

How the European Parliament Chooses Its Battles: Parliamentary Resolutions on the Negotiation of International Agreements

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Abstract

This article explains the occurrence and timing of resolutions adopted by the European Parliament (EP) on international agreements. Such resolutions allow the EP to exert influence, especially when they are adopted early in the negotiation process (i.e., ‘early resolutions’). However, the EP does not systematically adopt (early) resolutions. The article therefore addresses two research questions: (1) under which conditions does the EP adopt resolutions during the negotiation process of international agreements? And (2) under which conditions does the EP adopt early resolutions? Using a comprehensive dataset including the 344 international agreements concluded between 2009 and 2023, we find that resolutions are more likely to be adopted when the Committee on International Trade is the responsible EP committee, when human rights, personal data protection or environmental protection are at stake and when agreements are salient. Moreover, early resolutions are more likely to be adopted for more recent negotiations and when negotiations are salient early.

Keywords: European Parliament; foreign policy; international agreements; resolutions

Introduction

Every year, the European Union (EU) concludes over 20 international agreements across various policy fields, such as trade, environment and fisheries. These international agreements form a web of international law through which the EU aims to shape its external environment and relations with third countries. Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009, the European Parliament (EP) has formal veto power on the conclusion (i.e., ratification) of most international agreements. If the EP exercises that veto power, the international agreement cannot enter into force. Whereas such a veto does not allow the EP to signal its position on the substance during the actual negotiation of international agreements, the EP has another tool at its disposal to express its position: it can adopt resolutions during any stage of the negotiation process. Adopting resolutions allows the EP to publicly signal its institutional position and hence to fill the ‘gap’ between its formal power at the end of procedure and its willingness to signal its position without limitations of timing (Hart, 2020).

Remarkably, the EP does not systematically adopt resolutions. Whilst the EP adopts several resolutions for some agreements, it does not adopt any for other agreements. Furthermore, there is variation not only on the occurrence but also on the timing of these resolutions: in some cases, the EP adopts resolutions early in the process, whilst in other cases, resolutions are only adopted at the very end. Whilst the EP’s limited resources imply that it should ‘choose its battles’, the variation on the occurrence and on the timing of

the adoption of resolutions remains unexplained (Héritier et al., 2019). Yet the adoption of resolutions, particularly of early resolutions, indicates on which international agreements the EP aims to exert influence. Therefore, this article asks the following: (1) *under which conditions does the EP adopt resolutions during the negotiation process of international agreements?*; and (2) *under which conditions does the EP adopt early resolutions?*

To answer these research questions, the article tests explanatory factors relating to three strands of the literature: (1) the capabilities of parliaments; (2) the EP as an actor advocating for specific policy priorities; and (3) the parliamentary responsiveness to salience in the public sphere. By considering these three strands, we examine explanatory factors pertaining to the EP itself and to the broader negotiation context, as well as to a scrutiny and a position-taking logic of parliamentary activities. The effect of these three sets of factors is tested relying upon an original, comprehensive dataset consisting of the negotiation processes of the 344 agreements concluded by the EU since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009.

The article makes three main contributions to the literature on the EP in EU foreign policy. First, it highlights the distinctiveness of the EP Committee on International Trade (INTA) and of trade agreements. Whilst the specific organisation of this committee regarding international agreements has been documented in the literature, the article confirms it empirically with a large dataset allowing comparison with other committees and with other policy fields. Second, the article shows that the EP adopts more resolutions when human rights, personal data protection or environmental protection are at stake. Third, the article validates a key hypothesis from the existing case study-based literature: when negotiations are more salient, the EP is more likely to adopt resolutions. Likewise, when an agreement is salient early in negotiation processes, then resolutions are also more likely to be adopted at this early stage. Furthermore, the article provides evidence that the logics driving the occurrence and the timing of resolutions differ.

The article is structured as follows: the next section discusses how the EP is involved in the negotiation of international agreements, focusing on the role resolutions play in the EP's involvement. Section II presents the explanatory factors and the hypotheses for explaining variation in the occurrence and the timing of resolution adoption. Section III explains the methodology applied to test the effect of these sets of explanatory factors. Section IV presents the results, and Section V discusses them.

