplomatic solution for the ongoing conflicts in the neighbourhood, and the MEPs would be welcomed as part of the process.

Review of the ENP

The EU has revised its formal policy towards the neighbours (the ENP) a series of times in the past. However, the EP had only a marginal role both in the consultations process, but also in the way the policy was implemented and monitored[10]. In this sense, the EP claimed that it should be given increased decision-making power in revising the ENP. It argued that the revised ENP should reflect the values and norms that are the base of the EU. MEPs emphasised that the EU's current approach towards its neighbourhoods was not effective. This happened because ENP initiatives were very abstract or the member states were not willing to make clear long term commitments towards the neighbourhood countries. As a solution, the EP claimed that the ENP should be developed along the lines of strategic thinking in promoting effective multilateralism in the neighbourhood, with the Commission and the EEAS playing a crucial role in this process. Moreover, the EP stressed that the success of the ENP and the promotion of EU values is dependent on boosting popular support in the ENP countries. The ENP was seen an issue area where policymaking should be dominated by transnationalism.

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[10] To a certain extent the EP's strategy was successful as the EEAS and the Commission broadened the consultations for the 2015 revision of the ENP.

Hence, the EP claimed that it should have an increased role in setting the agenda of the ENP, and that this policy should not run the risk of becoming an intergovernmental one. It argued, for example, that the Commission should strive to ensure that

> the "community" character of the neighbourhood policy, bearing in mind that Parliament rejects any intergovernmentalisation of Union policies, and that the Treaty bestows upon the Commission the main responsibility for negotiating international agreements for and on behalf of the Union (European Parliament 2013a).

Interacting with Russia in the neighbourhood

The EP viewed interacting with Russia in the neighbourhood as an issue area where the promotion of interests was the main driver. While the EP can shape through its formal competences the broader relationship with Russia (e.g. trade, border checks or visa policy), Moscow's policies in the post-Soviet space were primarily framed by MEPs as a security issue. Moreover, tackling Russia's actions in the eastern neighbourhood was seen by the EP to be mandatory for promoting the EU's interests in the region. The EP was harsh in emphasising the negative effects that Russia had on the economic development of countries such as Ukraine or Moldova through the use of trade and energy relations as a political tool. Nevertheless, the EP sought to maintain a balanced

attitude and keep the door open for open for cooperation with Russia. The EP underlined Russia's role in assuring peace and stability in the neighbourhood, while also noting that the development of a sustainable strategic partnership with Moscow was of utmost importance for the EU. Maintaining functioning relations with Russia was framed to be key to the effective promotion of the EU's interests in the neighbourhood, and also globally. The EP also stressed that the EU and Russia had to work more closely in multilateral settings in order to understand each other better with a 'view to improving global governance and addressing common challenges' (European Parliament 2014). MEPs perceived the member states and the Council to be the central decision-makers in relation to engaging with Russia in the neighbourhood – placing the issue area on the intergovernmental end of the continuum. The EP followed the overall discourse of the member states towards Russia, on the one hand highlighting the need to forge a strategic partnership with it, while on the other underscoring the negative influence that Russia was having on the countries in the eastern neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the EP sought to act as a somewhat autonomous actor, as it addressed Russia directly during the Ukraine, conveying a deeply critical stance towards Moscow actions.

Energy security

The Lisbon treaty granted the EP the power to ratify energy treaties and co-legislate on cooperation in the field of energy. In relation to the neighbourhood, the 7th EP argued

that energy is an instrument that should enhance regional security and stability, rather than to threaten it. Even though it was only a marginal topic, assuring and increasing the energy security of the states in the neighbourhood was linked to safeguarding the EU's own energy security. This made energy security a policy priority in the ENP, as the member states and the EU's neighbours share 'political challenges with regard to ensuring the reliable and safe supply of energy' (European Parliament 2013c). In turn, Russia's use of energy as a political tool was seen to endanger solidarity and cooperation in the field of energy between the member states and the countries in the EU's neighbourhood. Cooperation here was crucial for promoting the stability of the neighbourhood and the economic development of the countries in the region through assistance in the area of energy infrastructure. However, the EP also stressed that the EU should primarily focus on assuring its own energy interests. The EU was urged to fully consider the current geopolitical context and devise a strategy that would counter Russia's actions meant to create divisions among the member states. Nevertheless, MEPs stressed on several occasions that energy deals with Russia or the neighbourhood countries should not be made behind closed doors by the Commission or bilaterally by the member states. The EP strategically sought to emphasise that energy security in the neighbourhood should be an area where both the individual interests of the member states and those shared at the EU level have equal weight. This was a clear message to the member states that they should not try to sidestep the EP's prerogative and make

bilateral energy deals. Hence, decision-making in this issue area was seen to be characterised by both intergovernmentalism and transnationalism.

