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Radical right-wing Eurosceptics as public orators in the European Parliament: the logic of persuasion as an instrument to break consensus

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine how members of the political group *Identity and Democracy* (I&D) attempt to break the existing pro-Ukrainian consensus in the European Parliament (EP). The adopted hypothesis is that I&D MEPs do that through the mechanism of the logic of persuasion. It was verified by analysing speeches during EP plenary debates on the situation in Ukraine and looking for evidence of this mechanism within them. The analysis demonstrated that almost 1/4 of the I&D political group uses the logic of persuasion in all their speeches to break the pro-Ukrainian consensus in the EP, but only six MEPs are likely to do that intentionally. However, some of the analysed MEPs use this mechanism in their speeches to undermine the consensus on migration and asylum policy.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, European Parliament, logic of persuasion, public orators

Radykalnie prawicowi eurosceptycy jako publiczni oratorzy w Parlamencie Europejskim: logika perswazji jako instrument przełamania konsensusu

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest zbadanie, w jaki sposób członkowie grupy politycznej *Tożsamość i Demokracja* (ang. *Identity and Democracy*, I&D) próbują przełamać istniejący w Parlamencie Europejskim (PE) proukraiński konsensus. Przyjęto hipotezę, że europosłowie I&D robią to za pomocą mechanizmu logiki perswazji. Hipoteza ta została zweryfikowana poprzez analizę wystąpień podczas debat w PE na temat sytuacji w Ukrainie i poszukiwanie w nich dowodów na istnienie tego mechanizmu. Analiza wykazała, że prawie 1/4 grupy politycznej I&D wykorzystuje logikę perswazji we wszystkich swoich wystąpieniach w celu przełamania proukraińskiego konsensusu w PE, ale tylko sześciu eurodepu-

towanych prawdopodobnie robi to celowo. Jednak niektórzy z analizowanych eurodeputowanych wykorzystują ten mechanizm w swoich wystąpieniach, aby podważyć konsensus w sprawie polityki migracyjnej i azyłowej.

Słowa kluczowe: Eurosceptycyzm, Parlament Europejski, logika perswazji, publiczni oratorzy

Although the concept of Euroscepticism was firstly proposed in 1998 by Taggart, it is still difficult to claim that it exists as a concrete idea. Studies that attempt to operationalise Euroscepticism tend to lead to vague categories (Szczerbiak, Taggart 2018). This vagueness also applies to far-right Eurosceptics, who are in the focus of this article. Minkenberg and Perrineau have attempted to operationalise this category. According to them, it encompasses "a collection of nationalist, authoritarian, xenophobic and extremist parties that are defined by the common characteristic of populist ultranationalism" (Minkenberg, Perrineau 2007: p. 30). Nevertheless, the scope of this definition remains somewhat unclear. It seems certain, however, that far-right Eurosceptics oppose the EU on both strategic and ideological grounds. Strategic grounds mean that they are a party driven by a protest strategy and motivated to oppose the EU in order to differentiate themselves from their mainstream rivals, while ideological grounds are that the EU project is in opposition to the core values of the far right. Hainsworth (2008: p. 82) states that "European integration serves to undermine constructs and values, such as the nation state, national identity, state sovereignty [...] and national belonging". Therefore, such politicians fear that European integration will have detrimental consequences for national interests, traditions and identity. For this reason, they largely focus their criticism on undermining EU migration and asylum policy as one that directly strikes at the nation-state and the national identity of the Member States' societies (Stockemer et al. 2018). Politicians representing such views in the European Parliament (EP) of the ninth legislature sit in the political group *Identity and Democracy* (I&D)¹, and the speeches of its representatives will be analysed in this article.

The behaviour of this group of Eurosceptics in the context of the situation in Ukraine is worth investigating, above all because their political and financial ties to the Kremlin are quite widespread and well documented. For several years, the Russian government, based on politicians from parties such as the *National Rally*, the *League or Alternative for Germany*, has been trying to create a so-called conservative movement as an alternative to the traditional right-wing parties (Futák-Campbell 2020; Polyakova 2014). Behind this plan, money has been flowing to the parties forming this political group in the EP over the past years, whether in the form of loans or camouflaged, indirect support (Dalton

¹ *Identity and Democracy* is the sixth largest political group in the European Parliament in its ninth term. It comprises MEPs from eight countries: Italy (Lega); France (Rassemblement National); Germany (Alternative für Deutschland); Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs); Flanders (Vlaams Belang); Estonia (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond); Denmark (Dansk Folkeparti); Czech Republic (Svoboda a Prima Demokracie). The group is chaired by Marco Zanni (Italy), with Jordan Bardella (France) and Gunnar Beck (Germany) as vice-chairs.

