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Research article

From New Humanitarianism to Total Defence: Conceptualising a New Dimension of Aid Organisations in Ukraine's War Effort

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Abstract

A new wave of organisations, primarily established after February 2022 in response to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, provide aid to civilians while also contributing to Ukraine's military defence. This hybrid set of activities challenges the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, rendering the existing frameworks of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism inadequate to describe their operations. This paper tackles these conceptual shortcomings and the difficulties in finding appropriate terminology to characterise such activities by introducing the alternative framework of total defence. The research focuses on an organisation founded by Ukrainians in Sweden, active in both Sweden and Ukraine, and examines its approach in relation to the frameworks of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and total defence. The findings indicate that this novel hybrid approach represents a paradigm shift in the discourse between humanitarianism and new humanitarianism, suggesting that the organisation is better characterised as part of a total defence mechanism rather than a conventional humanitarian response.

Keywords: *humanitarianism, total defence, humanitarian principles, neutrality, civil military cooperation, Ukraine*

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Introduction

The Russian military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 is a pivotal moment in contemporary history and across various academic fields (Scholz 2022; Tharoor 2022). The scale of the armed conflict, and the magnitude of the resulting humanitarian crises, as well as the widespread engagement of communities and civil societies across borders, were unparalleled (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; Grünewald 2022; Moallin, Hargrave & Saez 2023; Politi et al. 2023).

This research draws from the author's first-hand observations in the field and from previous scholarly works (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; DIIS 2024; Fedorchak 2024), and focuses on the *modus operandi* characterising those civil society organisations responding to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 by providing aid and support to civilians, and at the same time by contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system. More specifically, this work is an attempt to address the rising conceptual shortcomings and the difficulties in finding adequate terminology to characterise organisations implementing such hybrid activities through the leading paradigms of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism developed by scholars and practitioners in the humanitarian sector.

Despite significant differences in the interpretation of their relevance, humanitarianism and new humanitarianism are centred around the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (Barnett & Weiss 2008; Egeland, Harmer & Stoddard 2011; Haug 1993; Macintosh 2000; Pictet 1979, 1956; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2015; Scott-Smith 2016; Sphere Association 2018). Hence, humanitarianism and new humanitarianism seem inadequate to define operations aimed at providing aid and support to civilians, and at the same time contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system. To address these shortcomings, the study suggests the alternative conceptual approach of total defence (TD).

Through the analysis of a case study centred on the Help Ukraine Gothenburg organisation (HUG), this research aims at examining the driving forces that led to the establishment of such organisations and their activities. The objective is to characterise their nature and *modus operandi* through the interpretative lenses of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, and to identify which framework offers a better characterisation.

Through this novel approach, this research establishes a baseline for further research on the impacts that such a hybrid approach may have on humanitarian operations. This is particularly relevant considering that similar hybrid activities

may contribute to the erosion of the humanitarian space (Sida 2005), or at least to the reshaping of forms of civil-military cooperation on the battlefield (Franke 2006; Moses 2020; Roberts 2010), with potential ramifications on, e.g., the understanding of humanitarian principles, and the international humanitarian law obligations of parties to the conflict (Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Macintosh 2000). These aspects are increasingly critical given the evolving dynamics of global conflicts and the growing importance of humanitarian negotiations, e.g., for establishing humanitarian corridors or for humanitarian access (Cuscunà 2023).

By establishing this baseline, the study outlines humanitarian dilemmas deserving scholarly attention and is a starting point for wider research within the fields of international and security studies, and humanitarian affairs, at a crucial and topical time.

The Ukrainian context and the hybrid response to the crisis

The attack launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine in February 2022 was qualified by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) as an act of aggression and a violation of the United Nations (UN) Charter (HRMMU 2022: 1; UNGA 1974, 2022: 3; Wilmshurst 1974). According to international organisations monitoring and reporting on the events, e.g. the mission of experts established under the Moscow Mechanism in 2022, and the Ukraine Monitoring Initiative (UMI) of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) within the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the resulting armed conflict still unfolding is an international armed conflict (Benedek, Bílková & Sassòli 2022: 5; UMI 2023a).

After the launch of the attack and the following escalation of the armed conflict, a large flux of Ukrainians began fleeing from the areas affected by the hostilities, triggering an unprecedented wave of internal and international displacement (IOM 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d). At the same time, the situation of those who stayed or were trapped in populated areas that became the frontline of intense and often indiscriminate military operations soon became dreadful (HRMMU 2022; ICRC 2022a, 2022b, 2022c; OSCE 2022a, 2022b, 2022c).

As part of the response to the military invasion, in the days following 24 February 2022, Ukrainian authorities called civilians to actively participate in the defence of the country and in the resistance against Russian forces (Benedek, Bílková & Sassòli 2022: 34–35). At the same time, a large internal and international mobilisation of people and resources began providing support to those impacted by the armed conflict and those fleeing Ukraine (for an overview on the role played by the Ukrainian diaspora and civil society organisations, see e.g. ODIHR, 2024). Weisser (2023) shows how in the first weeks after the invasion, the level of interaction with and support towards refugees by civil society in Europe, and especially in neighbouring countries to Ukraine, increased signifi-

cantly. Politi et al. (2023) investigated this phenomenon through the lenses of individual prosocial dispositions and superordinate European identity, showing how the cumulative effect of these factors intensified the helping intentions towards Ukrainians in Europe.

According to Cullen Dunn and Kaliszewska (2023), self-organised informal civil society initiatives played a significant role in creating *ad hoc* platforms to provide urgent and direct support inside Ukraine and in the areas at the Ukrainian-Polish border. This initial fast mobilisation at least partially counterweighed the more bureaucratic and less flexible traditional international humanitarian response mechanisms.

Zarembo and Martin (2023) focus on this 'informal action' (Krasynska & Martin 2017, cited in Zarembo & Martin 2023: 2) as social phenomenon characterising the response of Ukrainians to the Russian aggression in 2022, and on the social and political mobilisation during the so-called Euromaidan movement in 2013–2014. The notion that this mobilisation was not entirely new is reinforced by other studies on the Euromaidan events and on the non-international armed conflict in eastern Ukraine (e.g. Worschech 2017; Zarembo 2017; Stepaniuk 2022),[1] and on the role of social media and information technology as tools facilitating the mobilisation (Asmolov 2022; Boichak 2017; Boichak & Jackson 2020).

Other similar, but different and not un-controversial forms of social engagements are at the centre of other studies. Examples are the establishment and expansion of volunteer battalions and other forms of civilian participation in the conflict and the impact of this participation on civilians at the outbreak of the armed conflict in 2014 (Saressalo & Huhtinen 2018; Umland 2019; Mironova & Whitt 2020; Aliyev 2021; Asmolov 2022; Wood 2022; Phillips & Martsenyuk 2023), and in the aftermath of the Russian aggression in 2022 (Pavlova et al. 2022; Phillips & Martsenyuk 2023; Pugliese 2023).

The fluid and hybrid approach adopted by some groups providing support to both civilians and combatants in the response to the Russian invasion is the focus of growing scholarship. Fedorchak (2024) outlines how civil society initiatives have been contributing to total defence mechanisms throughout the armed conflicts unfolding in Ukraine since 2014, and after the Russian military aggression launched in 2022 and focuses on civilian organisations and groups dedicating their efforts to supporting the military infrastructures. Cullen Dunn and Kaliszewska (2023) and the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS 2024) describe the role of aid initiatives implementing hybrid activities, providing support to civilians while simultaneously contributing to Ukraine's military defence. Similar observations are also included in the evaluation of

1 Reference is made considering the subject of the volunteer mobilisation, and not to the description and definition of the conflict dynamics.

the humanitarian response to the crisis resulting from the war in Ukraine by Grünewald (2022).

Theoretical framework: Humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and total defence

Originally the humanitarian sector was developed around the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence, part of the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and later known as the humanitarian principles (Barnett & Weiss 2008; Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Egeland, Harmer & Stoddard 2011; Macintosh 2000; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2015; Scott-Smith 2016; Sphere Association 2018). Once widely accepted, the humanitarian principles and approach were at the centre of debate after the Cold War due to the changing international dynamics and a series of failures of the traditional humanitarian system. These debates took place within the sector and among scholars, and a cleavage grew hastily between traditional humanitarians and those looking for a radical rights-based change – the new humanitarians (Adami 2021; Gordon & Donini 2015).

A source of friction is the interpretation of the scope of the humanitarian action. Adami (2021) provides an account of the differences between 'the old humanitarianism, based on neutrality and short-term, relief-based assistance, and new humanitarianism, centring on advocacy and development' (403). And according to Gordon and Donini (2015), new humanitarians are pushing for 'more political and emancipatory forms of humanitarianism . . . that promised to support transformative, developmental outcomes and even peacebuilding initiatives' (88).

Scholars and practitioners have been debating on the opportunity and the implications for humanitarians to implement politically inspired and motivated operations, or to engage in cooperation with non-neutral actors (Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Fox 2001; Gordon & Donini 2015; Mačák 2015; Mills 2005; Rieffer-Flanagan 2009; Schenkenberg van Mierop 2015; Slim 1997, 2020a). In *To stay and deliver, good practice for humanitarians in complex security environments*, Egeland, Harmer and Stoddard (2011) firmly outline how 'the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality underpin acceptance and provide the basis for warring parties to accept humanitarian action in situations of armed conflict' (4). And while acceptance and access appear to be increasingly critical and difficult to secure in contemporary armed conflicts, such as in Syria and Ukraine, humanitarian negotiations for establishing humanitarian corridors or securing humanitarian access have shown their potential as powerful tools in ensuring not only the delivery of lifesaving humanitarian aid, but also in upholding IHL, and contributing to de-escalation attempts (Cuscunà 2023).

The idea of neutrality, defined by Mačák (2015) as the principle that 'requires

the provider of humanitarian action to abstain from associating with the ideological or political aims of any of the parties to the conflict' (161), is perceived by some scholars and practitioners as particularly challenging. To at least partially address this, Hugo Slim has been consistently arguing for a more nuanced view of humanitarianism that moves beyond strict neutrality and suggests that in some situations, taking sides may be ethically justifiable or a moral duty, especially when faced with gross injustices or atrocities (Slim 1997, 2020a, 2020b). Slim outlines a form of humanitarianism based on solidarity, characterised by an explicit moral and ideological stance and a commitment to a common cause, but without a clearly defined operational framework for providing actual support. He further develops the concept of 'humanitarian resistance', in which 'humanitarian activists' can hold political or moral positions and provide aid. In this model, aid workers consciously resist injustice, not by remaining neutral, but by actively choosing sides to protect vulnerable populations. The only limitation provided is that the support should not offer a definite military advantage to any party to the conflict (Slim 2022).

Bryant, Saez and Redd (2022) and Moallin, Hargrave and Saez (2023) elaborate on the entanglements between the narratives that characterised the responses to the Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2022 and the consequent humanitarian crises, and the support and humanitarian actions activated by different actors. In their works, the scholars highlight the contradictions between narratives strongly rooted in values connected to solidarity and resistance, and the humanitarian principles.

Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015), Gordon and Donini (2015) and Adami (2021) offer a comprehensive analysis of the relevance of the principles, and try to untangle some of the dilemmas arising from the apparent incompatibility between the principle of neutrality and the advocacy role played by many humanitarian actors especially since the 1990s. Franke (2006) outlines the complexity of contemporary crises, often requiring forms of civil-military cooperation (CIMIC), and underlines how the mechanisms to ensure a degree of coordination can challenge – and have challenged – the humanitarian principles. Interestingly for the subject of this research, in Franke's (2006) study, the distinction between CIMIC, as a doctrine for both military and civilian actors to collaboratively address humanitarian needs, and civil affairs (CA) activities, as military efforts to sway civilian actors into supporting military needs, is subtle yet present.

To minimise the risks associated with the politicisation of aid, the humanitarian community developed the concept of humanitarian space, where aid operations can take place free from influence or interference from governmental actors and parties to the conflict, and can be implemented in compliance with the humanitarian principles (Sida 2005). But maybe more importantly, despite recognising an unbridgeable gap between them, Adami (2021) explores mechanisms

that would allow the two competing approaches of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism to function complementarily, enhancing their strengths and partially compensating their weaknesses (Adami 2021). Adami's efforts and the interplay among different humanitarian actors make it possible to group them under the label of (new) humanitarianism.

The concept of TD is characterised by a paradigm shift in the approach to the problems of CIMIC and CA that arose in humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. In fact, neither the humanitarian dilemma surrounding the understanding of neutrality nor the limitation on providing support that may offer a decisive military advantage to a party in the conflict are applicable to the TD framework. In his research on the topic, Wither (2020) defines TD as 'a whole of society approach to national security intended to deter a potential enemy by raising the cost of aggression and lowering the chances of its success', where 'infrastructure and societal resilience jointly constitute national resilience, a cornerstone of total defence' (Wither 2020: 62; for similar accounts see e.g. Swedish Defence Commission 2017; Swedish Ministry of Defence 1991). This characterisation is also reflected in various policy documents shaping TD defence policies, e.g. by NATO (NATO SOF HQ 2020), Sweden (Swedish Defence Commission 2017, 2023; Swedish Ministry of Defence 1991, 2023) and Ukraine (Presidency of Ukraine 2021, cited by Fedorchak 2024).

According to the interim report on the orientation of TD and the design of civil defence by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023), the objectives of civil defence within a TD approach are: '[to] ensure the most important social functions, . . . [to] contribute to the capability of the military defence, [to] protect the civilian population, maintaining the will to defend and society's resilience against external pressures' (4).[2] A similar operationalisation of TD can be identified in the relevant policy documents developed in Ukraine (Fedorchak 2024). Considering the complex network of partnership and cooperation between the military dimension and civilian public and private institutions and actors required in a comprehensive TD mechanism (Swedish Defence Commission 2017), the development and establishment of an overall structure for the implementation of TD is challenging, as also highlighted in a report by the Swedish Red Cross on the topic (Forsberg 2024). Finally, the population of a country embracing a TD approach is likely to experience significant repercussions from an armed conflict, as evidenced by Wither (2020).

In the analysis, discussion, and conclusion, the interrelations between the proposed theoretical frameworks and the potential impacts of the hybrid approach at the centre of this analysis on the humanitarian system are made explicit. By examining the case study through the interpretative lenses of humanitarian-

2 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

ism, new humanitarianism and TD, it appears that TD offers a solution to the conceptual shortcomings of both humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. However, this paper also highlights consequential humanitarian dilemmas – with potential normative and operational ramifications – that should be taken into account when humanitarian and TD actors operate alongside one another, or when TD policies are being developed.

For the purpose of this research, an organisation carrying out humanitarian activities upholding the humanitarian principles falls within the framework of humanitarianism. This can be at least superficially determined through the assessment toolkit developed by Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015) and the framework by Gordon and Donini (2015), looking at elements unveiling the respect of the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. Following the same logic, an organisation carrying out humanitarian activities, with also political and ideological commitments and not fully upholding the humanitarian principles, falls within the framework of new humanitarianism. An organisation carrying out humanitarian and other activities, and also contributing to the military defence of a party to the conflict may be considered part of a TD mechanism, and not a mere (new) humanitarian actor. The qualifying elements are the objectives of civil defence within a TD approach as outlined by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023): '[to] ensure the most important social functions, . . . [to] contribute to the capability of the military defence, [to] protect the civilian population, maintaining the will to defend and society's resilience against external pressures'[3] (4).

Methodology and limitations

The research is centred around an *exemplifying* case of a more general phenomenon (Yin 2009 cited in Bryman 2012: 70), as substantiated by the identification of organisations implementing at least partially comparable activities in previous scholarship (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; DIIS 2024; Grünewald 2022) and in the early extended overview of online data covering other organisations operating in Sweden and Ukraine that have not been selected as subject for this research.[4]

The selection of HUG as the subject is based on its relevance to the study, and the researcher's access to the organisation and its members. In the spring of 2023, a year prior to the development and design of the study, the researcher had approximately three informal introductory meetings with representatives of the organisation to gain an understanding its activities. This initial understanding of the wide range of activities implemented both in Sweden and Ukraine allowed for a preliminary assessment of the relevance of these activities to the research. This preliminary assessment was reinforced by an early overview of the online

3 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

4 E.g. operationaid (https://operationaid.org/); Blågula Bilen (https://www.blagulabilen.se/); Ukrainian Volunteer Hub (https://www.facebook.com/uavhub.stockholm)

social media contents of the organisation. The decision to adopt a single case study design was based on the objective and scope of the research, which does not aim to measure the extent of the phenomenon but rather to provide a reference framework and baseline for further analysis.

The research entails the collection and analysis of qualitative semi-structured interviews with four key informants within the organisation and is complemented with the analysis of the organisation's public communication through a selection of its Instagram posts[5]. The objective is to explore the self-representation of the organisation through the words that the interlocutors used during the interviews with the researcher, and through the words and the aesthetic of the online content shared by the organisation during its operations outside the research setting (Bouvier & Rasmussen 2022; Leaver, Highfield & Abidin 2020; Manovich 2017).

The four key informants were selected considering their initial role in the establishment of the organisation and their current involvement in the management and strategic decision-making processes of the organisation. The participants were selected using a snowball sampling technique. The sample size was considered adequate given the limited size of the organisation's management team and the distinct patterns that emerged from the information collected, indicating that the relevant coding for the research had likely reached saturation. Similar considerations determined the sample size of the online content selected and analysed in this research (Bryman 2012; Fusch & Ness 2015; Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006).

The interview guide was developed based on the assessment toolkit proposed by Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015), along with the frameworks by Gordon and Donini (2015) and Pringle and Hunt (2016). Questions aimed to collect information and data enabling a characterisation of the organisation's values and *modus operandi* in relation to the criteria specific to the theoretical frameworks of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD. The interview guide consisted of 22 questions divided into six macro categories covering: 1) introductory information about the interlocutor, 2) the establishment of the organisation and the activities launched in the initial phase, 3) the development of the organisation and its activities throughout the first two years of operations, 4) elements relevant to the principle of neutrality, 5) elements relevant to the principle of independence and 6) elements relevant to the subject of TD. While adhering to the interview guide, a flexible approach to questioning was maintained, ensuring the gathering of comprehensive information while also acknowledging and respecting any emotional aspects that may have arisen for participants (OHCHR 2011; UMI 2023b).