I. EP Resolutions on International Agreements

The main formal power of the EP regarding international agreements is its veto power on the ratification of international agreements. Indeed, the consent procedure applies to the ratification of international agreements, which formally empowers the EP only during the last stage of the negotiation process. Pursuant to Article 218 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the negotiation process of international agreements can be divided into three stages. First, during the *authorisation stage*, the Council adopts a negotiating mandate upon a recommendation of the Commission. Second, during the *negotiation stage*, the Commission negotiates with one or multiple third countries. During these authorisation and negotiation stages, the EP has no formal powers except that of being informed. Third, during the *ratification stage*, the Council decides on the signature and the ratification of the international agreement on the basis of a proposal

by the Commission. Before the Council decides on the ratification, the EP has to give its consent.¹ Overall, the EP's role in the negotiation process of international agreements is limited compared to the Commission and the Council.

Despite its formally limited role, the EP regularly conducts a variety of activities to get involved, including informal contacts with the Commission, hearings in committees and resolutions (Meissner, 2016). Crucially, resolutions are adopted by the EP independently from other institutions and other ongoing procedures. They represent a distinctive and pivotal instrument for empowering the EP in policy domains and procedures where the EP's formal powers are limited, such as the initiation of legislation (Kreppel and Webb, 2019; Webb and Kreppel, 2021), the oversight of the Commission's delegated powers (Christiansen and Lange, 2020) and EU foreign policy. Actually, the majority of resolutions adopted by the EP concern foreign policy, a field where other EU institutions dominate, as exemplified by the case of international agreements (Kleizen, 2016). Case studies have shown that such resolutions have recurrently been influential. For example, EP resolutions were instrumental in obtaining changes regarding the inclusion of non-trade issues in EU trade policy (Hart, 2020).

Compared to other activities that the EP can conduct to be involved in the negotiation of international agreements, resolutions are distinctive because they constitute a public and institutional assertion of a position. Because resolutions are *public*, they allow EP to perform communication functions towards the broader public sphere and to bring public attention onto a subject (Hart, 2020; Hoerner, 2017). At the same time, because EP resolutions state an *institutional* position, they signal that there is broad interest, going beyond the interest of individual Members of the EP (MEPs), political groups or committees.

Resolutions, as public and institutional assertions of positions, have three functions, which are not mutually exclusive. First, resolutions are tools to *scrutinise* the executive. Second, resolutions allow parliaments to *communicate* statements to the broader public (Hoerner, 2017). Third, in the specific case of international agreements, resolutions can have a *policy-shaping* function. Indeed, aiming to mirror the prerogative of the Council to issue a negotiation mandate for the Commission, the EP developed the practice of adopting resolutions to signal its expectations and positions regarding the forthcoming international agreement (da Conceição-Heldt, 2017; Kerremans et al., 2019).

There is no formal guarantee or obligation that other institutions, in particular the Commission, take into account or respond to the EP's positions expressed in resolutions.² However, in practice, it is likely that resolutions are to some extent taken into account by the Commission because of two reasons. First, the impact of resolutions rests on a dynamic of veto leveraging. The Commission is likely to anticipate an *ex post* veto by the EP and to seek to avoid an involuntary defection (da Conceição-Heldt, 2017; Putnam, 1988). Hence, it has an incentive to accommodate the EP concerns before the EP can cast its veto during the ratification stage (Delreux and Burns, 2019; Ripoll Servent, 2014). Second, the Commission is likely to respond to EP concerns because of the dynamics of socialisation, routines and practices that have been developed in the

¹EP consent was needed for more than 80% of agreements concluded since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (own data). Most other agreements are related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy, where the EP has no formal powers except related to a requirement of being informed.

²Except in the case of legislative own-initiative legislative reports, which are outside of the scope of this article.