2022; Datta 2022).² The events that took place in Ukraine 24 February 2022 was a shock for them, as it made fundraising more difficult, but also made the entire political project less credible. In addition, a pro-Ukrainian consensus clearly emerged within the EU, resulting on the one hand in high public sympathy for the attacked state, and on the other hand – in unprecedented EU activity in the area of foreign and security policy (Steiner et al. 2023). The consequence of the latter was the adoption of successive sanctions packages hitting Russia and its elites, the creation of the framework, within which arms purchases for Ukraine could be coordinated and financed. This, in turn, not only struck at the interests of their foreign 'sponsor', but also resulted in a deepening of cooperation between EU Member States in the area of external action and security policy on an unprecedented scale. The latter, in turn, contradicted the Eurosceptic identity of I&D members. Therefore, this topic is important for far-right Eurosceptics both strategically (it allows them to distinguish themselves from the mainstream parties) as well as ideologically (it gives them the opportunity to express their opposition to deepening cooperation within the EU).

The second reason why exploring this topic is important, is because Eurosceptic MEPs can put pressure on other parties to change their political positions (Meijers 2017). As Winzen (2020: p. 4) rightly points out, MEPs use parliamentary means to change European policy. Therefore, it is worth investigating the position of I&D members in relation to the situation in Ukraine. Indeed, it may be that their position will translate into the views of other MEPs and indirectly into the policies of national governments. Thus, in the future, they may lead to a modification of policy towards the situation in Ukraine and the financial and military aid provided to Ukraine by the EU and its Member States.

In this study, I borrowed the concept of the 'public orator' from Nathalie Brack (2015: p. 339). According to her, orators concentrate on two aspects of their actions: public speaking and spreading negative information about European integration. This leads them, according to Brack, to be characterised by a preference for anti-conformism and an attitude of frontal opposition to the EU. This is important because the subject of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, due to the existing consensus within the EU institutions, allows them to present both attitudes, demonstrate their anti-conformism and criticise the EU's actions. Thus, they can play the role of advocates for citizens, who do not share the pro-Ukrainian and anti-Russian narrative dominant in politics and the media. Most importantly, however, their speeches, according to Brack, are primarily aimed at shattering the so-called consensus in the EP (Brack 2015: p. 341). For the purposes of this article, therefore, the research assumption has been made that a similar phenomenon also exists in the case of the situation that occurred in Ukraine after 24 February 2022.

² For example: Marine Le Pen, former leader of the *National Rally* party, took out a loan from First Czech Russian Bank in 2014. The bank has since gone bankrupt, transferring the loan to the Russian company *Aviazapchast*. Italian party *Lega* struck an oil deal with Russia, the profits of which were to be donated to the *Lega* to fund the 2019 European Parliament election campaign. The case is being investigated by the Milan prosecutor's office. In 2019, Heinz-Christian Strache, then Austrian vice-chancellor and leader of the far-right *Freedom Party*, was filmed trying to accept a bribe from a fake Russian oligarch while on holiday in Ibiza.

Therefore, the following two **research questions** are posed:

(Q1) to what extent do public orators belonging to the I&D political group attempt to shatter the existing pro-Ukrainian consensus in the EP?

(Q2) by what mechanism do they attempt to do so?

For the purposes of this study, the **working hypothesis** is that the analysed MEPs mostly try to shatter the existing pro-Ukrainian consensus in the EP and do so using the mechanism of the so-called logic of persuasion. This hypothesis will be verified by analysing I&D members' speeches during the EP plenary debates on the situation in Ukraine (March 2022 – February 2023) and looking for evidence in them that the aforementioned mechanism was used to break the pro-Ukrainian consensus in this EU institution.

This article is innovative in three areas. Firstly, there are few studies that analyse the impact of Eurosceptic parties on the EU's external action and security policy in the broadest sense (Keith 2017; Müller et al. 2021; Pardo, Gordon 2018; Tereszkievicz 2016). Secondly, the approach of Eurosceptic parties to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has been little studied (Ivaldi, Zankina 2023; Tereszkievicz 2015). The third innovation stems from the application of the mechanism of the logic of persuasion to explore the potential for Eurosceptics to influence politicians of other political groups. While this mechanism has been quite widely described in the political science literature, it has been little applied to the analysis of Eurosceptic behaviour in the EP.