Drawing from Bryman (2012), interviews with key informants were analysed thematically. For online materials, visual components were analysed using Bou-

5 At the time of publication, the referenced Instagram posts were all publicly accessible.

vier and Rasmussen's (2022) methods, while Bryman's (2012) guidelines informed the analysis of textual components. The coding for the thematic analyses of the interviews and of the online data draws from, and at the same time brings back to, the three theoretical frameworks of humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD. The identified themes stem from the information provided by the key informants during the interviews, and from the online content, hence they have been extrapolated using an inductive approach. Attention was also given to the different or developing discourses or plots from the interviews and the online content (Elliott 2005: 17–19, 53–56). The goal, without adopting a narrative analysis, is to identify variations in the themes and content through time.

While there is growing literature around the nature and roles of diaspora mobilisation amid crises and tensions (e.g. Koinova 2018), this approach has not been included in this research. Diaspora communities have mobilised in different difficult contexts, to defend human rights and democracy in Hong Kong (Lee 2023), to promote political participation and protest repressive regimes in the Arab Springs (Beaugrand & Geisser 2016; Moss 2016, 2020), to advocate for transitional justice (Koinova & Karabegović 2019; Stokke & Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2019), and for other reasons (Feron 2017; Quinsaat 2022). And the role of Ukrainians abroad, also in relation to the armed conflicts unfolding in Ukraine since 2014, has been explored by researchers such as Nikolko (2019), Özgür and Deniz (2023) and by the ODIHR (2024). However, diaspora mobilisation is inherently defined and constrained by the identities of the individuals involved (Feron 2017; Quinsaat 2022), and while organisations stemming from diaspora mobilisation may offer aid or support hybrid activities with a humanitarian, new humanitarian or TD approach, not all organisations engaged in such activities originate from diaspora mobilisation.

Humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD were therefore deemed more suitable for addressing the research problem due to their operational focus and emphasis on implementation. This evaluation is supported by the fact that not all organisations providing aid to civilians and contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system are Ukrainian or connected to diaspora communities. Consequently, using a diaspora mobilisation framework would limit the applicability of the approach and restrict the generalisability of the findings. By focusing on humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, this research aims to encompass a wider range of organisations and contributions.

Also, though conflict transportation may provide a lens for interpreting certain behavioural patterns, narratives and decisions within the organisation from political, discursive and symbolic viewpoints (Feron 2017), these aspects are outside the scope of this research.

Finally, this study does not seek to offer a thorough analysis of the methods and impacts of Ukrainian civil society initiatives established to provide aid in response

to the humanitarian crisis caused by the attack launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Similarly, the objective is neither to exhaustively verify the compliance of such initiatives to humanitarian principles, nor to address the ramifications that the hybrid approach adopted by some groups providing aid to civilians and at the same time contributing to the Ukrainian military defence system may have on humanitarian operations, on the humanitarian sector or on the international humanitarian law (IHL) obligations of parties to the conflict.

In line with ethical standards, the research upholds the principles of do-no-harm, informed consent and confidentiality; hence all the identifiable features present in the interviews, as well as in the online content, have been omitted or masked (Bryman 2012; Swedish Research Council 2017, 2023).

The organisation's founder consented to the disclosure of the organisation's name for research purposes and resulting academic works. Nevertheless, the author explored the option of redacting information that could expose the organisation. Considering that the organisation and its members communicate openly about their activities and approach on social media, and other open sources, and that the online data used are both publicly available and intended as part of the communication channels of the organisation (Ravn, Barnwell & Neves 2020), the risks associated with the disclosure of the organisation were assessed as low. Hence, to ensure access to the sources, the name of the organisation and its identifiable features have not been redacted.

Results: A matter of needs and defence

As part of this research project, interviews with four key informants actively involved in the establishment and management of the organisation were conducted in April 2024. The participants, comprising three women and one man, included three individuals of Ukrainian origins and one Swede.

As emerged from the interviews with the four interlocutors, HUG was established in the aftermath of the military aggression launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The organisation was a grassroots initiative aimed at contributing to the global response to the humanitarian crisis unfolding within Ukraine and neighbouring countries, led by a relatively small group of (mainly) Ukrainian citizens or members of the Ukrainian diaspora in Sweden. With the support of the Ukrainian community in Sweden, members of the Swedish community in Gothenburg, and Swedish civil society and religious organisations, HUG launched a range of activities in both Sweden and Ukraine, supporting Ukrainian refugees in Sweden and internally displaced people within Ukraine. The key components of HUG's operations include the collection and provision of medical supplies to Ukrainian health institutions, the fundraising, purchase and delivery of rescue vehicles and tactical medical equipment to various operational actors in Ukraine, the collection and delivery of food and non-food

items to affected communities in Ukraine and the provision of psycho-social support services in both Ukraine and Sweden.

The common themes relevant to this research emerging from the interviews are a) *attention trigger*, b) *doing good*, c) *initial chaos*, d) *humanitarian imperative*, e) *aid operations*, f) *ensure the most important social functions* and g) *contribute to the military defence system*. Another theme identified in the analysis of the interviews is h) *identity*.

Three out of four interlocutors defined the mounting threats of a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine in the months prior to the 24 February 2022, and the actual invasion, as an *attention trigger* towards the events unfolding in Ukraine. Referring to the armed conflict unfolding in the Eastern regions of Ukraine since 2014, one interlocutor said:

> I can admit I was not aware, or I did not make myself aware of the situation in Ukraine. But . . . in the months before . . . February, I followed the news constantly, that was not so usual for me. (Int. 1, para. 8–10)

In all three cases, this *attention trigger* sparked the determination of *doing good*, and the intention to find a way to proactively respond to the events. One interlocutor recalled how 'when the war started, the full invasion started . . . it is maybe the most terrible day in my life, because I tried to understand . . . "do I need to go home?", "how can I help my family?"' and how a family member in Ukraine advised 'to concentrate on the kind of things that I can do' (Int. 4, pars. 17–19). Another interlocutor explained how (s)he 'had the possibility to do nothing' but 'felt suddenly that I can't live like this . . . and need to do something . . . So, I chose Ukraine instead' (Int. 3, pars. 10–11).

While reflecting on the active role played within the organisation, one interlocutor associated the themes of *attention trigger* and *doing good* with the theme of *identity*:

> When I came to Sweden . . . nobody knew what Ukraine was, so as a child I used to say that I am from Russia, because people can relate to that. After few years here . . . I did consider myself being more a Swedish person than Ukrainian . . . But the situation changed completely. Maybe not from the beginning of the full-scale invasion, because I did this not because of my nationality, I did this for the people, and for the fact that this should not happen anywhere in the world . . . [But] after two years working with this, I am definitely shifting towards identifying myself as Ukrainian in Sweden and having it as a big part of who I am today. (Int. 1, para. 12–15)

This connection between the themes of *doing good* and *identity* is reinforced by the questions that an interlocutor asked h**self: '"do I need to go home?", "how can I help my family?"', and by the fact that the roots of the organisation are within

the *glocal* movement protesting the Russian invasion of Ukraine, as outlined by three interlocutors who first connected during a demonstration outside a Russian consulate in Sweden. In three interviews this event was mentioned as the initial step of the mobilisation of the Ukrainian community in the area.

When describing the immediate aftermath of the 24 February 2022, all interlocutors referred to the theme of *chaos*. They specifically mentioned it when outlining the situation at the Polish-Ukrainian border, the evident and disconcerting initial lack of comprehensive response mechanisms by traditional humanitarian actors, and the vital role played by a wide range of solidarity and volunteer formal and informal organisations that self-organise in the area, as also described by Cullen Dunn and Kaliszewska (2023).

From the interviews, it seems that this initial *chaos* pushed the general wish of *doing good* and facilitated its development towards more and more structured operations. In this phase, ideas and dynamics started to evolve and to be increasingly relatable to the theme of *aid operations*.

The initial evolution from simply *doing good* to a more comprehensive response to a rising *humanitarian imperative* was summarised by two interlocutors when recalling how the buses initially used to transport basic items at the Polish-Ukrainian border and in Western Ukraine soon and purposefully became the means of transport for the first Ukrainian refugees arriving in Sweden, despite the opposing indication of institutions:

> We sent buses with everything . . . from food to power banks, to strollers . . . clothes, you name it . . . blankets, everything that was needed in the first phases of the humanitarian crisis, or war. Everything, most of it, was coordinated with the Ukrainian embassy in Sweden. What we were not prepared for, was that these buses would be filled with people who tried to go further and come to Sweden. And in that moment Sweden was not accepting refugees from Ukraine yet, because the Maastricht directive was activated on 4 March. This is something we were in close discussion with the embassy . . . 'how do we do this?' . . . but they said 'stop'. But I . . . we . . . due to my engagement in 2015 [with Syrian refugees] I knew that people would anyway cross the border and come here, so we did not stop the buses. (Int. 1, para. 22–27)

All interlocutors portrayed the organisation's development, noting increases in both the scale and scope of its activities, as well as a growth in the expertise and capacity of its members. This evolution is the red thread marking the path from the early theme of *doing good*, to the more structured theme of *aid operations*, centred around the *humanitarian imperative*. From the early 'room for humanity' where volunteers 'came and gave consultation or filled . . . immigration papers' (Int. 4, par. 45) or were 'cooking *borsh* for refugees', explaining 'how the Swedish

system works' (Int. 4, par. 46), to the establishment of 'one of the largest volunteer organisations in Sweden' (Int. 3, par. 63). 'From . . . filling the basic forms, we are now at the stage where we are providing psychological help and . . . professional help to find . . . a job or an education' (Int. 2, par. 53).

The interlocutors outlined a similar trajectory in the Ukrainian operational component as well, where the organisation was able to establish a network of partnership and cooperation with several actors at different levels, with activities focused on, but not limited to, supporting the health sector through the provision of vehicles, equipment and psychosocial support. For example, one interlocutor underlined how the decision to support hospitals with limited access to financial resources and equipment 'outside Kyiv, . . . Kharkiv, outside Odessa . . . made the difference' as these critical institutions otherwise 'would never get the ambulances through the governmental funding' (Int. 2, par. 113).

The *modus operandi* and the wording used by the interlocutors to describe it is associated to the theme of *aid operations* as well. For example, operations are described as being 'adaptive, based on the needs that were needed in different point of time' (Int. 2, par. 53), and addressing 'acute needs' within the healthcare system, while the organisation was also developing a more strategic 'long-term plan . . . working with children and mental health rehabilitation' (Int. 1, par. 44). Regarding funding, the organisation successfully established and secured various funding streams, ranging from individual contributions to substantial financial and in-kind support from both private and public entities, including local, national and international grants. As all interlocutors explicitly and implicitly outlined, this diversification proved to be effective in safeguarding a high level of operational flexibility and independence. Elements that are also part of the *aid operations* theme.

The *aid operations* theme is intertwined with the theme *ensure the most important social functions*. This appears unequivocal when interlocutors describe the importance of providing support to both individuals and institutions within the health sector. For example, one interlocutor said: 'when you support for example this doctor . . . [it] gives him the power to go longer and continue his work more and keep society working' (Int. 4, par. 119), and:

> when we support hospitals with ambulances it means that the hospitals can do their work longer or do their work just. In the small villages and cities these special cars keep these hospitals and societies working around, with old people who live in these villages and have no choice, from some perspective, to leave. (Int. 4, par. 118)

When outlining the activities implemented by the organisation aimed at supporting a functional society, all interlocutors explicitly mentioned the delivery of equipment, with a focus on lifesaving tactical medical equipment, to groups

directly involved in the national military defence system of Ukraine. All interlocutors also specified that the organisation decided unambiguously neither to provide support for, nor supply of, weapon systems. The theme *contribute to the military defence system* is centred around the description of activities indirectly or directly supporting organisations of tactical volunteer medics training and aiding army detachments at the frontline, or directly medics within the Ukrainian army. The support consists mainly in the provision of tactical medical equipment, e.g. 'tourniquets . . . special needles, special compression bandages' (Int. 4, par. 124), and 'ambulances, most of them . . . 4x4 wheel drive' (Int.1, par. 64). The vehicles are sometimes 'painted green, . . . because . . . they [the soldiers of the Russian Federation] shoot at them' and now have to be supplied with 'jamming devices' for protection against drones (Int. 3, par. 83, also Int. 1, par. 90).

One interlocutor explained this approach saying:

> It is a holistic picture of what does it mean to be a country at war, and what does it mean to be a defender. For me it is crystal clear, either I come with diapers, or I come with very specific tactical medicines gadgets, I am a part of the defence, however it is. (Int. 1, par. 112)

Another interlocutor further elaborated the impacts that such a comprehensive approach can have on the different levels of a functional society at war, including its military defence system:

> the soldier who is in the battlefield, he needs to know that his family is fine, secure, and healthy and all of that. And that is where volunteers and the organisation can help. They can help the children of those soldiers, they can help the mothers, wives, and the sisters and so on, and that is one part.
>
> Another part is that the soldier needs to know that if he is injured, he will get the medical help, because the matter of survival is there.
>
> And then of course the military themselves need all the ammunition and the equipment they need to work there. We are not helping obviously, that is the government and all the ministers that are working on that, but our part is secure those two first: that the soldiers out there in the field, they know that someone is having their back. (Int. 2, para. 122–124)

In the preliminary review of the online data of the organisation's Instagram feed, a consistent recurrence of themes among the 440 posts shared between 9 March 2022 and 6 January 2024 has been observed. Echoing Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), Bryman (2012) and Fusch and Ness (2015), it feels safe to say that distinct patterns emerged from the online content, indicating that the relevant coding for the research had reached a saturation point within the initial 329

posts posted between 9 March 2022 and 27 August 2023. These 329 posts, spanning the first 18 months following 24 February 2022, allows a comprehensive examination of the initial humanitarian response to the sudden-onset crisis, alongside the IASC System-Wide Scale-Up, and the initial phases of the protracted crisis (IASC 2018, 2023a, 2023b, n.d.).

An initial relevant element is the self-representation of the organisation in regard to its nature. In one of the textual contents of its Instagram feed the organisation defines itself as a

> non-profit charity organisation that was started on February 26, 2022 in response to Russia's full scaled invasion of Ukraine, and is run by people for people. (HUG 2022b)

Similarly to the themes identified in the analysis of the interviews, those emerging from the textual online contents are a) *aid operations*, b) *ensure the most important social functions*, c) *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, d) *hybridity* and e) *direct contribution to the military defence system*.

The majority of the posts and relative textual content are relatable to themes a) *aid operations* and b) *ensure the most important social functions*. The main subjects of such posts refer to the wide range of activities carried out by the organisation supporting internally displaced people in Ukraine, Ukrainian refugees in Sweden, raising funds and awareness around the events unfolding in Ukraine, for example:

> When the cold hits, you as a private person and business can be the lifeline for children and families struggling to survive.
>
> HUG's Christmas gift can provide people in Ukraine with warming winter packages to cope with the cold winter months and survive the lack of food. Each package for a family includes: Warm light[,] Food package[,] Heating stove.[6] (HUG 2022e)
>
> Thank you Gothenburg for your warm Christmas presents! We have now delivered over 400 stoves to people in eastern parts of Ukraine. Warm thanks.[7] (HUG 2023c)

The posts referring to the operations implemented in Ukraine are closely connected to the theme b) *ensure the most important social functions.* Such posts outline how the operations of the organisation either support Ukrainian institutions and society (e.g. providing vehicles and equipment to rescue and emergency services) or directly implement such activities in complementarity

6 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
7 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

with national institutions. For example:

> All of us are different, speak different languages, lived different lives but then the war came and we came together to start assisting, rescuing, supporting and continuously working to help civilians and healthcare in Ukraine.[8] (HUG 2023a)

> On 21/5, an unusual ambulance discharge went from Högsbo in Gothenburg, consisting of 9 better used ambulances that [will] drive all the way to Lviv in Ukraine. The cars are full of supplies and medical equipment and are driven by Swedish and Ukrainian volunteers.
>
> The effort is led and coordinated by the organisation Help Ukraine Gothenburg, which works tirelessly with support both for war refugees in Gothenburg and the civilian population on the ground in Ukraine.[9] (HUG 2023f)

> At a time when the presence of government agencies can be difficult to access, our team has stood up for the value of humanity and support. These people have decided not to leave their homes, and it is our duty to ensure that help reaches where it is most needed. Being able to offer medical care and supportive treatment in these challenging circumstances is more than a task – it is an honor.10 (HUG 2023m)

Some posts introduce the partnerships developed in Ukraine with other non-governmental organisations (NGOs), some of which are operating in support of the Ukrainian national military defence system. Themes c) *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, is exemplified e.g. in the following posts:

> Two weeks ago we started a collection for your rescue vehicle number 7.
>
> A sum that was missing to carry out HUG's largest effort for Ukraine to date, namely the purchase of an ambulance bus for the Медичний Добровольчий Батальён Госпитальёри • Hospitallers Paramedics.[11] (HUG 2022d)

> Ambulance No. 8 No. is here! . . . MedStar Медевак ПДМШ has received one of the most important additions – VW Amarok, the perfect front

8 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
9 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
10 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
11 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

> ambulance![12] (HUG 2023b)
>
> Here you can see the paramedics from Тактична медицина Північ who today received both an ambulance and lots of materials thanks to your donations![13] (HUG 2023j)

The posts show how the operations implemented by the organisation in certain cases include a degree of hybridity with activities supporting both civilians and the national military defence system, as also observed by other scholars and presented in earlier sections. Examples of the *hybridity* theme can be found for example in the following posts:

> Collection Ukraine! Examples of field food (turmat) that are needed in Ukraine right now. This is an incredibly important resource and is in huge demand by heroes on the front but also civilians in shelters. Help us send our next car away already on Saturday.[14] (HUG 2022a)
>
> After just over a week in Ukraine, we have now completed the delivery of 9 ambulances and an evacuation vehicle to the military, evacuees and hospitals.[15] (HUG 2023e)
>
> 💪We got your back mother Ukraine!
>
> Today we sent off #HUG transport no. 126 filled with hospital beds, fire extinguishers and medical supplies. This is an incredibly valuable delivery that will go to the military hospital, the rescue service and the healthcare in Ukraine 🇺🇦.[16] (HUG 2023g)

This hybridity is more pronounced in the theme *direct contribution to the military defence system*:

> Thanks to everyone who contributed to the collection for tourniquets for Ukraine!
>
> These will be sent to Ukraine already this week and distributed to the offensive in eastern parts of Ukraine.

12 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
13 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
14 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
15 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
16 The first sentence is originally in English. The rest is originally in Swedish. Author's translation.