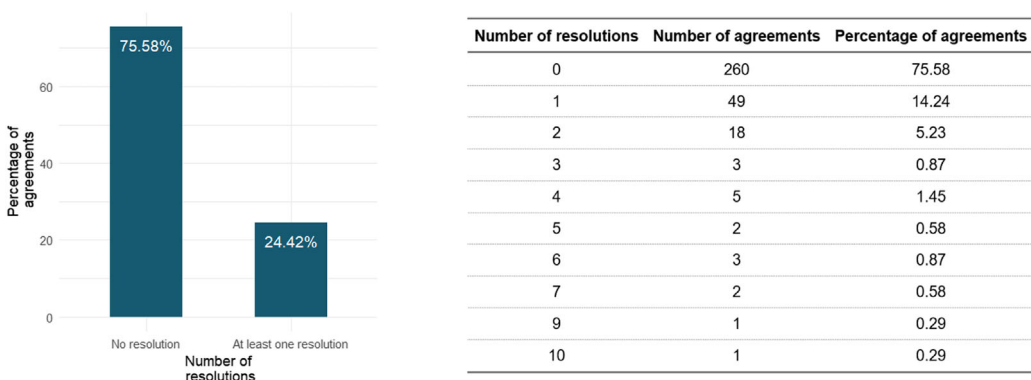
co-operation between the Commission and the EP (Bardou, 2024; Coremans and Meissner, 2018).

In the EP, resolutions result from various procedures. All types of resolutions are potentially relevant when studying international agreements, and we do not make a distinction between them in this article. We only exclude legislative own-initiative reports that request the Commission to make legislative proposals and resolutions adopted as part of specific procedures such as the budgetary procedure. Resolutions are adopted in the EP as follows: they start with a motion for a resolution, which can be initiated by committees, political groups, groups of MEPs or individual MEPs. The motion is preliminary screened, typically by the Conference of the Presidents (Schädler and Brandsma, 2021). Then, some motions are selected and referred to the relevant committee, a rapporteur is appointed, and a committee report about the resolution is adopted, followed by a facultative plenary debate and a final vote in the plenary.

EP resolutions are not systematically adopted for all international agreements. For example, amongst the main trade agreements negotiated since 2009, some of them have led to intense EP involvement, including via resolutions, whilst the EP remained inactive on others (Héritier et al., 2019; Meissner and McKenzie, 2019). Whilst the existing literature provides case-based evidence of this variation (e.g., Delreux and Burns, 2019; Zimmermann, 2019), it does not provide a systematic, cross-case explanation. Figure 1 plots the distribution of the occurrence of resolutions. At least one EP resolution is adopted for 24.42% of agreements. For approximately 10% of agreements, two or more resolutions are adopted.

No immediate explanatory factors of variation can be intuitively distinguished. The EP adopted resolutions irrespective of the policy area, the scope of the agreement or how well-known the negotiations have been. For example, whilst the EP has adopted resolutions about the EU–Japan free trade agreement (FTA) or the EU–Mauritania fisheries partnership agreement, no resolution was adopted on the EU–Chile trade agreement on organic products or on the EU–Senegal fisheries partnership agreement. This observation leads to our first research question: *under which conditions does the EP adopt resolutions during the negotiation process of international agreements?*

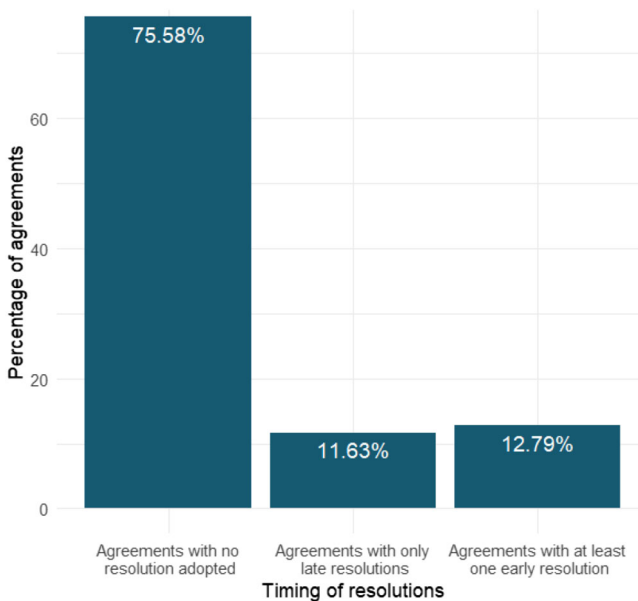
Figure 1: Distribution of the Occurrence of European Parliament Resolutions on International Agreements. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions)]



In the 24.42% of cases where EP resolutions are adopted, their timing varies. For instance, whilst the EP issued a resolution on the EU–Japan FTA during the authorisation stage, the EP’s resolution on the partnership agreement with New Zealand was issued only during the ratification stage. Figure 2 presents the distribution of agreements by the timing of the earliest EP resolution (if any). Approximately half of the agreements for which the EP adopts at least one resolution include resolutions adopted during the authorisation or negotiation stage. We define such resolutions that are adopted during the authorisation or negotiation stage as ‘early resolutions’. Consequently, resolutions adopted during the ratification stage are considered ‘late resolutions’.