This article consists of three sections, an introduction, and conclusions. Section one presents the materials analysed, the methodology adopted in the research, and the theoretical assumptions. In the second section the author describes the results of the study, including the occurrence of elements constituting the mechanism of the logic of persuasion in the speeches examined. Finally, the third section contains an analysis and discussion of the results obtained in the context of the role of public orators played by some members of the I&D political group.

Materials, methodology and theoretical assumptions

This study will use a method of discourse analysis, based on the assumption that EP debates are a form of it due to the real-time exchange of views (Habermas 1984). Some scholars in political science tend to downplay the importance of the speech act. Following Jeffrey Checkel, it has been assumed that it is important because it can be used to persuade actors to change their position. Thus, it can change people's beliefs about what goals are valuable and what roles they play or should play in social life. When a speech act produces such effects, it does important social constructionist work, creating new understandings and new social facts that reconfigure politics (Checkel 2001). It is therefore important to explore whether this also applies to the attempt to construct – in opposition to the mainstream – a new perception of the situation in Ukraine, and consequently to the attempt to change European policy in this area.

Eurosceptic politicians seek to transform not only the structures in which they operate, but also the EU's actions. This reshaping can take place through various mechanisms,

among which the so-called logic of persuasion should certainly be mentioned. It is based on rhetorical action, consisting of challenging opponents' positions and demonstrating the correctness of one's own positions by referring to common norms and values. However, its aim is not to shape a compromise position, but to persuade one's own views and change the position of the opponent.

This study uses Checkel's concept of argumentative persuasion, which fits the above definition. According to him, it is a social interaction process that involves changing attitudes in the absence of overt coercion (Checkel, Moravcsik 2001: p. 220–222). It is a mechanism, by which a change in the preferences of the particular actor can be influenced only through the strength of the used arguments. Thus, it is an action or process, in which one person attempts to induce a change in another person's belief, attitude or behaviour by communicating a message in a context, in which the persuaded person has some degree of free choice. Therefore, persuasion is not manipulation, but rather a process of persuading someone through arguments that are appealing to them and informed debate (Mutz et al. 1996). Checkel also identified five conditions when actors should be particularly open to socialisation and preference change (Checkel, Moravcsik 2001: p. 221–222). From the point of view of the present study, the most relevant observation is that "argumentative persuasion is more likely to be effective when the persuader does not [instruct] and demand, but instead [follows the] principles of serious deliberative argumentation" (Jorgensen et al. 1998: p. 297). This is the situation in the EP. The socialisation and the formal nature of the debates that take place (e.g. presentation of a political group's position, limited speaking time, possibility to ask a question under the so-called blue card procedure) mean that presented speeches are usually deliberative in nature. It seems legitimate to assume, therefore, that they will use the mechanism of the logic of persuasion in its argumentative variety, especially by Eurosceptic MEPs with limited influence on other EU institutions.

At the first step, in this study I sought public orators among the members of the I&D political group participating in the EP plenary debates on the situation in Ukraine. Public orators will be identified by measuring their involvement in the discourse taking place in the EP. As the rules of this EU institution do not always allow everyone willing to participate in a debate (e.g. a debate may be limited to only one representative of a political group), it is difficult to identify a hard percentage of engagement as an indicator of being a public orator. Therefore, the assumption was made that MEPs, who are clearly more likely to participate in debates on the topic under analysis, would play the role of public orator.

At the second step I looked for elements of the mechanism of logic of persuasion used to undermine the pro-Ukrainian consensus in their speeches. These statements had to be constructed in such a way that in one speech the MEP supports the dominant narrative in the EU on the situation in Ukraine, i.e. criticising Russia, supporting pro-Ukraine actions, while on the other hand – trying to undermine the European, or more broadly Western, consensus on the issue (e.g. criticising sanctions, pointing to the costs borne by the EU/Europe, indicating that a prolonged war could threaten European security). Thus, the ex-

amined statements referred to values relevant to political opponents, but at the same time there were elements in them whose aim – intentional or unintentional – was to bring about a change in the policy of the EU and its Member States. Therefore, the statements that were considered during the debates had to contain both elements – both referring to the opponents' beliefs and questioning the actions taken. This construction of the speech will demonstrate that the speaker's intention is to bring about a change in European policy, but without coercion, by appealing to arguments acceptable to the other side.