> Together for peace and survival.[17] (HUG 2022c)

> 🇺🇦 Large amounts of help to the heroes of the counteroffensive 🤼‍♂️

> Volunteers play a vital role in supporting the Ukrainian soldiers by providing vital resources. On site, it is the volunteers who provide the *soldiers with the essentials – food, clothing, camping equipment, sleeping bags, mats and fire extinguishers. Help Ukraine Gothenburg is an essential part of the aid that reaches the front.*

> 💪 This continued effort to donate material is extremely important, not only for Ukraine but also for all of Europe. By supporting the Ukrainian army, we contribute to stability and peace in the region. [18] (HUG 2023k)

> Ukraine daily stands in 🔥 from the Russian aggression. Healthcare, infrastructure and civilians are constantly a target for attacks and bombings.

> We continue to support Ukraine amid ongoing challenges by supplying essential protective equipment and fire extinguishers to the military and emergency services. This time a large batch donated from Alwico Brand 🔥 has now been distributed in several regions and the need is huge. Continued donations are essential to protect the civilian population and the country's vital resources.[19] (HUG 2023l)

Finally, it feels safe to say that there are two additional common themes emerging and conveying a sense of *patriotism* and more broadly a certain (*transnational*) *will to participate in the Ukrainian struggle*. This is best exemplified by the post shared by a partner organisation and visible on the organisation's timeline:

> Sweden and its people actively continue to support and help Ukraine in its struggle for victory. It was this common goal that united our foundation with the "Help Ukraine in Gothenburg" Charitable Foundation.

> But . . . as soon as you start talking about the "Help Ukraine in Gothenburg" team, it is difficult to stop describing the motivation, strong spirit and will to change, the will to victory, the will to peace! We sincerely thank you for your steadfast position, principles and faith in the great future of Ukraine! (Hope UA 2023)

17 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
18 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.
19 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

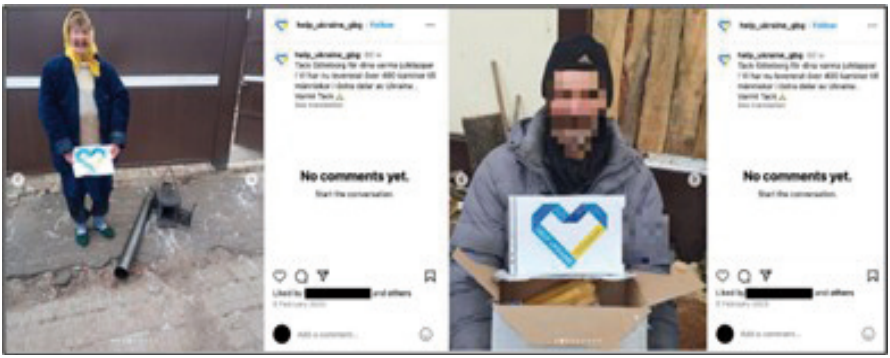
The two additional themes of *patriotism* and (*transnational*) *will to participate in the Ukrainian struggle* are reinforced by expressions like '💪We got your back mother Ukraine!' (HUG 2023g) and the use of patriotic symbols and slogans, e.g. the use of an emoji depicting the Ukrainian flag (🇺🇦, e.g. in HUG 2023n), or the use of the slogan 'glory to Ukraine' in its Ukrainian version 'Слава Україні!' (using visual content in e.g. HUG 2023d) or in its Latin alphabet transliteration 'Slava Ukraini' (e.g. HUG 2023h, 2023i) or other patriotic expressions, e.g. in artistic forms. An example is the poem 'When I am dead, bury me . . .' by Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko shared on the organisation's Instagram feed:

> To my Dear mother Ukraine 🇺🇦 . . .
> When I am dead, bury me
> In my beloved Ukraine,
> My tomb upon a grave mound high
> Amid the spreading plain,
> So that the fields, the boundless steppes,
> The Dnieper's plunging shore
> My eyes could see, my ears could hear
> The mighty river roar.
> When from Ukraine the Dnieper bears
> Into the deep blue sea
> The blood of foes . . . then will I leave
> These hills and fertile fields —
> I'll leave them all and fly away
> To the abode of God,
> And then I'll pray . . . But till that day
> I nothing know of God.
> Oh bury me, then rise ye up
> And break your heavy chains
> And water with the tyrants' blood
> The freedom you have gained.
> And in the great new family,
> The family of the free,
> With softly spoken, kindly word
> Remember also me. (HUG 2023n)

The themes emerging from the visual online content of the Instagram feed are related to a) *aid operations*, b) *ensure the most important social functions*, c) *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, d) *hybridity* and e) *direct contribution to the military defence system*. The definition of the organisation as a 'non-profit charity organisation . . . started . . . in response to Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine' is explicit part of the visual content (HUG 2022b), and refers to the *aid operation* theme.

In line with the observations covering the textual contents, most of the visual material revolve around two primary themes: *aid operations* and *ensure the most important social functions*. These posts predominantly depict the initiatives undertaken by the organisation aiming at (e.g.) supporting internally displaced people in Ukraine (Picture 1), and providing health services to those in need through mobile units (Picture 2), as illustrated in the following images:

Picture 1: Delivery of parcels to people in need



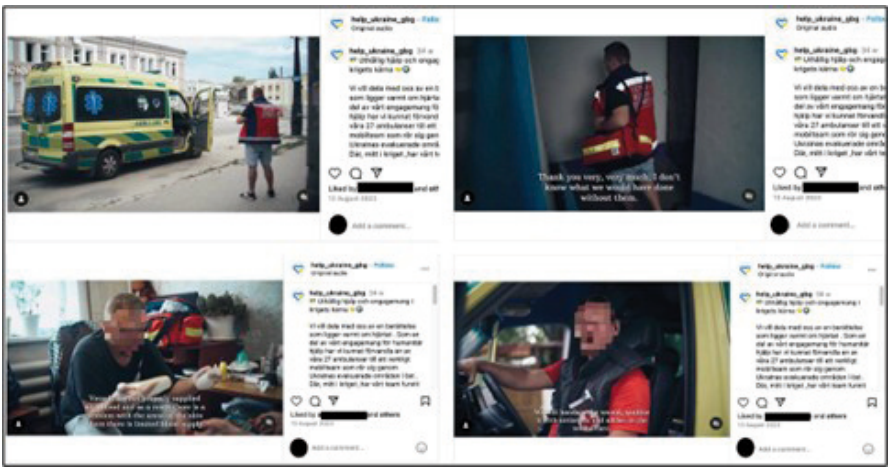
Source: HUG 2023c

In the visual content, the distinction among the different themes appears more blurred, especially considering the distinction between the themes of *aid operations* and *ensure the most important social functions* and the themes suggesting or implicating a degree of association with the Ukrainian military defence system, i.e. *indirect contribution to the military defence system*, *hybridity* and *direct contribution to the military defence system*. This is shown in some of the posts related to the *aid operations* theme, when comparable items were distributed to civilian institutions and personnel and groups of the national military defence system, as depicted for example in the posts shown in Picture 3.

The theme of *hybridity* is also noticeable in some of the collaborations developed by HUG with NGOs providing services and support to the military defence system, as depicted, for example, in Picture 4 and on the websites of the partner organisations themselves[20].

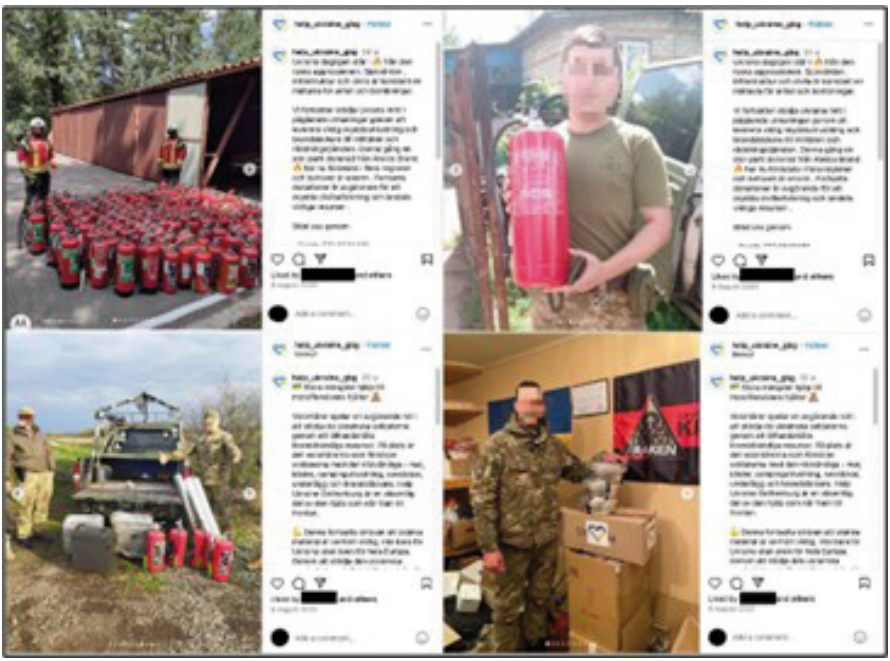
20 E.g. https://tacmednorth.com/en/about/, https://www.medbat.org.ua/en/about-pfvmh/

Picture 2: Provision of health services – still images from video published on Instagram



Source: HUG 2023m

Picture 3: Delivery of equipment supporting civilian institutions, and the national military defence system



Source: Top row pictures from HUG 2023l; bottom row pictures from HUG 2023k

Picture 4: NGOs providing services and support to the military defence system

Source: HUG 2023j

From the visual content, it feels safe to say that the emerging image is one of an NGO engaged in a wide range of aid operations supporting civilians and Ukrainian society and civil institutions, as well as the Ukrainian military defence system. This comprehensive approach may be relatable to the additional themes centred around symbols of *patriotism* and the *will to participate in the Ukrainian struggle*. These additional themes are exemplified for example by the use of patriotic symbols and slogans, e.g. the use of videos depicting the Ukrainian flag and the national anthem (e.g. HUG 2023n), or the use of the slogan 'glory to Ukraine' in its Ukrainian version 'Слава Україні!' (e.g. HUG 2023d).

Analysis and discussion

The first observation emerging from the research is that there is coherence across the various sources examined in this study. This is manifest considering: the internal coherence among interviews with key informants; the anchoring between online textual and visual contents, since the textual component often supports the visual material (Bouvier & Rasmussen 2022; Grange & Lian 2022); the overall internal coherence within the online content; and the comprehensive internal coherence between interviews and online content.

The second observation is that common themes have been identified in the analysis of the interviews and of the online textual and visual contents. These are a) *aid operations*, b) *ensure the most important social functions* and themes related to c) *patriotism* and d) *contribution to the military defence system*.

Based on the results of the research activities, and in line with previous scholarly observation (Cullen Dunn & Kaliszewska 2023; DIIS 2024), the organisation subject of the research was established as part of a wider effort of the Ukrainian and international civil society to respond to the humanitarian catastrophe caused by the Russian military aggression of Ukraine in early 2022. The driving force was the urgency of doing good, providing immediate humanitarian aid and assistance

to refugees fleeing the country, and those affected by the armed conflict inside Ukraine. After the initial phases characterised by chaos, the organisation was able to stabilise and establish long lasting partnerships in Sweden and Ukraine, securing a certain degree of both operational and financial sustainability and independence.

Both the interviews and online contents highlight the organisation's evolution over the course of two years, illustrating how its activities have been shaped according to the needs recorded on the ground during field visits, and through a network of partners and local sources. They also show how the organisation has been gradually focusing its activities on specific sectors, notably prioritising the support of basic needs and the provision of psychosocial support to adults and children in Sweden and Ukraine, supplying medical equipment and supporting the healthcare sector in Ukraine.

At this stage, it feels safe to say that the organisation has been established to answer the humanitarian imperative to 'bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, . . . to prevent and alleviate human suffering . . . to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being' (Pictet 1979: 4), at least partially in line with the humanitarian principle of humanity. Furthermore, the organisation operates without discrimination, based on the needs observed and reported on the ground, in line with the principle of impartiality (Pictet 1979). The wide range of funding resources and the network with diverse actors, e.g. civil society organisations, NGOs, and Ukrainian and Swedish private and public institutions, allow the organisation to ensure autonomy in its decision making while upholding relevant applicable national laws in line with the principle of independence.

The findings of the research activities reveal that since its inception, the organisation has been actively involved in the Ukrainian struggle, with patriotic values and ideals. But as Slim (2020b) puts it: 'political neutrality is not legally required under international humanitarian law[;] . . . [and] neutral humanitarianism is not necessarily ethically desirable when we see people as enemies for good reasons' (Slim 2020a). The scholar further argues that 'legally, operationally, and morally, we can take sides and still be humanitarians. . . . This all means that legally, operationally, and morally, we can take sides and still be humanitarians' (Slim 2020a), as various humanitarians did in the past (Slim 2020b).

Hence, by applying the assessment toolkit proposed by Schenkenberg van Mierop (2015), along with the frameworks by Gordon and Donini (2015) and Pringle and Hunt (2016), to characterise the values and *modus operandi* of the organisation as emerged from this initial analysis, it can be argued that the organisation could align with the criteria specific to the theoretical framework of new humanitarianism (for a problematisation of the potential dilution of the humanitarian identity, see DIIS [2024]).

However, the research activities provide a comprehensive overview of an additional component of the activities implemented by the organisation, illustrated through the themes connected to the indirect and direct contribution to the Ukrainian military defence system. This component includes the supply of (e.g.) 4x4 ambulances and special evacuation vehicles, tactical medical supplies (e.g. tourniquets, pressure bandages and other medical equipment), and other items to volunteer tactical medic organisations and directly to groups within the Ukrainian army active along the frontline. While arguing that neutrality is neither an essential nor a required feature of humanitarian actors, in his paper Slim (2020b) clarifies that 'the Geneva Conventions recognise a range of relief providers, most of whom are not politically neutral . . . like . . . military medics, and civilian associations of various kinds (though the law does require relief to be impartial; support the greatest human need; and not give "definite [military] advantage" to one side)' (Slim 2020a).

Whether the organisation's contribution to the Ukrainian military defence system constitutes a 'definitive [military] advantage' (Slim 2020a, 2022) from a legal perspective is beyond the scope of this work and would deserve further dedicated analysis. Nevertheless, the objective of this research is to identify the theoretical framework that better represents the approach followed by the organisation among humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD.

In its interim report on the orientation of TD and the design of civil defence, the Swedish Defence Commission (2023) defines three objectives qualifying the civil defence component within a TD approach that are relevant to the framework of this research. These objectives are: '[to] ensure the most important social functions, . . . [to] contribute to the capability of the military defence, [to] protect the civilian population, maintaining the will to defend and society's resilience against external pressures'[21] (4). While the contribution to maintain the most important social functions and the society's resilience, and the protection of the civilian populations are elements that can fall at least partially within the scope of (new) humanitarianism, the contribution to the capability of the military defence and to the will to defend, are at least specific to a TD approach, if not incompatible to the (new) humanitarian framework. These two elements mark a paradigm shift between (new) humanitarianism and TD, especially because of their different implications on the concept of humanitarian space.

While the provision of medical assistance to injured combatants is one of the founding principles that led to the development, negotiation and adoption of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols – not coincidentally the title of the first Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949 is *Convention (I) for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field* (Sassòli,

21 Original in Swedish. Author's translation.

Bouvier & Quintin 2011) – and of the genesis of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the difference emerging from the interviews and online content is that, in HUG's case, the support has a wider scope. It includes, for example, the direct provision of equipment and vehicles to one specific party to the conflict, rather than the independent, impartial and neutral provision of assistance to the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field. Further reinforcing this difference is the fact that HUG's operations are inspired by, and conducted with, a strong sense of *patriotism* and a desire to *contribute to the military defence* of Ukraine. While specific assessments and considerations regarding the actual adherence to humanitarian principles by individual National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are beyond the scope of this paper, it seems reasonable to state that this difference in principle marks a distinction between organisations involved in a TD mechanism and humanitarian or new humanitarian organisations.

Following this comprehensive analysis, it feels safe to argue that the contribution to the military defence system of Ukraine can constitute a problematic element within a (new) humanitarian framework. However, it does reflect a core characterising objective of a civilian defence component within a TD system, as outlined for example by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023). Hence the theoretical framework that better represents the approach followed by the organisation among humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, appears to be TD.

The TD framework, as a novel paradigm to characterise organisations implementing activities with an analogous *modus operandi* to the one outlined in this research, contributes to addressing, or at least to partially delimiting, issues connected to the concept of neutrality in humanitarian action and the consequent dilemmas surrounding humanitarian narratives. The competing narratives between international humanitarian actors and local aid organisations, highlighted by Moallin, Hargrave and Saez (2023), may be exacerbated by the conceptual shortcomings and the difficulties in finding adequate terminology to characterise organisations implementing hybrid activities through the traditional paradigms of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. The possibility of describing their approach as part of a TD mechanism offers a more nuanced overview of the different actors operating in the field and following different sets of values and principles.

At the same time, the TD framework as a novel paradigm to characterise certain aid organisations unveils further dilemmas. The interactions between aid organisations engaged in similar hybrid activities and humanitarians warrant further scholarly attention. They might contribute to the further erosion of the humanitarian space (Sida 2005), or at least to the reshaping of forms of civil-military cooperation on the battlefield (Franke 2006; Moses 2020; Roberts 2010), with potential ramifications, for example, on the understanding of humanitarian principles and the international humanitarian law obligations of parties to

the conflict (Bouchet-Saulnier 2015; Macintosh 2000). These aspects are critical given the evolving dynamics of global conflicts and the growing importance of humanitarian negotiations, e.g., for establishing humanitarian corridors or for humanitarian access (Cuscunà 2023). And while, in the context of Ukraine, a certain degree of overlap or blurriness between humanitarian and TD actors may be considered less problematic by countries and institutions acting in solidarity with Ukraine, a similar blurriness may pose significant challenges in other contexts. From this perspective, this study contributes to the debate surrounding the rising calls for localising and decolonising aid (IASC 2016), allowing for a critical problematisation of some potential challenges that these processes may pose.

This baseline study is potentially the first step for further research focusing on the social and institutional interplay between (new) humanitarians and TD defence actors. This appears to be a topical and critical moment, not only considering the current development of TD policies, for example in Sweden (MSB 2023; Swedish Defence Commission 2023; Forsberg 2024), but also the worrying trends of attacks against health workers and first responders recorded in Ukraine (WHO 2024), and the lessons that could be learned from them.

While in TD environments much attention is given to the establishment of coordination and cooperation mechanisms from a TD perspective with a focus on civil-military cooperation, this paper and the possible further research are characterised by a humanitarian angle, adding a distinctive layer of analysis with a multidisciplinary reach.