Migration

In terms of migration, the Lisbon treaty granted enhanced formal powers to the EP in terms of border checks, human trafficking, illegal migration or cross border crime. The EP argued on a limited number of occasions that the EU should better manage migratory flows and enhance its cooperation with origin and transit countries from the neighbourhood. This was seen to advance the EU's values, but also safeguard the EU's interests and contributing to regional stability. As a policy solution, the Commission was urged to create a better communication strategy for making more clear and appealing free travel to the EU in the context of the countries in the neighbourhood. In terms of the EU's migration policy the EP's discourse and position was abstract, calling for the Commission and the Council on most occasions to 'take appropriate, responsible measures regarding the possible influx of refugees into its Member States' (European Parliament 2013a). At the same time, mobility partnerships and student exchanges were framed to be crucial for achieving a secure and sustainable EU migration policy. The EP linked migration from the neighbourhood to security and stability in the region, and urged the member states to agree on a common policy towards migrants and refugees originating from or transiting neighbourhood countries. Nevertheless, the EP

strategically addressed other international organisations[11] and the neighbourhood states in a bid to enhance its own presence in international relations. In most cases, the EP highlighted that the EU should work with other international organisations – such as the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the CoE or the OSCE – in order to solve or manage various timely issues in its neighbourhood. For example, the UN was addressed in relation to humanitarian issues in the case of the conflicts in the neighbourhood. In terms of third countries, the EP addressed very often the countries in its neighbourhood, trying to put pressure on their respective governments to adopt reforms by assessing through praise or criticism progress (or lack of) in terms of dealing with illegal migration.

Discussion and Conclusions

While in the early 2000s the neighbourhood was seen by the EU as a 'ring of friends' throughout the mandate of the 7th EP this region transformed into a 'ring of fire' due to the multiple crises that erupted simultaneously. The EP traditionally viewed the neighbourhood as the most salient area of EU foreign policy. This makes the activity of the last mandate (2009-2014) of the EP a good testing ground for the way MEPs approach the neighbourhood. The article focused on the way the EP strategically framed

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[11] This can be seen as an active effort of the part of the EP to interact directly with other international actors. The extent to which these efforts were successful is questionable and requires further research.

the policy towards the neighbourhood on the two continuums[12], highlighting two key points. Firstly, in terms of nature of EU engagement in the neighbourhood (the ideas/interests continuum) the article finds that a stronger EU involvement in the region was advocated by MEPs regardless of whether they framed the EU's policy towards the neighbourhood in a value based or interest manner. To that extent, the article shows that the EP during the last mandate strategically supported the idea that the EU should play an enhanced role in world politics and that the ENP should undergo a major overhaul. Even though it is difficult to attribute the 2015 revision of the ENP to its strategic framing, it is clear that the EP contributed to highlighting the shortcomings of the policy and the need to have a more inclusive approach or focus on creating ownership among the countries in the neighbourhood. Secondly, in relation to decision-making in EU foreign policy (the transnational/intergovernmental continuum), the analysis highlights that the EP strategy was to argue that it should have a more central role in shaping the EU's approach towards the southern and eastern neighbours. This was more evident in relation to issue areas where the Lisbon treaty did not expand the formal powers (as co-legislator of the EP) such as: democracy promotion, rule of law, human rights, the EU's involvement in the security of the neighbourhood and the revision of the ENP.

The findings of the article have a series of broader implications for the conduct of EU foreign policy by opening up then black box of how EU actors employ strategic

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[12] The two continuums can be employed in the case of other EU institutions in order to study the way they strategically frame foreign policy.

framing in this policy area. Moreover, the EP's aspiration to act autonomously in relation to some issue areas like migration, democracy promotion or human rights reinforces the idea that EU foreign policy is generally characterised by a series of views and actions which sometimes run in parallel (Smith 2004; Tonra 2011). At the same time, the EP's willingness to play a more salient might provide the EU additional foreign policy tools. For example, the Cox-Kwasniewski mission was sent by the 7th EP to Ukraine in order to mediate the release of former Prime Minister Timoshenko and provide new momentum to the negotiations for the AA which were at the time blocked. The mission extended its initial mandate and was recognised by the Council as a key tool of EU foreign policy in Ukraine. Finally, the EP's claim that the EU should have a stronger engagement is in itself a continuous sources of popular legitimacy for the Union's ambitions and policies in the region.

While the article highlights the framing strategies used by the EP in order to gain a better position to set the agenda, it uncovers only one piece of the puzzle regarding the role of the EP in the EU's approach towards its neighbourhood. Future research could draw on the findings of the article in a series of ways. Firstly, extending the period of analysis to other mandates would provide better insights into how the EP historically developed its approach towards the EU's neighbours. Secondly, our understanding of the EP's role could be enhanced through process tracing and institutional analysis. This would emphasise the way in which the EP has made use of its new competences (gained

under the Lisbon treaty) in order to negotiate its role in the 2015 ENP review or the 2016 Global Security Strategy with the Commission, the EEAS and the Council – both formally and informally. Another piece of the puzzle would imply exploring the practical outcomes of the EP's approach and its influence on the ground, i.e. in the neighbourhood countries. One way this could be achieved is through exploring the assumption that the EP has developed an original type of parliamentary diplomacy based on the powers and international reputation of influential parliamentary delegations and MEPs. Moreover, the findings of the article could serve as a base for uncovering the way in which the EP sought to develop its parliamentary diplomacy drawing on its strategic framing, including, for example, a focus on some of the interparliamentary forums it set up with the neighbourhood countries – e.g. Euronest or parliamentary assembly of the UfM. Finally, the article could serve as a model for analysing the strategic framing activities in foreign policy of both national and transnational parliaments.

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