In the EP, 28 debates were held on the subject during the year (March 2022 – February 2023). In these debates, the members of the I&D political group spoke 74 times, of which only in seven debates the political group's position was presented. However, it should be noted that this may have been due to procedural restrictions adopted by the EP. Only one debate did not arouse the interest of the I&D representatives.

The above-mentioned information allowed to assume that the involvement of Euro-sceptic MEPs in the debate on this conflict was significant. Therefore, an analysis of the statements made by members of this political group during the debates will provide representative insights into their use of the logic of persuasion to break the existing consensus in the EP on the need to support Ukraine.

Research Results

General characteristics of the speeches

Of the 64, and as of December 2022, 62 deputies of this political group³, as many as half, i.e. 32 took part in the debates. Thus, since half of the members of this political group chose to speak in debates on the situation in Ukraine, it can be assumed that this topic was significant to them. Among all speeches, 36 were classified as using the mechanism of the logic of persuasion to undermine the pro-Ukrainian consensus in the EP. It was, in turn, used by 21 MEPs of the analysed political group (by 2/3 of the speakers). Among them, therefore, we can find public orators. However, only in the case of six of them it can be assumed that the analysed mechanism was used intentionally, as it was present in every speech. These MEPs can be mentioned here: Ch. Anderson, J. Bardella, G. Beck, H. Vilimsky, M. Zanni, and B. Zimniok. In the case of the 10 MEPs, it is difficult to determine the intentionality of this mechanism, because they only appeared once, but the mechanism was identified in their statements. MEPs who did not use this mechanism at all can be positioned on the opposite side. First and foremost, among them are J. Madison and A. Bonfrisco, who, in their numerous speeches, fully supported the EU's policy in the area under consideration. A separate group is formed by MEPs, who spoke more than once, but only in part of their speeches I've identified the use of the logic of persuasion mechanism to undermine the pro-Ukrainian consensus in the EP, and in the rest – to challenge other EU policies (mainly migration and asylum). Thus, it seems that they apply the analysed mechanism intentionally, using it – depending

³ In December 2022, True Finns members moved to the European Conservatives and Reformists political group.

on their needs – to undermine a selected area of EU activity. Certainly N. Fest, who spoke eight times, can be included in this category, because in only three statements contained elements of the logic of persuasion in the context of undermining the pro-Ukrainian consensus, and in the rest – for other purposes. A similar situation exists with G. Lebreton and T. Vandendriessche, who spoke several times, but only in some of their statements was found the mechanism of the logic of persuasion in the sought context. The last group of MEPs includes P. Kofod, M. Dreosto and G. Reil, who spoke several times, but only used the mechanism of the logic of persuasion to contest EU asylum and migration policy.

Element 1: Criticism of Russia

Members of the I&D using the mechanism of the logic of persuasion in their speeches mainly emphasised their negative assessment of Russia's attack on Ukraine. They used phrases such as: "shameful attack", "unjustified aggression", "unacceptable step", "aggression war", "military aggression". They clearly indicate that Russia is the aggressor here and that Ukraine is merely defending itself against attack. These statements do not include the phrase "special military operation", which is present in the Russian narrative, or any reference to the fascist nature of the Ukrainian regime, and no indication of the need to defend the oppressed Russian-speaking population. In a number of speeches, MEPs from this political group simply condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine and pointed out that it was a violation of international law.

Element 2: An attempt to change the pro-Ukrainian consensus

Persuading that sanctions are damaging the European economy

One of the aims of the members of the I&D was to undermine the need not only for new economic sanctions on Russia, but also for the extension of existing ones. The conducted analysis made it possible to distinguish three types of arguments used by I&D representatives. First of all, they noted that sanctions have and will have negative consequences for the Union in the future, lowering the standard of living of average Europeans. In this context, they pointed to rising fuel and energy prices and soaring inflation. Their statements also often referred to the recent pandemic and its negative consequences, which the European economy still has to overcome.

The second argument discouraging the adoption of another package of sanctions against Russia was the claim that they would be counterproductive, because they would actually strengthen the Russian economy. MEPs often pointed out in their statements the ineffectiveness of the sanctions introduced so far, because despite them Russia's revenues from the sale of raw materials increased. The last group of arguments related to the thesis that sanctions serve other countries. MEPs pointed in this context in particular to the United States, which had increased its income from gas exports, as well as China, India and Turkey, which had not joined Western sanctions. In their view, the continuation of the current policy will lead to economic collapse in Europe and a decline in its importance on the international stage.