Conclusion

The first part of this paper outlined the historical backdrop and the previous research around the new wave of aid initiatives established in response to the armed conflict unfolding in Ukraine after the Russian military aggression in February 2022, and the resulting humanitarian crises. It also introduced the idea of specific conceptual shortcomings to characterise those organisations providing aid to civilians affected by the armed conflict, and at the same time contributing to the military defence system of one of the parties to the conflict, especially through the leading paradigms of humanitarianism and new humanitarianism. In an attempt to fill this gap, the concept of TD was introduced as a potential alternative.

The research shows that the organisation subject of this research was established after the Russian military aggression against Ukraine, and the consequent humanitarian crisis. Its primary purpose was to answer the humanitarian imperative addressing the most urgent needs of those affected by the armed conflict. The activities evolved and addressed different issues, with a certain degree of impartiality and independence, and with the goal of contributing to the Ukrainian struggle. Alongside the activities aimed at providing aid and support to the

civilian population affected by the armed conflict, the organisation contributed to the military defence system of Ukraine, providing tactical medical equipment and other supplies to the Ukrainian army and groups connected to the Ukrainian army.

Through the elements emerged in the analysis and discussion, it is possible to argue that the theoretical framework better representing the approach followed by the organisation among humanitarianism, new humanitarianism and TD, appears to be TD. This conclusion is determined by the activities of the organisation contributing to the military defence system of Ukraine that reflect the specific and significant defining elements of the civilian defence component of a TD system, as outlined by the Swedish Defence Commission (2023) and also by Ukrainian institutions (Fedorchak 2024). This conclusion appears to be relevant and also applicable to other organisations implementing similar activities in Ukraine and elsewhere.

Overall, this research contributes to the academic analysis of the complex and multifaceted developments of humanitarian and societal response to armed conflicts and crises, exploring the role played by the new wave of aid that emerged after the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022. This work establishes a baseline for possible further research centred around the interplay between these new actors, and the traditional humanitarian sector. This fits into the larger academic and humanitarian scholarship aimed at identifying patterns of change triggered or influenced by societies' responses to armed conflicts.

This study further contributes to the debate around the rising calls for localising and decolonising aid, making it possible to problematise some potential challenges that these processes may pose. This is crucial considering the efforts of the international community on these issues (e.g. IASC 2016), the patterns of attacks against ambulances and emergency teams identified in Ukraine (WHO 2024), and the fact that in Ukraine often high-risk operations are carried out by organisations implementing similar hybrid activities (DIIS 2024).

Focusing on the social and institutional phenomena that lay at the centre of the convergent boundary between (new) humanitarianism and TD is topical. These paradigmatic frameworks are shaping decisions and power dynamics across borders, institutions and communities. The international attention is focused on interpreting the events unfolding in and around Ukraine, redefining Ukrainian institutions and society. This is particularly relevant in Europe, and in the Baltic and Nordic countries, considering the current development of TD policies, e.g. in Sweden (MSB 2023; Swedish Defence Commission 2023; Forsberg 2024). And while much of the focus is on the establishment of coordination and cooperation mechanisms from a TD perspective, additional research characterised by a humanitarian angle would add a distinctive layer of analysis.

Tangible questions impacting the design and implementation of crises management plans and humanitarian operations arise. What legal implications do

activities involving the provision of aid to civilians and the contribution to the military defence of a party to the conflict have on the IHL obligations of conflict parties? What is the level of (in)compatibility between the (new) humanitarian system and organisations implementing such activities? What degree of partnership and/or complementarity can be envisaged between them?

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List of interviews

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Interview 3, Representative of HUG, 16 April 2024, Gothenburg, Sweden.
Interview 4, Representative of HUG, 18 April 2024, Gothenburg, Sweden.

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Research article

The Role of the European Parliament in EU Foreign Policy: Parliamentary Diplomacy and the Development of the EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly

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Abstract

This article examines the role of the European Parliament (EP) in EU foreign policy and parliamentary diplomacy through the lens of the social theory of functionalism. By focusing on the case of the EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly, the study discusses the forms of diplomacy developed by the EP in its relations with the Eastern Partnership countries. The study is based on qualitative research, including involved documents analysis and semi-structured interviews (23) and conducts a three-tier analysis of, first, social interactions, second, cultural patterns and, third, individual MEPs motivations. The article argues that EP parliamentary diplomacy goes beyond its formal competencies and contributes to EU foreign policy aims. The research indicates that parliamentary diplomacy serves the functions of parliamentary scrutiny and of obtaining accessible information directly from parliamentarians and civil society representatives in Eastern partner countries. The Euro-Nest inter-parliamentary institution provides a platform for ongoing socialisation and regional cooperation. European parliamentary diplomacy and the focus on the EU's specific foreign policy agenda (Eastern Partnership) is also linked to the individual motives of MEPs themselves.

Keywords: *parliamentary diplomacy, EuroNest, European Parliament, Eastern Partnership, Europeanisation*

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Introduction

Inter-parliamentary links have been increasing in recent decades, and the scholars stress that the involvement of legislatures, as well as other actors such as NGOs (Noutcheva 2015), in international issues should be encouraged (Kingah & Cofelice 2015) as it can contribute to reducing the 'democratic deficit' at the international level (Ruland & Carrapatoso 2015: 197).

Under the EU's latest ratification of the Lisbon Treaty (2009), the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy remains at the disposal of the member states, with only the member states retaining their veto power. However, the role of the European Parliament (EP) has been significantly strengthened in international affairs, especially in the development of international trade and other international agreements (Servent 2014; Meislova 2021; Bressanelli, Chelotti & Lehmann 2019), and in the distribution of funding to meet the EU's international programme objectives (Cardwell & Jančic 2019). Moreover, the European Parliament has for decades developed a network of inter-parliamentary assemblies (Luciano 2017; Petrova & Raube 2016), as well as bilateral inter-parliamentary relations with outside countries or regions (Vandecasteele 2015; Dri 2010). The EP also engaged in crisis management situations in foreign countries (Fonck 2018; Nitoiu & Sus 2016). All these tendencies show that the European Parliament is striving to become an active player in the development of EU foreign policy and is also contributing to the EU's representation at international level.

This article analyses the European Parliament's evolving diplomatic relations with the Eastern Partnership countries by focusing on the development and functions of the EuroNest interparliamentary assembly. The Eastern Partnership, as the EU's external policy, was launched in 2009. The six Eastern European Neighbourhood countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – are formally part of the Partnership, but Belarus' involvement has been very limited. The initiative aimed to build stronger economic and political relations with the post-Soviet countries, and from the outset proposed Europeanisation and integration without full membership in the European Union (Rakutiene 2014), requiring reforms linked to membership, and largely reflected the overall objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP 2004). Both the individual EU member states and the neighbourhood countries participating in the partnership have long interpreted the initiative itself and its ultimate objectives differently. While some saw the EaP as a kind of pre-accession programme (the aspiring countries and the EU member states that strongly support it), for others it was perceived as no more than another format for cooperation. However, when in 2014 Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova signed association agreements and

DCFTAs and reached visa free agreements with the European Union, it raised the question and dilemma as to what the Partnership's further ambition could be. In 2022, following the Russian armed attack on Ukraine, the European Union took the political decision to offer the prospect of EU membership to Ukraine and Moldova (in 2022), and later to Georgia (in 2023). This raises the further question of the appropriateness of the Eastern Partnership and the involvement of these countries in the format of regional cooperation once they are already part of the EU's enlargement policy.

In the context of this new geopolitical reality (Kilic 2024) and 'resurgence of Russian imperialism' (Pertiwi 2024: 66), this study is particularly relevant as the future of the Eastern Partnership region is not yet clear and there is an intense geopolitical struggle between major international players, including the EU. This case examines the role and functions of one of the EU's institutional actors – the European Parliament – in the context of the implementation of the EU's Eastern Partnership. As the European Parliament is one of the EU's most important legislative bodies, as well as the EU's only directly elected institution, it is important to examine its forms and role in order to find answers to how it contributes to EU foreign policy and diplomacy. The study also offers a new analytical perspective in the context of the existing academic literature on parliamentary diplomacy (Vandecasteele 2015; Petrova & Raube 2016), by analysing the EP's diplomacy through a functionalist social theory approach. While previous studies have mainly analysed EuroNest inter-parliamentary Assembly through the theoretical lens of socialisation and institutionalism, the present study applies the social theory of functionalism, forming an analytical model based on three factors: a) social interactions, b) cultural patterns and c) individual motivation. Based on this theory, the article aims to explore the role of the European Parliament and its diplomatic forms in the EU's Eastern Partnership. How can the European Parliament contribute to the development of the EU's foreign policy through parliamentary diplomacy and what are the incentives for it to do so?

The paper first analyses the academic literature, grouping together research that highlights the role and contribution of the EP in specific areas of EU external policy and the legal limits of its competences. The analysis then turns to the social theory of functionalism which is applied to the case study of the EuroNest Assembly. The third part is based on a three-tier analysis linked to a theoretical model to find out: (a) how the EP develops social interactions with the Eastern Partnership countries and which actors are involved; (b) whether and which cultural models, norms and values underpin the cooperation; and (c) to what extent and why the MEPs' own individual motivations are important for the development of parliamentary diplomacy. The paper argues that EP parliamentary diplomacy goes beyond its formal competencies and contributes to EU foreign policy aims.

Literature review: The role of the EP in EU foreign policy and parliamentary diplomacy

Legal competences of EP in external policies

The role of the European Parliament in EU policies has steadily increased throughout the process of European integration (Grau i Segu 2019; Rakutienė & Unikaitė-Jakuntavičienė 2020). Comparing research and academic discourse, a number of areas can be identified which analyse the role and influence of the European Parliament in the development of the EU's external relations (see Table 1). Under the legal competences of the European Parliament, as laid down in the Lisbon Treaty, the EP has an important legislative role (on par with the Council of the EU) in the approval of the EU budget and in the ratification of international agreements between the European Union and foreign countries. In these areas, the EP's legislative powers are symmetrical with those of the Council of the EU, as both institutions can reject a legislative act. Through these legislative and budgetary powers, the European Parliament generally seeks to increase its influence in EU foreign policy.

The European Parliament is directly involved in the distribution of EU funds to external regions and countries. These legislative powers of the European Parliament apply to development cooperation programmes (Cardwell & Jančic 2019) and to the allocation of EU funds in other policies (Kingah & Cofelice 2015). The budget approval procedure allows the European Parliament to bargain for the adoption of certain strategic EU foreign policy decisions and in the determination of the amount of funds allocated to them. Cardwell and Jančic (2019) concluded that the European Parliament has been able to significantly increase its role in development cooperation policy through the use of its budgetary powers and has increased its political influence in inter-institutional negotiations.

Another strand of research, which also highlights the increasing role of the EP, analyses the legal competences and influence of the European Parliament in international negotiations on trade agreements, association agreements or other international agreements with third countries through the consent procedure of the EU legislation. The high-profile case of the European Parliament's rejection of the EU-US SWIFT agreement in 2010 signalled to other countries the need to build and maintain a stronger relationship not only with the governments of the EU member states, but also with MEPs (Servent 2014). Ariadna Servent pointed out that this came as a great surprise to the EU's American partners, who had hoped that an agreement with the EU capitals would not lead to any major problems, but after the EP had rejected the original text of the treaty on the issue of data protection, renegotiations took place, and the US legislators came to the EP for negotiations (Servent 2014: 578). In this way, the EP has shown that its approval is not a given and that member states, including partner countries, need to pay more attention to the EP's position and to the negotiations with this

Table 1: The role of EP in shaping European external policies

Involvement	Legislative procedure within EU	Participants	Outcomes
Formal/Legally binding	Budget approval	European Parliament and EU Council	Legal Act Budget/fund allocations for EaP countries
Formal/Legally binding	Consent	European Parliament and EU Council	International agreements/Treaties- EU Association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia; Visa facilitation and Readmission agreements
Parliamentary diplomacy/ Legally non-binding	Consultation/none	MEPs and EaP MPs/Interparliamentary Assembly 'EuroNest'	Resolutions, institutionalisation, socialisation
Parliamentary diplomacy/ Legally non-binding	Consultation/none	MEPs and EaP MPs bilateral inter-parliamentary committees	Socialisation, exchange of information
Parliamentary diplomacy/ Legally non-binding	Consultation/none	MEPs and EaP MPs based on ideological ground- inter-party cooperations	Socialisation, exchange of information
Parliamentary diplomacy/ Legally non-binding	Consultation/none	MEPs, leaders, mediation missions	Mediation, crisis management

Source: Author

institution (Servent 2014). Similar studies on international negotiations (Meislova 2021), such as the Brexit process, have highlighted that MEPs have been very effective in strengthening their role in the negotiation process, taking part in key decisions throughout the process and even became 'quasi-negotiators' (Bressanelli, Chelotti & Lehmann 2019: 359).

The studies have thus identified the growing influence of the European Parliament in the European Union's international negotiations. These legislative and budgetary powers also encourage the European Parliament to become more involved in foreign policy processes and to develop a range of parliamentary

diplomacy tools – which enables them to build direct links with foreign partners (see Table 2).

EP role beyond legal competences: Parliamentary diplomacy

A growing body of academic literature and research examines the role of the EP in building relations with external partners through various forms of parliamentary diplomacy that have no real legal force and that go beyond the legal competences conferred on the EP by the EU Treaties (see Table 2 and Table 1). These forms of parliamentary diplomacy range from simply building diplomatic relations and networking to more impactful socialising and diplomatic missions in third countries (see Table 2). This field of study is a much less explored area of the EP's role in foreign affairs than the formal, legislative powers as outlined above. Scholars stress that more attention should be paid to studying these diplomatic tools of the European Parliament and their impact (Stavridis & Irrera 2015; Dri 2015; Fonck 2018), explaining how European parliamentary diplomacy can contribute to the development of the EU's foreign policy (Kingah & Cofelice 2015; Kostanyan & Vandecasteele 2015).

Table 2: Modalities and functions of parliamentary diplomacy: Literature review

Diplomacy	Parliamentary scrutiny	Institutionalisation	Socialisation	Mediation missions
exchange of information, creation of contacts and long-term links;	helps get information directly from foreign partners;	development of inter-parliamentary institutions, regular contacts, joint resolutions, positions;	Sharing, transferring or creating common norms, values, rules, practices;	mediation, crisis management missions where necessary.
Petrova and Raube 2016; Nitoiu and Sus 2016	Luciano 2017	Stavridis and Irrera 2015; Dri 2015	Kostanyan and Vandecasteele 2015	Fonck 2018; Nitoiu and Sus 2016

Source: Author

The European Parliament has set up a number of inter-parliamentary institutions to build foreign relations based on regional cooperation and multilateralism. Research on inter-parliamentary institutions tends to focus on the socialisation process as a determining factor (Kostanyan & Vandecasteele 2015), where the European Parliament builds relationships with delegates from non-EU countries

through multilateral parliamentary assemblies, aiming at democratisation and regional identity building (Luciano 2017). According to Luciano, such inter-parliamentary institutions become like a 'moral tribune' for openly promoting and defending the values of democracy, human rights and freedoms (Luciano 2017: 320). Socialisation is interpreted as a kind of educational process that seeks to transport and transfer European norms, values and certain rules to partner countries (Kostanyan & Vandecasteele 2015). Such a process aims to socialise parliamentarians from other countries and to transfer European experiences. However, other authors stress that socialisation is not always successful and that, besides socialisation, other important factors in the development of an inter-parliamentary institution are institutionalisation and diplomacy, where the aim is simply to exchange information and build relations.

Clarissa F. Dri (2010), in analysing the EP's relations with the Mercosur Parliament, highlighted the importance of the process of institutionalisation in explaining the extent to which the EP's 'institutional mimesis' has taken place in an attempt to replicate some of the institutional elements of the EU's integration model in the Latin American region. She stressed that the links with the EP had helped strengthen the parliamentary dimension and create a Mercosur Parliamentary Assembly that replicated certain European elements, but that this institutional engineering had also been subject to the limitations of the political culture of the region (Dri 2010). Irina Petrova and Kolja Raube (2016) analysed the case of the EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and concluded that institutionalisation, socialisation and parliamentary diplomacy are the main forces determining such cooperation, and that the latter is the most decisive factor in their view, while socialisation was limited. They argue that parliamentary diplomacy – based on the development of inter-parliamentary relations, where the aims are simply to exchange information and get to know the partners better, and not necessarily centred on the transfer of EU norms and values – is a significant determining factor (Petrova & Raube, 2016: 37). Compared to traditional executive diplomacy, parliamentary diplomacy has a greater variety of diplomatic tools (Luciano 2017), complements traditional diplomacy, encompasses a broader political role (Nitoiu & Sus 2016) and can be useful where traditional diplomacy does not work.

European parliamentary diplomacy is based on the creation of multilateral assemblies, also on the development of bilateral inter-parliamentary committees and the development of inter-party relations. Political meetings on an ideological basis (EPP; Socialists, etc.) take place before the plenary sessions of the inter-parliamentary assembly or at other times, and this model is linked to European culture and is another European practice that aims to be transferable to regions outside the EU (Luciano 2017). This has been identified as a process of political family building, whereby EP political groups build links on an ideological basis with political parties outside the EU (Petrova & Raube 2016).

Another important function of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy is its mediation missions to third countries to help resolve crisis situations and political conflicts. The European Parliament has already undertaken such diplomatic mediation missions on several occasions. Daan Fonck has argued that the role of the European Parliament was instrumental in the resolution of the Macedonian political crisis in 2015–2017, when, through mediation missions and socialising parliamentary diplomacy, the EP facilitated the Pržino Agreement between the Macedonian government and opposition parties (Fonck 2018). A similar political crisis between ruling and opposition forces took place in Ukraine under Viktor Yanukovych. In order to help resolve this crisis, a two-leader Cox-Kwasniewski mission was sent to Ukraine (2012–2013), which was seen as an instrument of the EP's diplomacy and was aimed not only at helping to resolve the crisis, but also at promoting the EU's objectives (Nitoiu & Sus 2016). Although these prominent political leaders were not MEPs, the EP carried out a lot of technical work, assisted the mission with political advisors from the EP Secretariat and prepared the mission agenda (Nitoiu & Sus 2016).