The variation in timing is puzzling, as the timing of EP resolutions is crucial if the EP wants to use them as tools to signal positions and to leverage its veto power. The earlier a resolution is adopted, the greater the opportunity to influence substantive outcomes (Daviter, 2007; Princen, 2007). When the negotiation stage ends, a text is agreed between the negotiators from the EU and from the third country. At that moment, it becomes very difficult for the EP to obtain changes on the substance of agreements. Thus, late resolutions are unlikely to bring substantive changes, contrary to early resolutions, which are a tool for potential substantive influence. Whilst both early and late resolutions have the function of scrutiny and communication, only early resolutions are instrumental for policy-shaping. However, it is harder for the EP to adopt early resolutions than late resolutions. Generally, during the early stages of policy-making (in our case, the authorisation or negotiation stage), parliaments often lack the necessary resources for active involvement (Anglmayer and Scherrer, 2020; Murphy, 2020). In the case of international agreements, when the EP adopts an early resolution, it diverges from the equilibrium foreseen

Figure 2: Distribution of the Timing of European Parliament Resolutions on International Agreements. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/terms-and-conditions)]



in the treaties (Eckes, 2014; Hart, 2020). Whilst it is foreseen that the EP can scrutinise and communicate, policy-shaping stems from a more self-assertive strategy. The variation on the timing of resolutions leads us to our second research question: *under which conditions does the EP adopt early resolutions?*

II. The Conditions of the Occurrence and of the Timing of EP Resolutions

To identify the conditions of the occurrence and the timing of resolutions, we consider the conditions under which (some) functions of resolutions are useful for EP actors. The reasoning is grounded in the classic idea that actors in the EP are driven by policy-seeking and office-seeking objectives (Strøm, 1997). These objectives can be pursued through resolutions, which fulfil the functions of scrutiny, communication or policy-shaping. Because early and late resolutions have in common that they are public and institutional assertions of positions, and because early and late resolutions have partially overlapping functions, the drivers of occurrence and timing are considered to be similar, but the intensity of their effect is expected to be different.

In order to identify the conditions under which resolutions in general and early resolutions in particular are adopted, the article brings together three strands of the literature and considers the effect of three sets of factors. Jointly, these factors cover policy-seeking and office-seeking objectives and the three functions of resolutions allowing the pursuit of these objectives.

First, we consider the effect of *EP capabilities*. The elaboration and adoption of resolutions require capabilities and resources such as staff, expertise and time to gather and process information (Coremans and Meissner, 2018). Such resources are deployed, and practices are developed in the context of policy area-specific EP committees and in interaction with policy area-specific Commission Directorates-General (DGs). In other words, EP capabilities differ depending upon policy areas (Pegan, 2021). The literature has shown that the development of practices and expertise to deal with international agreements has particularly occurred in the EP's INTA Committee (Armanovica and Bendini, 2014; Coremans and Meissner, 2018; Kerremans et al., 2019). That is to say, INTA is a committee with strong capabilities regarding international agreements. Committees in other policy areas do not have the same level of capabilities, partly because international agreements are less central to their work (Bardou, 2024). When more capabilities are available, more activities that deploy such capabilities, such as resolution adoption, can be conducted. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 1a: When the INTA Committee is the responsible committee, the EP is more likely to adopt a resolution.

Given that early resolutions additionally have a policy-shaping function and that their adoption requires more capabilities than late resolutions, we expect early resolutions to occur more frequently when the EP has more capabilities:

Hypothesis 1b: When the INTA Committee is the responsible committee, the EP is more likely to adopt at least one early resolution than only late resolutions.