Appeal for de-escalation

The second objective, which is clearly driven by some members of the I&D political group, is to bring about a cessation of the sending of arms to Ukraine and to bring about a so-called de-escalation. In this context, the analysed Eurosceptics often referred to European values such as peace and prosperity for all people. In their view, the EU, by supporting the sending of arms to Ukraine, de facto opposes the values, on which it was established. Some MEPs referred in this context to the fact that the EU is the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. They also pointed out that supplying weapons is pointless because Ukraine has no chance of winning a confrontation with Russia anyway. In their view, prolonging the conflict only means more deaths and destruction. Some members of the analysed political group indicated that the EU's aim should be to encourage Ukraine to make concessions and work towards finding a diplomatic solution to the conflict. Finally, it should be noted that there was some embitterment on the part of the analysed Eurosceptics, because they believed that those who call for peace are automatically seen as pro-Russian and hostile to Ukraine.

Call not to impose censorship

The third objective pursued by members of the I&D was to stop the actions taken by the EU to prevent the spread of Russian narration. Among the analysed MEPs, the argument related to European values was frequently raised. One argument was that we should not use the same methods in Europe that we criticise elsewhere, and that closing down the media would go against democratic values. The second type of argumentation emphasised the need to treat Europeans as intelligent people, who themselves know when they are being misled. A third line of argumentation was to point out that it is the EU, Member States' governments and the mainstream media who are in fact manipulating Europeans in the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Discussion

The conducted analysis has demonstrated that there are three clear areas, in which some of the far-right Eurosceptics of the I&D attempt to break the European consensus about Ukraine using the logic of persuasion: sanctions imposed on Russia, arms supply to Ukraine, and combating Russian propaganda. An interesting observation is that those members of the analysed political group, who used the indicated mechanism, fitted into Brack's defined role of public orator. She notes that they oppose almost everything, because they oppose EU competence as a matter of principle (Brack 2015: p. 341). Also, in the analysed topics, they opposed the measures taken at EU level: introducing sanctions, coordinating arms supplies and purchases, and combating Russian propaganda. In their speeches, they questioned the rationality of the taken measures, their effectiveness, while emphasising the disconnection of the European bureaucracy from the needs of normal people. The second fundamental aspect of this ideal type identified by Brack is the focus on spreading negative information about the EU (Brack 2015: p. 341). This element is also

found among the members of the I&D using the logic of persuasion. Here, a narrative describing the EU as subservient to the USA or manipulable to the Ukrainian president predominates above all. The third characteristic of public orators that Brack points out is that they consider as their duty to inform the public about the negative consequences of EU decisions. They also try to remind their colleagues that the EP's decisions are not supported by a certain segment of society (Brack 2015: p. 341). This behaviour is also clearly visible in the analysed statements.

It is difficult to find these characteristics in the case of the other political group members, who took part in the debates but did not use the logic of persuasion mechanism. They mostly supported the EU's initiatives in the area under consideration. They also mostly convey positive messages about it in this context, stressing the importance of European and transatlantic unity. It becomes legitimate to ask whether they can be categorised as public orators or even Eurosceptics. To answer this question, it would be necessary to analyse their speeches on other areas of the EU's activity. Perhaps it is only the issue of supporting Ukraine in its conflict with Russia that pulls them out of the framework of Euroscepticism, while on other issues, however, they continue to present a position hostile to the EU.

The analysis also demonstrated that the other two characteristics of public orators identified by Brack are not present in the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Firstly, this group of Eurosceptics uses insults or personal attacks, and disrupts parliamentary work or causes controversy in order to draw attention to themselves and break up the overly consensual nature of the EP's work (Brack 2015: p. 341). In the analysed debates, no such behaviour was identified. Moreover, very often speeches were of a serious nature, indicating concern for the future of the continent, even if their aim was to break the pro-Ukrainian consensus. In fact, the only identified speeches in which MEPs attacked political opponents, concerned the issue of Russian funding of European politicians. A significant proportion of the members of the I&D – and this is irrespective of whether we classify them as trying to break the consensus or as pro-Ukraine – tried to demonstrate in their speeches that such accusations should not be directed at them, but rather at members of mainstream parties. Secondly, public orators do not refer to the content of European politics, but rather tend to give speeches of a general nature (Brack 2015: p. 342). In the case of the analysed topic, in fact, all speeches referred to specific actions taken by the EU and its Member States. This may suggest that they were interested in the EU's activity in this area. Perhaps, this was due to a genuine concern for what is happening in the east of the continent. But in the case of the members of the I&D, who used the mechanism of the logic of persuasion to break the pro-Ukrainian consensus, the source of this interest may have been the negative consequences of the EU's actions for Russia. If we assume that the aim of this group of Eurosceptics was to limit the negative consequences for Russia, it seems obvious that they had to refer in their speeches to specific actions taken within the EU. Unfortunately, the behaviour of a group of MEPs from the I&D, who did not use the mechanism of the logic of persuasion, cannot be explained in this way. Rather, their aim was to support the actions of the