The academic literature review revealed that the role and involvement of the European Parliament in the development of EU foreign policy goes beyond its formal legislative powers, but seeks to contribute to the EU's normative and soft power objectives through parliamentary diplomacy, directly engaging with foreign partners in a variety of formats, through its socialisation, institutionalisation, political mediation and other diplomatic objectives. It is also noted that the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and other forms of parliamentary diplomacy can serve as an important tool for parliamentary scrutiny and monitoring, as the parliamentary dimension is complementary to international inter-governmental partnerships and often has a similar political agenda (Luciano 2017).

The interparliamentary interactions: Theory of functionalism and research methods

The study applies functionalism theory to explain the range of instruments of European Parliamentary Diplomacy, its functions, the international interactions it generates and the factors that determine them.

Social theory of functionalism

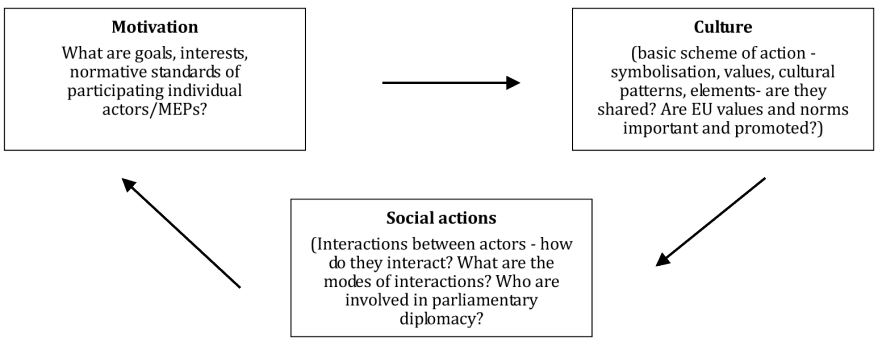
Functionalism, as a social theory, focuses on the role of a particular institution, the system of social interactions it creates and its relationship with certain cultural elements, and it searches for its place, its purpose and its functions in the international social system. Developers of functionalist social theory, such as Talcott Parsons and other scholars who have interpreted his work (Ormerod 2020), explain that functionalist theory focuses on the social interactions between actors and the cultural values that govern them, specifically focusing on how social

interactions lead to the formation of certain values and other cultural elements, and identifies the importance of the level of subjectivity (Selznick 1961) – an individual actor's motivations.

The sociological theory of functionalism explains the system of social interactions by distinguishing the importance of cultural elements in the social system and the factors determining the motivation of actors. 'Social action is depicted as the interaction between two (or more) organic actors in the context of the physical environment and the relevant culture' (Ormerod 2019: 1875). In the international framework, social interactions include various forms of interactions between different international actors. The analysis of the EuroNest case study will seek to distinguish the forms of interactions, the formats of cooperation and the actors involved.

Cultural elements are important because without them social interactions would be meaningless (Ormerod 2019). Culture includes various symbolic, traditional cultural elements. The symbols, standards that are chosen to guide activities and interactions are called values (Ormerod 2019). The literature review showed that in most cases European parliamentary diplomacy is carried out for socialisation purposes, with the aim of transmitting European norms and cultural institutional elements. In this case, the research on EuroNest will seek to find out to what extent this is relevant for the development of parliamentary diplomacy with Eastern Partnership countries. Are European norms and values promoted and which ones?

Figure 1: Building inter-parliamentary institution: Analytical framework



Source: Author

Motivation is also highlighted as a crucial factor in Parsons' social theory in explaining the action system (Ormerod 2019). Motivation, the actor's ego, refers to the goals, interests and normative standards of individual actors, explaining what determines actors' motivation for certain actions and activities within

a particular social system (Ormerod 2019). In this case, the aim will be to find out to what extent the individual motivations of individual MEPs matter in the development of forms of parliamentary diplomacy, and how they manifest themselves. How do MEPs themselves interpret the meaning and significance of inter-parliamentary diplomacy?

Thus, when analysing social interactions as a structure, it is important to look at how these three elements work in an integrated way (see Figure 1): the individual actors, the system of interactions between the actors and the cultural models – the value system (Ormerod 2019).

Operationalisation, data and methods

This study is mainly based on a qualitative research strategy in relation to the social theory of functionalism. Several qualitative research methods were used to analyse the selected EuroNest case study: document analysis, content analysis and semi-structured interviewing. Considering the perspective of functionalism of social theory and in order to operationalise the theoretical assumptions in an empirical case study (see Table 3), the research asks the following questions:

1. What kind of social interactions are developed in the EP's relations with the Eastern Partnership countries? What are their functions?
2. Are cultural elements important? Does the EP seek to transmit or create certain cultural norms and values through such diplomatic social interactions?
3. How important are the individual motivations of MEPs, what are the factors that determine them and how do MEPs themselves explain the benefits and functions of these forms of diplomacy?

First, the forms, scope and means of parliamentary diplomacy developed by the European Parliament were analysed by examining EP and EuroNest documents (rules of procedure), and by collecting data from the official websites of the European Parliament, specific political groups of the EP and the EuroNest website. At this stage, it was important to find out how the social interactions take place, how regular they are and which actors are involved. The study covered the period since the launch of the EU's Eastern Partnership (2009) and therefore involved the process of preparing for the establishment of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly and related issues. Next, the subsequent EuroNest case study covered all adopted EuroNest resolutions (54 in total) from the first plenary session convened in 2011 until 2024. A content analysis was carried out in order to find out what specific issues are most frequently highlighted in these resolutions, to what extent they emphasise the norms and values highlighted in the EU's global strategy, such as multilateralism, regional cooperation and the contexts in which they are promoted, as well as the normative goals of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which are considered to be the norms of the European

Table 3: Operationalisation, data and methods

Level of analysis	Focus	Data	Methods
1. Social interactions	Forms, intensity, frequency and scope of social interactions, actors involved, models of how cooperations take place	EuroNest Assembly founding documents, rules of procedure (2), EP, EuroNest and EP political groups' websites, Collected data of semi-structured interviews (sample:23)	Documents' analysis Semi-structured interviewing
2.Cultural patterns	Values, norms, symbols – identification of specific norms, values that guide EuroNest cooperation, number of mentions of norms and values	EuroNest Resolutions (Samples: 54), Collected data of semi-structured interviews (sample: 23) Freedom House data (scores of EaP countries)	Content analysis (manual reading and Word Cloud) Semi-structured interviewing Secondary analysis of statistical data
3.Individual motivations	Motivation, attitudes of MEPs, linkage to national interests and identification of other factors of motivations, calculations linked to national delegations	EP and EuroNest websites data Collected data of semi-structured interviews (sample: 23)	Content analysis (manual reading, authors own calculations) Semi-structured interviewing

Source: Author

foreign policy, and the cultural elements of European integration (Smith 2011). The content analysis by identifying and calculating mentions of specific norms, values and cultural patterns in the resolutions were based on a manual reading of the documents and Word Cloud tool.

Semi-structured interviewing with MEPs, their advisers and diplomats working in the EP Secretariat, was one of the most important methods as the data from the interviews was used in all stages of the analysis. The interviews were carried out at different points in time in 2011, 2014, 2019 and 2020. This was linked to

specific political events – the launch of the EuroNest Assembly in 2011, the signing of the association agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia in 2014, and the EP elections in 2019. In the selection of the respondents, contact and interviews were sought from MEPs actively involved in EuroNest activities (leadership, committees), who represent different political groups, and their advisors were contacted if they refused. Interviews were also sought and conducted with diplomats, permanent staff of the EP who work with EuroNest and other inter-parliamentary committees in the development of the EP's relations with Eastern Partnership countries. The interviews were based on a semi-structured approach, with specific questions, but also raising other issues related to the respondents' answers. A total of 23 interviews were collected with representatives working in the relevant field of the EP's diplomacy. The MEPs belonged to/represent various political groups (mainly EPP, Social Democrats, Liberals and Greens). The aim of these interviews was to find out how the creators of this parliamentary diplomacy see their contribution and role in developing these forms of inter-parliamentary diplomacy. All interviewees are coded, in order to preserve the discretion promised to them, with only the date of the interview and the institution they represent. The duration of the individual interviews ranged from 20 to 70 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted at the European Parliament in Brussels (18), the rest online or by phone. The breakdown of respondents was MEPs (11), MEPs' advisers (3), other secretariat and committee advisers (9). The following empirical analysis is based on three phases: 1. social interactions, 2. cultural patterns, 3. individual motivations, in looking for the answers to the above raised research questions.

Institutionalisation of social interactions with EaP countries: Developing 'EuroNest' Assembly

The EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly was established as the parliamentary pillar of the EU's Eastern Partnership, alongside the other two pillars of intergovernmental cooperation and civil society (see Table 4). As it is depicted in Table 4, the Eastern Partnership seeks to build an institutional architecture for international partnership between the EU and EaP countries that reflects the EU's institutional experience, with summits at the intergovernmental level, meetings of ministers from different fields, meetings of diplomats, bureaucrats and experts, including at the regional and municipal levels. The EU has also created a civil society pillar, thanks to both financial and political incentives, bringing together several hundred (over 250) EaP NGOs, which are thus not only creating regional networks for mutual cooperation, but are also encouraged to contribute to the implementation and monitoring of the political agenda and the reforms in the EaP countries (EaP Civil Society Forum 2024; Interview 12 2014). In this way, the social transnational interactions created by the different institutions of the European Union go beyond the traditional diplomatic forms and create

links with actors from different fields and with wider civil society by giving them a voice (Rakutiene 2014).

The European Parliament has taken the initiative to create an inter-parliamentary cooperation pillar, based on the formula of 60 MEPs + 60 MPs from EaP countries (10 MPs representing a country). However, the process for Belarus' membership was protracted and it took almost two years of discussions to convene the first session of EuroNest (Interviews 7, 8, 9 2014). In 2011, the first EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly was finally held without Belarusian representatives. Throughout the selected period of this study, the status quo remained and the issue of Belarus' membership of EuroNest was not resolved.

Table 4: Three pillars of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) of the European Union

Inter-governmental dimension	Inter-parliamentary dimension	Inter-civil societal dimension
Summit (heads of states of 27 EU MS and 6 EaP countries) Summit once in two years	EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly (60+50): annual plenary since 2011	Eastern Partnership civil society forum: annual general assembly of regional platform since 2012
Annual Foreign Affairs Ministers sittings and other areas Ministers meetings	Euronest committees (4) – each meets twice a year	Involves over 250 NGOs from the Eastern Partnership countries.
Bi-annual sittings of diplomats and bureaucrats of the EU and EaP countries in thematic platforms (4)	Working groups (3)	Working thematic groups (4) bottom-up regionalism, societal networking
Conference of Regional and local authorities for the Eastern Partnership		Steering committees and national platforms (6)

Source: Author

EP social interactions with the EaP countries

Social theory of functionalism, which examines the meaning and function of the institution, focuses on how, in what ways and with what frequency social interactions take place, and which actors are involved. In examining the activities of EuroNest and the European Parliament's social interactions with representatives of the Eastern Partnership countries, at least a few forms can be identified, which are analysed below (Interviews 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 2014): a) multilateral interactions, b) interactions based on political ideology, c) interactions with representatives of civil society.

Multilateral interactions

When the EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly was finally set up, it was found that the formula of 60 MEPs + 10x6 MPs from each Eastern Partnership country actually works on the basis of 60 + 50, as Belarusian MPs do not participate, which creates a majority of MEPs within the EuroNest (Petrova and Raube, 2016). The Parliamentary Assembly meets annually in a main plenary session, where it adopts non-legally binding resolutions, recommendations and opinions addressed to the Eastern Partnership intergovernmental level. The rules of the EuroNest Assembly specify (2018 amendment, Article 3) that the Assembly seeks to play an advisory, monitoring and oversight role in matters related to the Eastern Partnership activities. It is also noted that the Assembly's annual plenary meetings are to be held in conjunction with and prior to the date of the Eastern Partnership Intergovernmental Summit, in order to propose recommendations (Rules of Procedure, Article 7) to the executives.

The Assembly has a Bureau of presidents and two co-presidents, one representing the EP and the other representing the Eastern Partnership countries. Both have equal status in the Assembly and are selected separately by the EP and the EaP countries. The Bureau of the vice-presidents, which is responsible for various organisational aspects, is also mirrored by four representatives each from the EP and the EaP countries. The plenary meetings of the Assembly also take place alternately in Brussels (EP) or in one of the Eastern Partnership countries. This is a different model compared to the intergovernmental level of the Eastern Partnership, where all summits were held either in Brussels or in EU member states.

The Rules note that EuroNest members 'may also organise themselves within the framework of their own political families within the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly' (EuroNest, Rules of Procedure 2018: Article 2). This reflects an aspiration to develop parliamentary practices similar to those of the EP itself, where MEPs organise themselves into political groups based on ideology but this has not yet been achieved. The Rules of Procedure (Article 11) stipulate that in plenary sessions, EuroNest members sit in alphabetical order, but not by national delegation. Meetings are deemed to be held if at least one-third of the members of each component of the Assembly (MEPs and the Eastern Partnership) are present and decisions are taken by a simple majority of the members present (EuroNest, Rules of Procedure 2018: article 16).

The EuroNest Assembly has formed four committees, which reflects the main areas of cooperation (1. Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy; 2. Economic Integration, Legal Approximation and Convergence with EU Policies; 3. Energy Security; 4. Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Culture and Civil Society), and meet more than every six months (at least twice a year, and one of the committee meetings is held in conjunction with the Plenary session). EuroNest Rules of Procedure (2018 amendments, article 2) defines that committees

are composed of a maximum of 30 members each -15 (MEPs) +15 (MPs from EaP countries). Each committee has two chairs and four vice-chairs, again on a mirror basis (MEPs and EaP representatives). As a rule, each EuroNest member chooses one of the committees to join. The rules (Article 6) also stipulate that members of committees may be appointed rapporteurs, i.e. drafters and rapporteurs of the document/report (similar to the EP practice). In 2023, two pairs of co-rapporteurs (L. Mazylis, EEP and I. Krulko, Ukraine MP; M. Michels, MEP GUE/NGL and M. Karapetyan, Armenia MP) worked on reports which in the 2024 EuroNest plenary session were issued as resolutions.

This institutional engineering of EuroNest's multilateral interactions indicates that the European Parliament seeks to transfer its institutional practices wherever possible, taking them as a model. It is also noticeable that the institutional representation mirrored is based on the principle of 'co-ownership', which is a defined principle of the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004). The European Parliament also has more opportunities to get to know the legislative institutions of the EaP countries, as plenary sessions are not only held in Brussels, but also in the EaP countries (see Table 5). This also raises the awareness of the European Parliament in the countries of the region, as the plenary sessions organised receive more local media coverage. The majority of interviewed respondents (Interviews 2, 4 2011; Interviews 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 2014; Interviews 17, 18 2019) believe that it helps foreign parliamentarians and publics to get in touch with the EU. 'Thanks to the European Parliament, they get a good partner and mediator, but we should not be under the vain illusion that we will quickly step in and solve things that governments have to deal with' (Interview 2 2011).

Social interactions based on political ideology

Another form of diplomacy carried out by the European Parliament is inter-party relations, building ties based on ideological lines. In this case, the political groups of the European Parliament, mainly the major ones – the European People's Party, the Liberal Alliance and the European Socialist Group – are forging links with third-country political parties of a similar ideology, across the borders of EuroNest. Some respondents define this as the creation of some kind of daughter parties – political family groups (Interview 1 2011, Interviews 5, 6, 10, 11 2014).

> The political groups in our chamber are very flexible in their approach to dealing with partners in the East. The political parties are free to act, especially the three largest ones – the EPP, the Socialist Alliance and the Liberal Parties – they represent, so to speak, majority of the whole Parliament and in almost all countries, strategic neighbours, they have their own affiliated parties, which are associate members of the EP parties. They are formally part of those clusters. (Interview 1 2011)

However, looking at the websites of all the main political groups in the EP, only the EPP publicly identifies its so-called daughter parties, the partners in the Eastern Partnership countries (more than 14 EaP political parties in total) and it is difficult to identify the frequency of such interactions (EPP 2024). The other EP political groups do not openly distinguish their links with specific parties, but emphasise that they have representatives in EuroNest or other inter-parliamentary committees. On this basis, it can be argued that the EPP political grouping has developed the most such cross-party links.

The advisor of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs explained that such 'party family' contacts have been quite intense with representatives of Georgia and Moldova, but this also depends on the political situation in the country concerned as the Eastern Partnership countries are characterised by a democratic decline (Interview 6 2014). Thanks to such contacts, the European Parliament is engaged in a certain amount of networking, strengthening communication links with political parties in third countries, exchanging information and seeking to exert a certain political influence (Interview 4 2011, Interviews 17, 18 2019). It is stronger if the third country is seeking closer relations and association with the European Union (Interview 1 2011, Interviews 5, 6 2014). Such links are most often established with countries that aim to democratise and Europeanise their political systems (Interview 18 2019). On the other hand, respondents also highlighted a case where such ties have increased divisions within the European Parliament itself, with the political crisis in Ukraine under Yanukovych rule in 2011, during political drama over the imprisonment of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

> We have noticed that there is also disagreement in the European Parliament on Ukraine. There was a very big debate here internally, and the Ukrainians wanted to take advantage of this to 'divide and rule' us even more, and even managed to postpone one negative declaration against Ukraine. It was the only country that was able to do that. At the third attempt it was finally accepted, but the important thing was that our own Socialists [Socialist Group in the European Parliament] and the EPP [Christian Democrat Group in the European Parliament] realised that they were being manipulated by Ukraine, and that we were not helping Ukraine at all in this way. (Interview 1 2011)

Such examples illustrate the international partnerships that have been forged and the consequences of mutual socialisation, where not only the EP seeks to influence EaP politics, but representatives of political parties from EaP countries seek to shape the views of individual EP political groups.

Social interactions with civil society organisations

One of the distinctive features of the European Parliament's diplomacy is its strong focus and the desire to establish and maintain regular contacts with civil society

organisations in foreign countries (Interview 3 2011). The respondents explained that it has become something of a traditional feature of European parliamentary diplomacy and is carried out in several ways (Interview 12 2014; Interview 23 2020):

- Meetings are held in partner countries when MEPs visit the country;
- Representatives of civil society from foreign countries are invited to attend European Parliament meetings and events;
- Representatives of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum speak at the plenary sessions of the EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly.

These social interactions establish regular contacts and communication with representatives of civil society as the European Parliament seeks to hear voices other than the formal position of governments and legislators (Interview 18 2019), and also seeks to promote dialogue between the governmental and non-governmental sectors, which is often very limited in weak democracies or transition countries (Interview 2 2011), and is non-existent in authoritarian states. The EuroNest resolutions also highlight the need to build and continuously strengthen dialogue with civil society organisations. As stated in the resolution, the Eastern Partners should involve civil society in 'regional dialogue and cooperation, in order to offer a fresh perspective on a variety of topics, including the promotion of democracy, economic reforms, trade, sectoral cooperation, gender equality . . . and the fight against corruption' (EuroNest 2012a: 2). It has become practice for a representative of the Civil Society Pillar of the Eastern Partnership to address each EuroNest Plenary Session and to express societal perspective (EuroNest 2021). In the case of Belarus, although its MPs do not participate in EuroNest formats, its civil society representatives and opposition leaders are given a voice during EuroNest sessions. For example, Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tsikhanouskaya gave speeches at the 9th, 10th and 11th EuroNest sessions (EuroNest 2021; EuroNest 2024). This practice of European parliamentary diplomacy promotes dialogue between the government and civil society, gives a voice to different actors and helps the EP to gather information on the situation in different countries from different sources (Interview 3 2011). As an MEP involved in EuroNest noted:

> Here is a great platform. I cannot imagine that the European Commission or the European Council could perform the function that the European Parliament does here. For example, even yesterday, representatives of NGOs from Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine gathered here in Brussels and had the opportunity to express their position on the TRIO initiative, on the developments in the Eastern Partnership because they feel stagnation, and they had the opportunity to speak on many other important issues. We need to work purposefully with these countries and with the European Commissioners responsible for this area. This is the function of Parliament – to spread ideas. (Interview 18 2019)

The practice of parliamentary diplomacy within EuroNest thus provides a platform for regular contacts and exchange of information, networking and socialising not only with the legislatures of the Eastern Partnership countries, but also with civil society representatives, NGOs.

Cultural patterns: Focus on norms and values

Creating a culture of cooperation has been a challenging pursuit in the development of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly since its first steps. According to the respondents, the first EuroNest session held in 2011 was not successful and no resolution was adopted (Interview 3 2011).

'It ended not only with no results (no resolution was adopted) but also with real physical battles between Armenians and Azerbaijanis' (Interview 3 2011).

'We realized that it would take a very long time to work with the political culture of our colleagues so that they would understand that the common interest is more important . . . than to fight with each other. The report contained a lot of good agreements on visas, on energy, but this was blocked by one problem due to the frozen conflict' (Nagorno Karabakh) (Interview 1 2011).

Thus, after this experience of the first plenary session of EuroNest, the EP had to rethink and re-evaluate its cooperation strategy in order to be able to take joint decisions at later stages (Shyrokykh 2020). As shown in Table 5 – from 2011 to 2024, EuroNest convened 11 plenary sessions. In the subsequent plenary sessions, between 4 to 7 resolutions were adopted, which can be divided into at least three groups according to the themes and content of the resolutions (see Table 5): a) resolutions highlighting norms and values related to democratisation, human, political rights and the rule of law; b) economic convergence and approximation to EU law; and c) focus on common interests, mostly in energy issues, energy security and regional security. Energy policy is identified as a common regional interest between the EaP countries and the European Union.

Promotion of democracy and human rights

Democracy and the application of democratic standards to EuroNest participating countries was set as a norm and a value shaped by the EP from the very beginning of the creation of EuroNest (Interviews 5, 6 2014; Interview 17 2019). It was the reason why Belarus was not invited to join EuroNest and it took such a long time to start it. The membership of Belarusian parliamentarians in the Assembly has been a widely debated and controversial issue in the EP and has not yet been resolved. Belarus is considered to be one of the participants in the EU's Eastern Partnership and interviewees stated that the multilateral platform was designed to include Belarus. However, the interviews indicate that at the time of the creation of the Parliamentary Assembly there was no consensus in the European Parliament across different political groups as the positions were

Table 5: Outcomes of EuroNest Plenary sessions

Date	Place	Number of issued resolutions	The focus of resolutions Norms and values reflected in the resolutions
2011	Strasbourg (France)	0	-
2012	Baku (Azerbaijan)	5	Democracy; Media freedom; Human rights; political rights; Trade approximation; Energy security; Civil society involvement
2013	Brussels (Belgium)	4	Regional security; Approximation of national legislation with EU; Energy security; Poverty and social inclusion
2015	Yerevan (Armenia)	6	Partnership; Infrastructural cooperation; Energy security and efficiency; Cultural dialogue; Human rights, humanity; Regional security
2016	Brussels (Belgium)	5	Human rights; Regional security; Energy markets; Education cooperation
2017	Kyiv (Ukraine)	7	Media freedom; Energy cooperation; Women rights; Security; Human rights in conflict zones
2018	Brussels (Belgium)	7	Regional Security; Energy sustainability; Political rights; Energy cooperation and community
2019	Tbilisi (Georgia)	5	Democracy; digitalisation; Approximation in the energy sector; Education reforms; Trio plus cooperation
2020	Not convened/covid pandemics		
2021	Brussels (semi-remote mode) Belgium	4	Democracy; Cooperation and synergy (Education and economy); Energy efficiency
2022	Not convened		
2023	Chisinau Moldova	7	Democracy; economic development; Green energy; energy security; Approximation of vaccination programmes; EU integration; Peace
2024	Brussels (Belgium)	4	Peace; Children's rights; regional security; Partnership/EU integration

Source: Author, based on EuroNest official website information (2011–2024)

clearly divergent on Belarussian membership due to undemocratic elections in the country in 2010 and Alexander Lukashenko's rule. The EP Socialists were more open to Belarusian MP membership, but the majority of MEPs were more opposed to it (Interviews 5, 6 2014).

> Various possible formulas were discussed. One idea was to invite part of the Belarusian parliament and part of the opposition, but in the end, it was decided not to invite them at all, but to leave them with ten seats to be reserved for the future in case of democratic parliamentary elections in Belarus. (Interview 6 2014)

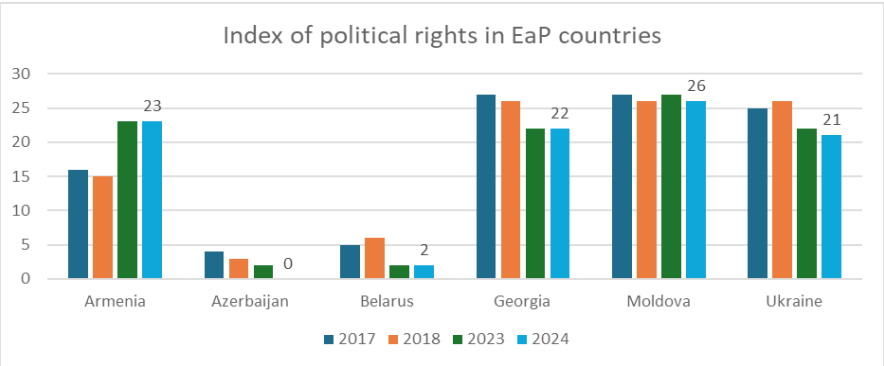
Referencing the social theory of functionalism, which suggests focusing on analysing how norms guide social interactions, this is an example of how the shaped norm, value – democracy – guided a decision and principle of social interactions when it was decided to include five partners from EaP parliaments instead of six. The agenda of promoting democratisation, human rights issues and the legal approximation to the EU are the themes discussed at each plenary session and often expressed as key cultural values and norms (see Table 5; Metsola 2023). The EuroNest resolution adopted in 2023 states that democratic governance should be improved in all Eastern Partnership countries:

> Whereas the governance situation is different in every Eastern Partnership (EaP) country, but significant improvements could be achieved in all of them, in particular by implementing reforms in public administration and the justice sector, by introducing more efficient policies to fight corruption and by enhancing transparency and democratic accountability. (EuroNest Resolution 2023: 4)

Therefore, the resolution explicitly links the democratisation agenda to the implementation of reforms. The respondents underlined that the EU's Eastern Partnership is based on Europeanisation and that EuroNest also contributes to this process (Interviews 12, 13 2014; Interviews 17, 18 2019). As one MEP explained: 'This European School that we are teaching them, as part of a wider Europeanisation process, is very useful. Europe sees that it can benefit more from working with these countries because markets are opened, cultural exchanges are promoted and there is an exchange of people' (Interview 17 2019). This reflects the EU's ambition to build cooperation linked to European cultural values and norms, based on the socialisation and approximation processes. However, more than a decade of cooperation shows that the EaP countries have not made much progress in this area and are still struggling in democratisation (see Figure 2).

The Parliamentary Assembly also focuses on human rights (Resolution on the N. Savchenko case, EuroNest 2016), political freedoms, opposition and civil society issues (see Table 5). The European Parliament has paid particular attention

Figure 2: Index of political rights in Eastern Partnership countries



Source: Author retrieved from Freedom House (index of political rights – 0 to 40 (the most free). Previous data is not comparable as different methodology was used.

to Ukraine in this area during the negotiations on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the DCFTA under Mr Yanukovych's rule, and during the trial of opposition leader Mrs J. Tymoshenko (EuroNest 2012d, Resolution on the situation of Y. Tymoshenko). The EuroNest Assembly highlighted these issues by drawing attention to the political persecution of the opposition (EuroNest 2012d, Interview 13 2014).

Socialisation and promotion of regional cooperation

Most of the MEPs and experts interviewed highlighted the socialising function of the Parliamentary Assembly (Interviews 5, 6 2014): while some put more emphasis on the promotion of European norms and values, based on Europeanisation (Interviews 18 2019), others stressed the need for training in regional cooperation and the transfer of diplomatic and political culture experience in this area (Interview 1, 2, 3 2011). Thus, regional cooperation has become a kind of norm to be shaped, an aspiration and one of the most important functions of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly.

'They need to be trained in regional cooperation . . . and this is where regional cooperation takes time' (Interview 17 2019).

The MEPs and experts interviewed stressed that the Assembly helps promote cooperation between countries in order to transfer the political culture of multilateral cooperation to the region (Interview 13 2014). Respondents highlighted this as an important function of an inter-parliamentary institution in terms of building a sense of community and consolidating the principles of regionalism and regional cooperation (Interviews 17, 18, 19, 2019). This is what the EU Global Strategy identifies as one of the principles of EU foreign policy. However, it is worth noting that these objectives of building regionalism and regional

cooperation, which are also considered important elements of the EU's model of governance and culture, were more pronounced in the first years of the Assembly's existence, and were highlighted in several of the resolutions that were adopted – stressing that creation of regional markets (EuroNest 2013), regional integration and trade would contribute to more effective economic governance, poverty reduction and human capital development (EuroNest 2012b; EuroNest 2013). However, more than a decade after the establishment of this interparliamentary institution, it can be stated that the objective of regionalism and regional cooperation involving all the countries of the region is very difficult to achieve, due to the differing interests of the countries involved in the partnership. It is also important to note that the agreements opening up EU markets and programmes have been signed bilaterally between the EU and the EaP country in question (association agreements, DCFTAs, visa agreements, etc.). Legal institutionalisation thus took place in a bilateral format.

Recently, two distinct groups have emerged: a) Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the remaining countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan (with Belarus still on the sidelines), due to the different aspirations of these countries in terms of their geopolitical orientation and their Europeanisation goals. The countries in the first group seek to become full EU members and Europeanise as soon as possible, while the second group seeks cooperation only where common interests can be found. For most of the EaP countries, therefore, the multilateral cooperation forum has little relevance. Ukraine and Moldova have moved from partners to candidates (from partnership to enlargement) with EU candidate status in 2022 and Georgia in 2023, and although negotiations have not yet started, national reforms and how they will be perceived by the EU are more important for full membership for each of them and regional cooperation is relevant insofar as it can help achieve the objectives of Euro-integration and is therefore more likely to be within the first group. The name TRIO ('Eastern Partnership Plus model', promoted by the EP) was coined in the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly to distinguish this group. It can thus be observed that, recently, even MEPs themselves have tended to group countries together, with less emphasis on the general perspective of regional cooperation between all countries, but more on those countries with greater ambitions for EU integration (Interview 18 2019). This strategy is in line with the strategy of conditionality and differentiation used in previous enlargement policy processes, where the aim was to make the lagging countries make more efforts and catch up with the advanced countries on the path of association and integration. However, there are differing views among EuroNest parliamentarians as to whether it is worth grouping these countries in this way.

> The second group of countries felt that EuroNest's approach to them was unfair, that Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia were singled out as better,

> more advanced countries, that these countries had a better chance of closer cooperation with the EU, and that countries like Armenia were considered useless. . . . This is insulting to them. (Interview 15 2019)

These attitudes of respondents indicate that the ongoing social interactions are aimed at understanding the different cultural elements and interests of the partners, and at proposing more varied cooperation models in this context (Interviews 15, 19 2019). MEPs have made considerable efforts to build a culture of regional cooperation, but this has not helped prevent the regional conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh from escalating and military action in 2023. It can thus be argued that while the Assembly serves as a platform for regional cooperation and is often the only format that involves the EaP countries, it has not yet succeeded in fulfilling this function and in creating a culture based on regional cooperation.

Mediation and MEPs individual motivations

The social theory of functionalism identifies the importance of individual motivation in the development of the institution as a causal factor. In the further analysis of the EP's interactions with the Eastern Partnership countries, it will be demonstrated that motivation has been an important factor that is observed both in the MEPs' choice of a particular inter-parliamentary assembly and in the EP's mediation missions. Mediation missions are a form of European Parliamentary diplomacy aimed at influencing the political situation in a partner country. During the period under review following the establishment of the Eastern Partnership and EuroNest, the European Parliament carried out at least two mediation missions in the Eastern Partnership countries.

The less researched mediation mission took place in Moldova in 2010, when a constitutional crisis broke out in the country as the parliamentary parties were unable to form a coalition and elect a president, who was elected by the Moldovan parliament at the time. This is one example of political influence, which, admittedly, can be described as a kind of ad hoc unplanned event, informal mission, which stabilised the political crisis in Moldova in 2010, when the European Parliament was led by Jerzy Buzek, a Pole. Buzek's advisor at the time described the situation as follows:

> PM Filat calls and says: President Buzek, I don't know if you know what's going on in Chisinau. The Russians are here, the agreement with the Communists (Moldovan political party) is almost concluded, all is left to do is sign it, and all our European ambitions will collapse, and you – Europe – are not with us. (Interview 1 2011)

In this case, the leadership was taken by the president of the European Parliament, Jerzy Buzek, who, as a Pole, with a good understanding of the political situation and the specificities of the region, went to play the role of mediator. His

political experience, which he shared with his partners in Moldova, explaining and teaching them about the difficulty, complexity and importance of building a European coalition and the principles of a coalition agreement, was also a major factor in this case, as respondents said (Interview 1 2011). Thanks to Mr Buzek's help and persuasion, he was able to bring together the leaders of the pro-European parties, Mr Lupu, Mr Filat and Mr Ghimpu, and, after a long period of persuasion and socialisation, and with the understanding of the mentality of the country's politicians, he was able to bring them together in a coalition, and eventually a coalition agreement was signed. Later, in his parliamentary activity report, Buzek also highlighted this role: 'In Moldova, I have firmly backed the creation of the pro-European coalition, which is now in power' (Buzek 2012: 21). This example illustrates the European Parliament's unconventional forms of diplomatic interaction and mediation missions, but the important factor was the individual personality and the willingness to play the role of mediator, based on individual motives.

Another, the Cox-Kwasniewski mission was carried out in Ukraine, which monitored the conflict between the ruling and opposition parties and the sentencing of opposition leader Tymoshenko. The mission also sought to persuade Ukrainian president Yanukovych to pursue the European agenda (Nitoiu & Sus 2016). This objective was not achieved at the time.

Functionalist theory identifies individual motives as a significant factor in social interactions. When analysing the composition of EuroNest, focusing on national trends, the influence of the individual motivation of MEPs is evident. This raises the following questions: which MEPs focus on the Eastern Partnership countries and what are their motives in developing EP parliamentary diplomacy?

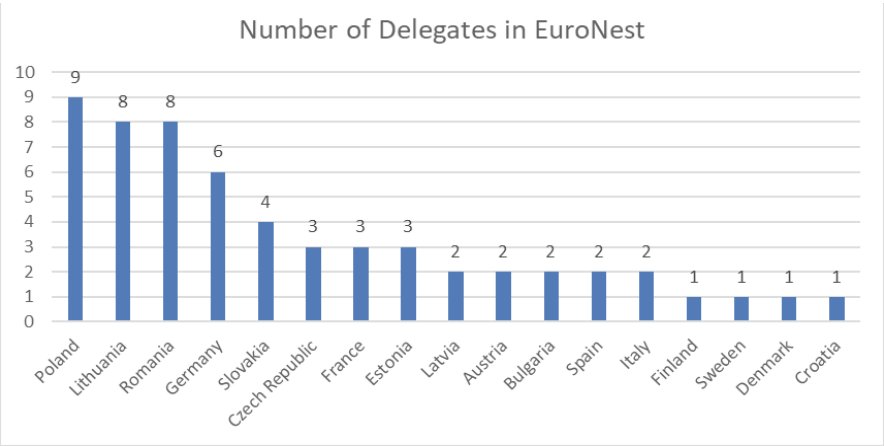
The European Parliament is made up of 705 elected members (EP 9th term), and each MEP belongs not only to a specific political group according to ideology, or to a specific committee according to specialisation, but also to a specific EP inter-parliamentary assembly or a specific committee that deals with relations with third countries. What determines which particular interparliamentary institution an MEP joins and whether national interests and priorities are relevant in this place is a subject of academic research. Studies show that MEPs often do not dissociate themselves from their national party and national interests (Raunio & Wiberg 2002; Mühlböck 2012), as they are elected on the basis of national party lists. Some studies indicate that MEPs prefer assemblies that engage with regions that are more relevant to the foreign policy priorities of their national countries (Dri 2015). In this case, the European Parliament becomes another international institution that contributes to national interests and can be linked to the individual motivation of a given MEP (Interviews 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 2019). Clarissa Dri (2015), in the research on the composition and activities of the EP–Latin American inter-parliamentary assemblies, claims that the most interest in the Latin

American regional assemblies is shown by MEPs from Spain and Portugal, who share historical, religious and linguistic proximity to these regions (Dri 2015).

The EuroNest delegation consists of 60 MEPs out of 705. Figure 3 shows that the largest national delegations to EuroNest are MEPs from Poland, Lithuania and Romania.