Union and its Member States in the area under analysis. Thus, it can be assumed that their reference to a specific policy stemmed from a genuine interest in the subject, which may be indicative of the scale of the shock that situation in Ukraine and the human dramas associated with it, represented for them.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning a group of MEPs from the I&D, who admittedly used the mechanism of the logic of persuasion in their speeches, and did not do so only to break the pro-Ukrainian consensus, but also – and sometimes especially – to argue for changes in EU migration and asylum policy. The consensus in the literature is that it is opposition to irregular migration that is one of the essential elements of the far-right Eurosceptic agenda. It is hardly surprising that some representatives of the I&D political group have used debates about the situation in Ukraine to mark their opposition to EU migration policy. What is interesting in this context, however, is that in their speeches they supported the reception of refugees from Ukraine, opposing them to illegal migrants from Africa and Asia. In this sense, the logic of persuasion consisted of appealing to the common support for sheltering Ukrainians and demonstrating in the second part of the speeches that the previous EU migration and asylum policy was wrong and should be changed. In this context, Poland and Hungary were cited as models for migration and asylum policy. It seems that this group of Eurosceptics was not interested in deviating from the pro-Ukrainian consensus, but rather in pursuing their core agenda. Therefore, it is difficult to classify them as pro-Russian politicians.

Conclusions

The conducted analysis only partially confirmed the adopted working hypothesis. It demonstrated that nearly 1/4 of the I&D political group used the mechanism of the logic of persuasion in all their speeches in order to break the pro-Ukrainian consensus in the EP. However, if we consider that 32 members of this political group spoke in the debates, as many as half of them used this mechanism. Of this group only six MEPs probably do so intentionally (Ch. Anderson, J. Bardella, G. Beck, H. Vilimsky, M. Zanni and B. Zimniok). Thus, this is not a large group, especially when set against the size of the entire political group. Nevertheless, all the analysed MEPs, who tried to undermine the pro-Ukrainian consensus in the EP, in the first step criticised Russia and verbally supported the Ukrainian people, but in the second step tried to bring about a weakening of specific anti-Russian measures (sanctions, sending arms to Ukraine, closing down media spreading Russian narration). The question that arises is whether they are doing this intentionally in order to implement Russian policy or whether it is part of the externalisation of their Eurosceptic identity. It is difficult to give a clear answer, and this will require further research in the future.

An interesting observation is that Brack's view that the public orators – I&D members who clearly participated more frequently in debates on the situation in Ukraine – form a relatively coherent group (Brack 2015: p. 342) was not confirmed. It is possible to

identify five MEPs who focused on speeches in the EP on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, because they were responsible for delivering 26 speeches. However, some of them took rhetorical action, i.e. used the logic of persuasion, in order to break the pro-Ukrainian consensus (12 speeches), some undermined the consensus on migration and asylum policy (9 speeches), and some explicitly inserted themselves into this consensus by supporting the actions of the EU and its Member States (5 speeches). In case of the latter, however, it is questionable whether they are public orators or even Eurosceptics. Nevertheless, this topic is a dividing line not only among the public orators, but also – and perhaps especially – within the analysed political group. So far, the source of this differentiation is not entirely clear. It is certainly not the possible Kremlin funding of the activities of individual political groups. Indeed, among the MEPs strongly supporting the pro-Ukrainian consensus are members of the Italian *Lega*, against which there are well-documented suspicions of receiving Kremlin support (Morley, Soula 2019). It is possible that the factor that has modified their approach to the topic under analysis is their entry into the government coalition in Italy. They now have other channels to influence the EU institutions and the decisions made within them, which makes them probably less interested in influencing the preferences of other actors through the use of deliberative processes, including the mechanism of the logic of persuasion. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the entry of a Eurosceptic party into the government of a Member State causes its representatives in the EP to start using other mechanisms to influence the EU and its institutions, and modify the role they play in this institution. However, verification of this hypothesis requires separate research.

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