In the case of Lithuania, more than 72% (8 Lithuanian MEPs out of 11) of the entire Lithuanian delegation in the European Parliament of the 9th term are members of the EuroNest Interparliamentary Assembly. Other countries with a high

Figure 3: National composition of the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly, 2019–2024, EP 9th term



Source: Author based on European Parliament (2024)
Substitutes are not included.

proportion of national delegations to EuroNest are mainly countries with historical, linguistic, cultural and economic ties to the Eastern Partnership countries: Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Latvia and Estonia. The EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly was also chaired by Andrius Kubilius, Lithuanian MEP and former prime minister. As mentioned above, diplomatic missions were also carried out by Poles (Buzek; Kwasniewski). Germany has six representatives, but this represents only 6% of its total national delegation to the EP, and in the case of France, even less – only 4%. This shows a tendency for the region to attract more interest from MEPs of the EU members who are culturally and politically closer to it.

When asked about their reasons for joining this particular inter-parliamentary body, the MEPs interviewed highlighted the importance of the region for their country, and even a certain moral commitment to a greater European focus on the region (Interviews 15, 17, 18, 19 2019). For example, Lithuanian MEPs participating in EuroNest noted that they have experience and expertise in communicating

with the Eastern Partnership countries in these areas, and that this is relevant to Lithuania's national interests and priorities:

> We know them better than the Germans, Italians or Portuguese. We understand them better and can explain to our colleagues what this or that means, or what is going on in those countries. . . . It is very important for us that the Eastern countries are more democratic, that human rights are more respected there. Then we will also have more security and, let's say, it will also be easier for us to live next to them. (Interview 15 2019)

Other MEPs have even stressed that it was the membership of Central Europe and the Baltic States in the European Union that brought the region onto the EU's foreign policy agenda, and that it is now their goal as MEPs to continuously emphasise and push for the EU to devote sufficient attention and resources to this region (Interview 17 2019). In this case, they are also emphasising that they seek to influence the content of the EU's foreign policy agenda (Interview 15, 17, 18 2019).

> This Euronest is a very important and new institution, because there has never been such a tradition of political cooperation with these countries. From the perspective of the European Union, they were seen almost as vassals. Poor, going somewhere, but themselves don't understand where. . . . We have to keep reminding Europe about them, about the fate of those peoples, and our responsibility for that is very important. (Interview 17 2019)

Thus, these interviews and other data show that MEPs' activities and choices to establish international relations with a particular region and to engage in this kind of parliamentary diplomacy are also determined by their individual motivations, based on the national interests of the countries they represent, as well as their individual perceptions, certain normative standards, and their understanding of the EU's political agenda in relation to the region in question.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to explore the role of the European Parliament in EU foreign policy and to identify the functions of the EuroNest inter-parliamentary institution that the EP is developing together with the Eastern Partnership countries. The study was conducted by adapting the social theory of functionalism, which focuses on three aspects: social interactions, cultural patterns including norms and values that guide social interactions, and the importance of individual motivation.

Functionalist theory points out that when studying social interactions, it is possible to distinguish which actors are involved and in what forms cooperation

takes. The EuroNest empirical case study identifies several forms of interactions: regular multilateral interactions in EuroNest plenary sessions and committees; social interactions based on political ideology, whereby EP political groups develop cooperation with political parties of similar ideology in the Eastern Partnership countries (known as the creation of 'political families'); and social interactions, also including the establishment of regular contacts with civil society organisations. An indicative example is that representatives of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum attend and speak at EuroNest plenary sessions. Involving such diverse actors in social interactions helps the EP not only socialise and build relationships, but also exercise parliamentary scrutiny and receive information directly from foreign partners.

Functionalist social theory also stresses the importance of examining whether and how shared norms, values and cultural patterns are created within an institution and how they influence social interactions. The analysis of the EuroNest resolutions and the interviews' data provide examples of how the EP is trying to transfer many of the characteristics of the European cooperation and cultural model to EuroNest. This was already reflected in the early days of this institution when, due to the undemocratic elections, Belarusian parliamentarians were prevented from participating in EuroNest. The analysis of the resolutions indicates that democracy, norms of good governance, human rights, alignment of law with the EU (the so called 'approximation process') and the creation of a culture of regional cooperation were shaped as norms and values. However, this has not yet been put into practice, as the very different and conflicting interests of the Eastern Partnership countries have also been revealed (while some – Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia – have been pursuing an active Euro-integration agenda, others (Azerbaijan) have been pursuing only cooperation in trade and energy. Thus, while EuroNest serves as a platform for promoting a cultural model of regional cooperation and multilateralism, it has not yet fulfilled this function (for example, it has not succeeded in creating a culture of cooperation between Armenia and Azerbaijan, or in preventing a military conflict between these countries).

Finally, functionalist social theory also recognises individual motivations as an important factor in the development of institutions and social interactions. The empirical data of the EuroNest case study shows that the activities of individual MEPs are also driven by their individual motivations and perceived normative understanding of what the EU's policy towards the post-Soviet countries should be. More active in EuroNest are MEPs from the new EU member states, whose foreign policy and national interests are often determined by the situation in the Eastern Partnership region. Specific mediation missions by MEPs in the Eastern Partnership countries have also demonstrated this linkage and indicated a limited but certain influence of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy (e.g. EP President J. Buzek's mediation mission in Moldova in 2010).

The selected case study thus shows that MEPs are engaged in various forms of diplomacy, going beyond the legal competences granted to them by the Treaties and seeking to contribute to the development of EU foreign policy. The EuroNest Inter-Parliamentary Assembly acts as a complementary platform, a parliamentary pillar, to complement intergovernmental cooperation in the framework of the Eastern Partnership and to build stronger relations between the European Union and the post-Soviet countries participating in the Eastern Partnership. The platform aims to build trust and a sense of commonality between the EaP countries themselves and with the EU through a range of social interactions. It is a platform for the dissemination of European cultural values and legal norms and an instrument for Europeanisation.

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Research article

Measuring Central and Eastern European Countries' Responses to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which started in February 2022, led to various (often confrontational) reactions of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries to Russia. The article measures the variety of responsive foreign and defence policies of CEE countries in the first twelve months of the invasion. Three main domains of activities are examined: first, direct relations with Russia; second, relations with and support for Ukraine; and third, national defence policies and position in NATO. By considering these domains, the paper offers a comprehensive analysis of CEE countries' positions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, indicates differences among these countries and categorises their attitudes from near-to-neutral to highly confrontational towards Russia. Along with primary intuition, Hungary adopted an attitude closer to neutrality, whereas Lithuania and Poland turned out to be the most confrontational. The analysis reveals minor differences among the Baltic states' approaches towards Russia. Contrary to expectations, the positions of Bulgaria and Romania differed widely, with the former following a more confrontational stance than the latter.

Keywords: *Central and Eastern Europe, Russia, Ukraine, foreign policy, defence policy, NATO*

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Introduction

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 resulted in a dramatic political and discursive shift in the foreign policies of CEE countries. The most notable were cases of volte-face of pro-Russian heads of state, such as Czech President Miloš Zeman who called president Vladimir Putin a 'madman' and clearly encouraged for counterbalancing: 'Lunatics need to be isolated, and we must protect against them not only by words but by concrete measures' (quoted in Hutt 2022). Likewise, Bulgaria's head of state Rumen Radev called Russia's attack 'absolutely unacceptable' (The Sofia Globe 2022). Although he warned against confrontational policies, Croatian President Zoran Milanović said that Russia belongs among big states that are 'potential monsters' (Hina 2023). Condemnations were expressed by numerous high-level policymakers. Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki compared Vladimir Putin with Hitler, Stalin and Pol Pot. Croatia's minister of foreign and European affairs Gordan Grlić Radman called Putin a 'war criminal' and expressed hope for the collapse of his regime (Hina 2022). Confrontation with Russia was not only conducted in words. As Estonia's prime minister Kaja Kallas stated, the ultimate goal was to 'help Ukraine win' (Bathke 2022).

However, not all the leaders responded equally to the invasion. Some remained silent, while others, especially Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, hedged by using morally neutral expressions such as 'military action'. Croatian President Milanović criticised transfers of heavy weapons to Ukraine. As expected after discrepancies among CEE countries before the invasion, in 2022 the discourse was not entirely homogeneous.

Aside from discursive changes, CEE countries took various confrontational steps towards Russia. Most actions were conducted via EU institutions, nevertheless, CEE countries used some opportunities to express unilateral sanctions against Russia. For instance, Lithuania imposed unilateral sanctions on Russian energy and food (Dudzińska 2022). Bulgaria, along with Montenegro and North Macedonia, blocked access for Russian Minister Sergey Lavrov's airplane, as a result of which his visit in Belgrade was called off (Kokot 2022). All the countries agreed on the EU's multiple harsh sanctions on Russia. Regarding their trade relations these countries (Hungary included) were also formally labelled 'unfriendly states' by Russia. Some CEE countries publicly called for further EU sanctions. However, no CEE country decided to terminate diplomatic[1] or trade relations with Russia.

The ambition of this article is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of differences among CEE countries. Political discourses in some countries, such as the

1 The closest to this stage was certainly Estonia, whose diplomatic relations were downgraded to the charges d'affaires level, but the initiator was Russia (Al Jazeera 2023).

Baltics, Poland and Romania, raised confrontational attitudes towards Russia or highlighted loyalty to NATO to show their moral superiority in international as well as in domestic arenas. It must be understood that Russia's invasion took place under specific circumstances. Ukraine was directly attacked, but Western countries have been indirectly challenged. As most of the CEE countries border either Russia or Ukraine, their threat perception of Russia has risen and CEE faced the invasion in this condition. As such, the article divides the overall context and CEE's positions into segmented and quantifiable reactions and develops a scale of CEE responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. To uncover the CEE countries' policies and showcase their attitudes and differences among them, this paper operationalises three main domains of activities: first, direct relations with Russia; second, relations with and support for Ukraine; and third, national defence policies and activities in NATO. Together, these three domains indicate positions of CEE countries on the scale measuring their responses to Russia's invasion.

Literature review

The political dimensions of Russia's 2022 military attack on Ukraine attracted the close attention of scholars. The starting point has been the issue of the causes of Russia's assault on Ukraine in 2022 with a special focus on domestic conditions (Götz & Staun 2022; Person & McFaul 2022; Ferraro 2024). More detailed analyses examine the theoretical and strategic background that led to Russia's miscalculation at the early stage of the invasion (Göransson 2024), the invasion within theoretical frameworks of securitisation (Kurnyshova 2024; Lupovici 2024), democratic peace (Tan 2024), the world-systems (Beržiūnas 2023) or gender (Kratochvil & O'Sullivan 2023). Some scholars have emphasised Western countries' misperception of Russia that conditioned Putin to carry out colonial conquest (Oksamytna 2023). Academics have also scrutinised broader contexts such as the 2022 invasion's consequences for the global arena, including reconfiguration of Russia's partners in the UN system (Farzanegan & Gholipour 2023) and selected legal transformations (Brunk & Hakimi 2023).

At the regional level, scholars have investigated EU responses to the war (Bosse 2022; Meissner & Graziani 2023) including a particularly impressive analysis of their domestic and international conditions (Haesebrouck 2024). Further, academics have scrutinised EU countries' and institutions' policies in the context of European integration (Genschel 2022), changes of EU international roles (Friedrichs & Sommer 2024) and perception of EU security systems (Fernández et al. 2023). Economists have considered the effects of EU sanctions on the financial situation of Russia (Clichici & Drăgoi 2023; Pertiwi 2024), and the disturbance of trade relations between Russia and the EU as a direct consequence of the war (Krivko, Kontsevaya & Smutka 2023). Security analysts scrutinised NATO involvement in regional security and its potential strategy for restoration of peace

(Lepskiy & Lepska 2023). The existing literature is rather modest when it comes to CEE foreign and security policies towards Russia. There exist pre-invasion analyses of pro-US vs. pro-European orientations as factors of attitudes towards Russia among the EU including CEE countries (Silva II 2024), attitudes of CEE countries towards Russia's expansion prior to the 2022 invasion (Klin 2023) or attitudes of CEE towards Russia as their energy supplier before the invasion (Ostrowski 2022). Limited literature considers historical conditions of CEE countries' differentiated foreign policy orientations towards the invasion (Zaborowski 2024). Some scholars examine individual CEE countries' policies towards Russia: Czechia with an in-depth scrutiny of its party system (Kaniok & Hloušek 2023), Hungary based on analysis of Orbán's discourse (Lamour 2023), Estonia's and Latvia's multifaceted responses to Russia's 2022 invasion (Veebel 2023; Andžāns 2023). Other countries' policies have been hitherto analysed only superficially, usually by thinktanks and newspaper commentaries, although there exist narrower analyses, such as those of Hungary's opportunist politics within NATO and the EU (Müller & Slominski 2024).

Research objectives and methodology

The article aims at gathering and identifying major differences among the CEE countries towards Russia's invasion. By CEE countries I mean 11 post-communist NATO and EU member states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. This article scrutinises the 12-month period of CEE countries' policies as responses to Russia's invasion. There have already been some academic attempts to capture the essence of this period (e.g. Sasse 2023). One may consider one or two months to be the correct time for responses to the first great interstate war in Europe since 1945; however, one year is long enough for states to gather resources, such as an increase in defence budgets. It is also sufficient for journalists to discover some confidential practices. For instance, Bulgaria initially seemed to avoid providing substantial military aid to Ukraine, but later it turned out to rank among its important arms suppliers. One year might also be preferable for scrutiny because of domestic political crises like in the case of Slovenia, whose officials for a few months publicly blamed the election and post-election party negotiations as the reason for their passiveness towards Ukraine.

The research objective of the article is to assess each CEE country's attitude towards Russia on an axis which shows positions between least and most confrontational. This is conducted by dividing countries' activities into three groups: direct relations with Russia; relations with Ukraine regarding the invasion; and domestic and NATO defence policies. These three groups of activities should address the main issue in the context of the Russo-Ukrainian War and a phenomenon of a new cold war between Russia and the West. Direct relations with

Russia reflect the level of confrontational policies to a large extent, but amid the ongoing conventional war, CEE countries have opportunities to confront Russia indirectly by supporting Ukraine and by strengthening their defensive capabilities.

The methodological challenge is to select specific criteria that contribute to our knowledge on levels of confrontation in each of the three groups. As mentioned above, there have been many discursive practices that partially reflect policies. This article is based on the assumption that in cases of conventional war, material activities and materialised political decisions matter most, whereas discourse is secondary but still relevant. An important political issue was certainly negotiations in the EU about sanctions towards Russia or multilateral assistance for Ukraine. However, negotiations are largely confidential, data can be extracted from hardly verifiable media releases and speculations. Hence the selection of issues that are relevant, comparable between CEE countries and available in open sources. Relevance means that on the international agenda when a given issue appeared as a problem, high-level policymakers emphasised its significance. Comparability results from homogeneity of activities, i.e. all the CEE countries had opportunities to act or not act in the same way. The above-outlined criteria lead to the exclusion of media releases that some country insisted on EU sanctions, as there is no certainty if other countries also confidentially insisted, supported or objected, or objected under some conditions. Further, unilateral sanctions imposed by some CEE countries on Russia are not taken into account. This results not only from difficulties in comparability, but also the limited significance in the analysed 12-month period. For instance, Czechia adopted a national sanction list, but initially no entities were enlisted (Doupal, Supak & Hudcovic 2023).

The article uses the quantitative method. Why are quantities equally assigned to each area of scrutinised policies? Politics of CEE countries after the invasion underwent quick changes within the analysed 12-months period. For instance, there were observable moments when expulsions of diplomats were carried out one-by-one by most CEE countries, which shows their relevance. But a few weeks later, CEE leaders focused on moral condemnations of massacres of civilians, released by Ukrainian authorities and media. This example indicates the changing priorities of instruments used against Russia. Since relevance of domains of foreign policy is indistinguishable, it is methodologically correct to assign equal values to each domain – that is, to each of the three groups of criteria. Potential biases are reduced by the richness of variables used in the model. The first group of criteria concerns direct relations with Russia. Among them, the first criterion is bilateral diplomatic relations composed of high-level meetings and expulsions of Russian diplomatic staff. The second criterion is energy policy as addressing the problematic issue of energy dependence. Selection of a specific segment was more difficult because of the tendency for the multilateralisation of sanctions

transmitted through the EU. The most representative was natural gas imports, because of its scale and also because Russia itself decided to coerce its gas buyers into subordinating to ruble payments, which garnered different responses from CEE countries. The third criterion was initially a purely discursive practice – namely, these were condemnations of Russia's conduct, but soon some CEE countries transmitted these into investigations and prosecutions such as the idea of a special tribunal. The discussion on methods, legal foundations and institutional arrangements for responding to Russia's international crimes not only expressed moral outrage in CEE, but also reflected discursive competition for the morally superior anti-Russian stance.

As stated above, the second group of criteria for responses contains policies towards Ukraine. The first criterion here is diplomatic relations – that is, high-level meetings with special significance during the initiating 15 March 2022 visit of three CEE country leaders in Kyiv, which Ukrainian officials received as the end of their diplomatic isolation. The second criterion is military assistance for Ukraine.[2] There have been comparable data released by media and analytical teams. Although some assistance was confidential, a year after the end of the analysed period it is safe to use the given data. The third criterion should reflect CEE leaders' discursive practices concerning the Russo-Ukrainian War. Specifically, to meet the standard of both relevance and comparability I selected two issues: discourse on Ukraine's victory in the war, because doubts could lead to discontinuation of military assistance; and EU swift candidacy status for Ukraine which was raised by CEE leaders immediately after Russia's invasion. Moreover, the debate over EU membership has attracted particular attention due to the pro-Western ambitions of Ukraine and Russia's opposition to them.

The third group of criteria concerns CEE domestic and NATO defence policies. This derives from the essence of counterbalancing which largely operates by military means. The first criterion is domestic defence policy reflected in available data on changes in defence budgets and military personnel as an auxiliary indicator. The relevance of the defence budgets' growth as a reaction to the security crisis was observable in the contemporary discourse among NATO officials (e.g. Stoltenberg 2022). Furthermore, building arms is at the core of the strategy of balancing according to the balance of power theory (Schweller 2006: 9; Wohlforth et al. 2007). The second criterion is activities in NATO to counterbalance Russia. What makes this criterion challenging is diversity of security contexts and military capabilities of CEE countries. Some of them are small and almost entirely dependent on external security guarantees. On the

2 I resigned from financial and humanitarian bilateral assistance because financial aid for Ukraine has been delivered mainly via multilateral actors, and humanitarian aid for Ukraine does not contribute to politics and defence, taking into account that even China delivered it.

contrary, some have larger capabilities and thus may use their resources outside on a larger scale. Also, three of the CEE countries – Croatia, Czechia, Slovenia – do not belong to the so-called NATO eastern flank, so they might be focused more on external activities. Despite this diversity of security contexts, a careful analysis can provide this research with some knowledge on confrontational policies towards Russia, which is explicated in the next section.

How exactly are quantitative values assigned to each country? There is a maximum which indicates the most confrontational country in each criterion. For instance, Lithuania and Poland initiated the creation of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) in the EU (Eurojust 2023) and publicly condemned Russia for war crimes, so they receive 1 point for this criterion. For some criteria, time of activity may be taken into account by appreciating initiatives and underappreciating delays. As the minimum, 0 is a logical consequence of the maximum; in the above case, this means a lack of public condemnations or any initiative like JIT. For intermediate cases, 0.25 (or its multiples) is added or subtracted. If an issue is further divided into two sub-criteria, they each receive 0.5 maximum. The idea is to equally asses each of the three domains: direct relations with Russia, relations with Ukraine and defence policies. Therefore each receives the maximum 3. The points of all the criteria are then added up, which results in a final assessment of each country's approach on the axis between near-to-neutral and strongly confrontational.

What is also worth discussing is the problem of intentions. The above-outlined method is based on the assumption that some activities are confrontational regardless of motives. For instance, in the case of diplomatic sanctions towards Russia, regardless of public justifications such as espionage or moral indignation, each decision on sanctions is confrontational. Methodologically, a more challenging criterion is defence policy, because it certainly reflects intentions not only towards Russia and Ukraine but also western partners. Further, some local configurations of power matter like in the case of Croatia, which counterbalances Serbia rather than distant Russia. Still, the criterion can be useful as long as defence efforts are analysed within the period of Russia's invasion. Its application is based on the assumption that decisions reflect each CEE country's approach to Russia as a threat. Moreover, the criterion takes into account changes in defence resources, not their nominal value, which aims to reflect its responsivity. Last but not least, arms serve as material response to external threats, and no other dangerous phenomenon emerged in 2022 in CEE.[3]

3 Interestingly, the rise of Hungary's defence budget in 2022–2023 was justified by general statements on the worsening of the 'security environment' or by non-security arguments such as the commitment within NATO (Hungary Today 2023) which confirms the lack of specific threats aside from Russia's aggressiveness.

The scale of CEE countries' responses

This section describes the creation of the axis of confrontational policies. As for diplomatic relations with Russia, available sources inform about each country's conduct. All the CEE countries (except Hungary) ceased high-level meetings and expelled Russian diplomatic personnel. Numerous sources report mass expulsions (e.g. Kıyağan 2022). The only small controversy is Czechia, which expelled only one diplomat, albeit a significant one. That seemingly limited response clearly resulted from the previous mass expulsions conducted in 2021 as a consequence of the Vrbětice affair.

The phenomenon of CEE's dependence on Russia's energy was a lasting and relevant political problem. Contrary to coal and oil imports, ultimately banned by sanctions at the EU level, imports of gas became a significant but chaotic game between each country and Russia due to Russia's decision to require ruble payments. After April 2022 most countries silently accepted ruble payments, besides Bulgaria and Poland, whose public opposition was met with Russia's ban on natural gas exports to both countries (Kakissis 2022). On the other side of the political spectrum, Hungary officially and publicly approved ruble payments; moreover, it signed an important annex to the 2021 gas contract[4] (Madlovics & Magyar 2023: 35). Although all the Baltic countries initially declared discontinuation of gas imports from Russia (Euractiv 2022), soon it turned out that only Lithuania had prepared its infrastructure and resigned from imports shortly before Russia's insistence on ruble payments (Petkova 2022). Latvia was the least prepared and still had to import natural gas in summer 2022 (Reuters 2022), whereas Estonia imposed unilateral sanctions on natural gas after almost a year of preparations (ERR 2022). Some CEE countries, such as Czechia, declared an objection to ruble payments, but later de facto accepted them (McVicar 2022).

The moral dimension of CEE policies towards Russia was reflected in public condemnations of various delicts such as war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocidal intent and crimes against peace, and found expressions in diplomatic and legal activities to formalise accusations. Releasing information on the massacres of Ukrainian civilians in April 2022 resulted in the first initiatives. As mentioned earlier, Lithuania and Poland initiated the establishment of a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) with the EU. Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia joined them weeks later. Romania became a member of the JIT in October 2022 as the latest member (Eurojust 2023). Czechia expressed scepticism about the legal foundations and practical effectiveness of investigation teams, but publicly called for the establishment of a special tribunal for Russian crimes in Ukraine (Dvořák 2022), whereas Slovenia initiated discussions on a war crime cooperation treaty for EU and non-EU coun-

4 Hungary also continued the process of modernising its nuclear power plant by the Russian company Rosatom.

Table 1: CEE countries' policies towards Russia (assigned quantities in parentheses)

Country	Diplomatic relations	Responses to Russia's gas countersanctions	Policy about war crimes
Bulgaria	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Immediate refusal of ruble payments (1)	Public condemnations (0.5)
Croatia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Public condemnations (0.5)
Czechia	No meetings (0.5); expulsion of deputy ambassador (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments, declarative objections (0.5)	Calling for establishment of a special tribunal (1)
Estonia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Delayed termination of gas imports (0.75)	Member of Joint Investigation Team (0.75)
Hungary	High-level visits (0); no expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0)	Public approval of ruble payments (0)	Restrained discourse: condemnations without indicating Russia as perpetrator (0)
Latvia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments, declarative objections (0.5)	Member of Joint Investigation Team (0.75)
Lithuania	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Termination of gas imports before Russia's requirement of ruble payments (1)	Co-founder of Joint Investigation Team (1)
Poland	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	Immediate refusal of ruble payments (1)	Co-founder of Joint Investigation Team (1)
Romania	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Delayed member of Joint Investigation Team (0.5)
Slovakia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Member of Joint Investigation Team (0.75)
Slovenia	No meetings (0.5); mass expulsions of diplomatic personnel (0.5)	De facto approval of ruble payments (0.25)	Initiative of war crimes cooperation treaty (0.5)

Source: Author

tries regarding war crimes in Ukraine (Maček 2023). The only country that avoided explicit condemnation of Russian crimes and any formal initiatives was Hungary. The analysis of these three domains are summarised in Table 1.

Relations of CEE countries with Ukraine deserve separate analysis. The first criterion is diplomatic relations. All the CEE countries except Hungary paid high-level visits to Kyiv between March and June 2022. The initiating visit was conducted by Czech, Polish and Slovenian heads of governments on 15 March. It made a tremendous impact on Ukraine's diplomatic position. Until that moment, western policymakers had avoided visits due to security concerns. For instance, officials from the Baltic countries fled Kyiv on the day of the invasion (Brennan 2022). The significance of the 15 March visit was later confirmed by the prime minister of Slovakia, Eduard Heger, who publicly regretted not having accompanied Czechia, Poland and Slovenia (Gosling 2022). These three countries are counted in the article as most supportive.

Military assistance for Ukraine has been scrutinised by numerous academics and journalists (e.g. Marsh 2023). From Ukraine's perspective, the scale of assistance matters most, therefore Poland has been highly appreciated. However, for the purpose of this article the effort of each country is more accurately measured by using aid as a GDP ratio. The most applicable source from the perspective of relevance and comparability is Ukraine Support Tracker, which gathers commitments on military assistance (Trebesch 2023). Contemporary commitments' effectiveness can be assessed ex post.[5] One controversial case is Romania, which apparently delivered unconfirmed military assistance, which was reported by both Ukrainian authorities (Całus 2022) and Russian officials in the form of accusations (Dumitrescu 2022). This makes a serious difference with Hungary, which repeatedly declared that it would not deliver any military assistance to Ukraine and did not permit military transit across its territory.

The third component of this group of criteria is the discourse regarding Ukraine's geopolitical choices, and to adequately address the year of Russia's invasion it is divided into two specific subcriteria. The first subcriterion regards the sense of Ukraine's defence. Hungarian policymakers raised numerous doubts about Ukraine's chances of victory. Two CEE heads of state, the presidents of Bulgaria and Croatia, publicly expressed doubt about Ukraine's confrontational strategy against Russia and their chances of a final victory. Otherwise, both countries' governmental officials demonstrated opposite discourse expressing belief in Ukraine's ultimate victory. Romania and Slovenia avoided such open declarations, which thus places them as in-between cases. As for the second subcriterion – Ukraine's swift candidacy in the EU – Romanian President Klaus

5 In the first months of the invasion journalists and politicians accused some countries of not delivering declared assistance.

Iohannis did not join the open letter from the CEE heads of state appealing for candidate status for Ukraine, but the following day he guaranteed Romania's full support for Ukraine's integration within the EU (Fodor 2022). Only the Croatian and Hungarian heads of state did not contribute to this particular initiative. How-

Table 2: CEE countries' policies towards Ukraine (assigned quantities in parentheses)

Country	**High-level meetings**	**Commitments on military assistance in % of GDP**	**Discourse on Ukraine's victory**	**Swift EU candidacy**
Bulgaria	High-level visits (0.75)	0.37% (0.5)	Contradictory discourse of president and government representatives (0.25)	Support (0.5)
Croatia	High-level visits (0.75)	0.22% (0.25)	President's public doubts (0)	PM's support, no president's support (0.25)
Czechia	Initiator of high-level visits (1)	0.25% (0.25)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Estonia	High-level visits (0.75)	1.1% (1)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Hungary	No high-level meetings (0)	0% (0)	Public doubts (0)	No expression of support (0)
Latvia	High-level visits (0.75)	1.19% (1)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Lithuania	High-level visits (0.75)	0.79% (0.75)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Poland	Initiating high-level visits (1)	0.44% (0.5)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Romania	High-level visits (0.75)	0% + confidential assistance (0.25)	Restraint discourse (0.25)	Delayed support (0.25)
Slovakia	High-level visits (0.75)	0.21% (0.25)	Public support (0.5)	Support (0.5)
Slovenia	Initiating high-level visits (1)	0.12% (0.25)	Restraint discourse (0.25)	Support (0.5)

Source: Author

ever, Croatia's prime minister, Andrej Plenković, supported Ukraine's candidacy (Government of the Republic of Croatia 2022). The criteria about policies towards Ukraine are summarised in Table 2.

The third group of criteria is defence activities. NATO delivers data and estimates on annual defence budgets and military personnel of its members. As mentioned earlier, expanding arms forms the core of counterbalancing strategies. Defence budgets are acknowledged as primary sources of military power. They are commonly used as variables in IR statistical research. As observed in the NATO countries' defence policies and military assistance for Ukraine, contemporary arms start with budgetary sources. This is further reflected in their political relevance as they emerge in official declarations and discursive practices at the state and interstate level among Western countries. For the purpose of this research, cases of countries whose defence budgets grew by more than 10% in both 2022 and 2023 qualify as substantial growth. However, some countries needed another fiscal year to achieve higher growth. This is the case of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia and Poland, whose defence budgets grew by less than 10% in 2022 but by over 25% in 2023. This is also qualified as substantial growth. Slovakia's and Slovenia's military spending grew by less than 10% in both 2022 and 2023, which is assessed as limited growth. The defence budgets of Croatia, Czechia and Romania were quite stable or underwent minimal reduction (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2024: 9).

While defence budgets ensure the quality of defence, troops are still required to fulfil military tasks. As the development of the Russo-Ukrainian War demonstrates, full-scale interstate wars entail recruitment of mass armies. In the article it is assumed when applying these data for the scale of CEE countries' confrontational policies that military personnel is less valuable than defence budgets. Thus, the maximum for the change of military personnel between 2022 and 2023 is 0.5. This results from decades of financial limits which led to having underinvested armed forces. Also, the technological modernisation and professionalisation of armies as ongoing processes indicate the significance of financing rather than recruitment which is less changeable. For the purposes of measurement, qualification is simplified: 0 for reduction of military personnel, 0.25 for stability and 0.5 for growth. Data are extracted from NATO sources (NATO Public Diplomacy Division 2024: 13). For both military budgets and personnel this research does not consider pre-invasion efforts. This presumption is based on the diagnosis of a significant potential for expansion of both.[6]

The NATO activities of CEE countries require contextual analysis. Numerous sources reported Baltic countries' diplomatic efforts to reinforce NATO military presence on their territories (e.g. Borger 2022), which is sufficient to assess as

6 NATO countries' military budgets and personnel are far from top military powers.

Table 3: CEE countries' responses in defence policy (assigned quantities in parentheses)

Country	National defence policy	International defence activities in NATO
Bulgaria	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); stability of military personnel (0.25)	A new battlegroup on its territory, no presence abroad (1.25)
Croatia	Stability of defence budget (0.25); reduction of military personnel (0)	Limited contribution to battlegroups in Hungary, Latvia and Poland, accepting US air policing (1.25)
Czechia	Stability of defence budget (0.25); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Leading the new battlegroup in Slovakia, contingents in Latvia and Lithuania (1.5)
Estonia	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup (1.5)
Hungary	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	A new battlegroup with limited external contributions on its territory, air policing in Baltic countries (0.75)
Latvia	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup (1.5)
Lithuania	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup (1.5)
Poland	Substantial growth of defence budget (1); growth of military personnel (0.5)	Effort to increase the existing battlegroup and US forces, contingents in Latvia and Romania, air policing in Slovakia (1.5)
Romania	Reduction of defence budget (0); reduction of military personnel (0)	A new battlegroup and US reinforcements on its territory, contingent in Poland (1.5)
Slovakia	Limited growth of defence budget (0.5); stability of military personnel (0.25)	A new battlegroup on its territory, contingent in Latvia (1.5)
Slovenia	Limited growth of defence budget (0.5); stability of military personnel (0.25)	Contribution to a new battlegroup in Slovakia, contingent in Latvia (1.5)

Source: Author

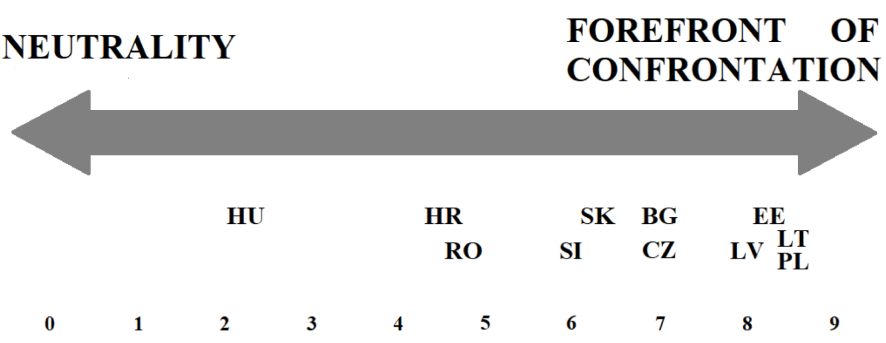
maximum engagement taking into account the Baltics' vulnerability to a potential Russian attack and the small size of their armies.[7] Four new battlegroups

7 Critics may indicate that Estonia maintained a military contingent in Mali until 2022, which proves that the Baltics have capabilities for foreign military presence. However, NATO eastern flank countries' policy makers did not demand Baltic countries' contingents stay outside their subregion which results from the prioritisation of their defence.

have been formed on the NATO eastern flank: in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Bulgaria allowed Italy to take on the role of framework nation and other NATO countries to contribute to the new battlegroup on Bulgaria's territory. However, Bulgaria has not taken part in any standing presence in other battlegroups. Croatia approved only limited military contingents in Poland and in the new battlegroup in Hungary (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2022); they contributed overall 64 troops which reflects a limited interest in counterbalancing Russia. The government also agreed on limited US air policing of the Croatian airspace (Aviation Defense News 2022). Despite speculations about its disapproval of NATO reinforcements, Hungary quickly agreed on a new multinational battlegroup on its territory. However, the government wanted its own command over NATO foreign troops (of limited size) and stressed their non-eastern basing, far from the border with Ukraine (Révész 2022). Poland invited US reinforcements on its territory and sent additional forces to Romania and Slovakia. Slovenia contributed to the newly established battlegroup in Slovakia and maintained troops in Latvia, which might be interpreted as a proportional counterbalancing effort. The criteria of defence, resulting from this contextual analysis, are summarised in Table 3. In order to achieve the maximum 3 for the whole group of defence criteria, the maximum quantitative value is 1.5 for each: national defence and military activities in NATO. National defence is composed of military budget and military personnel. Unlike with all the other criteria, no country is given 0 for NATO activities, because of the exceptional complexity of the analysis of each country's potential effort.

Tables 1–3 demonstrate the variety of CEE countries' responses to Russia's invasion. As a result of quantitative analysis, the following axis indicating the level of confrontational policies is constructed and presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The variety of CEE countries' responses to Russia's invasion



Source: Author

Conclusion

Russia's invasion repositioned some CEE countries' foreign and defence policies, while some others remained on their already confrontational course. How exactly each country responded is of interest to case studies. However, daily politics impedes efforts of summarising political positions. The article provides academics with a reliable summary of CEE countries' attitudes based on measuring key dimensions of their activities. The article contributes to the growing academic literature on Russia's assault on Ukraine. By indicating the quantitative model of CEE countries' stances towards Russia's invasion, it delivers precision and thus undermines some stereotypes. Comparability within the model sheds light on countries' detailed policies and general approaches. To illustrate that one may reflect on the alleged anti-Russian counterbalancing effort by Romania. The analysis indicates that Bulgaria, among others, clearly demonstrated the more confrontational approach. The de facto reduction of Romania's military budgets in 2022 and 2023, counted as GDP ratio, triggered post factum criticism and public excuses (Necsutu 2024). This proves that declarations are not always implemented. Also Hungary's declarative politics seem to be full of pro-Russian understanding, but careful analysis demonstrates one potential counterbalancing element which is domestic militarisation. Least surprisingly, the analysis reveals minor differences among the Baltic states' positions towards Russia.

Applicability of the article deserves additional attention. Precision of measurement verifies common knowledge, but the quantitative scale might also be useful for further quantitative analyses including serving as a dependent variable. Since the growing number of authors has conducted studies on variables behind EU or CEE countries' positions (Haesebrouck 2024; Klin 2023; Zaborowski 2024), one may use the detailed scale of this article for statistical analysis. It is also reasonable to apply it to comparative methods of foreign policy analysis. The scale might be particularly useful as an auxiliary tool in unison with IR theories for explaining foreign policy of CEE countries. Last but not least, the method of the scale can be creatively implemented for further examinations of CEE countries' attitudes for the whole Russo-Ukrainian War.

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