Capabilities not only differ between policy areas and EP committees, but they also develop over time. Learning processes can lead to the development of ad hoc practices of involvement, such as the establishment of informal communication channels with the Commission. Likewise, learning can lead to the deployment of limited resources in a more efficient way. These learning processes and the successive development of practices and routines unfolded progressively over time after the EP was granted veto power by the Lisbon Treaty (Coremans and Meissner, 2018; Peffenköber and Adriaensen, 2021). As a result of such learning processes, adopting EP resolutions is likely to be less and less costly, rendering the formulation of a public institutional position easier – and thus more frequent over time. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 2a: When a negotiation process is more recent, the EP is more likely to adopt a resolution.

As capabilities develop over time, the EP is better equipped to face the constraints of adopting early resolutions. Early resolutions, which have the additional function of policy-shaping compared to late resolutions, thus become less costly over time. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 2b: When a negotiation process is more recent, the EP is more likely to adopt at least one early resolution than only late resolutions.

Second, we consider the effect of *EP policy priorities being at stake*. The EP is indeed known for paying specific attention to several priorities in the EU's foreign policy. Three policy priorities are of particular importance to the EP when it comes to international agreements: (1) human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Cremona, 2011; Keukeleire and Delreux, 2022; Sjursen, 2017); (2) environmental protection, where the EP has been profiling itself as an 'environmental champion' (Burns and Carter, 2010); and (3) the defence of data protection rights for EU citizens (Ripoll Servent and MacKenzie, 2011). Because the EP is advocating for these policy priorities, it has a stronger interest to adopt resolutions on agreements where these priorities are at stake. Indeed, adopting a public institutional position in the form of a resolution allows for signalling the EP's red lines (i.e., policy-shaping function of resolutions) and to put pressure on the Commission (i.e., scrutiny function). It also allows for asserting an institutional identity and the identity of individual MEPs around the defence of these priorities (i.e., communication function). Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 3a: When one or several of EP policy priorities are at stake in a negotiation process, the EP is more likely to adopt a resolution.

Because early resolutions also have a policy-shaping function but come with more constraints to adopt than late resolutions, we expect that:

Hypothesis 3b: When one or several EP policy priorities are at stake in a negotiation process, the EP is less likely to adopt at least one early resolution than only late resolutions.

Third, we consider the effect of the *salience of the negotiations*. We define salience as the importance that actors in the public sphere specialised in EU affairs grant to the negotiations (Beyers et al., 2018; Dennison, 2019). Whilst notable exceptions exist, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations (Gheyle, 2020), EU international agreements are rarely salient beyond the specific public sphere specialised in EU affairs (de Bièvre and Poletti, 2020; Zimmermann, 2019). Existing empirical evidence suggests that salience matters in triggering EP activities in international negotiations (inter alia Héritier et al., 2019; Mancini, 2022; Meissner and McKenzie, 2019). The EP is likely to respond to salience in the EU public sphere for two reasons. First, the EP is generally responsive to the concerns of actors in the specific EU public sphere (Gastinger and Adriaensen, 2019; Greenwood and Roederer-Rynning, 2019). Second, salience in the public sphere is likely to influence which negotiations are perceived as important by the EP – and thus worthwhile to invest its limited resources (Smeets and de Rooter, 2019; Vliegenthart et al., 2013). When negotiations are salient, the EP has more interest in adopting a resolution. As a public institutional position, a resolution is more likely to resonate in the public sphere than other activities. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 4a: When negotiations are more salient in the public sphere specialised in EU affairs, the EP is more likely to adopt a resolution.

In the case of early resolutions, it is important to consider the timing of salience. Salience is not necessarily constant over time: the level of salience can differ between the authorisation, negotiation and ratification stages. When an agreement is salient only during the ratification stage, salience will not trigger the adoption of resolutions in the preceding authorisation or negotiation stage. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 4b: When negotiations are more salient in the public sphere specialised in EU affairs during the authorisation and negotiation stages, the EP is more likely to adopt at least one early resolution than only late resolutions.

Salience is likely to interact with EP policy priorities, and in particular with human rights. The EP is often depicted and presents itself as a defender of human rights. But the literature has demonstrated that the extent to which the EP advocates for the inclusion of human rights provisions in international agreements varies, in particular relating to salience (McKenzie and Meissner, 2017; Meissner and McKenzie, 2019). The argument is that the EP invests resources to defend the inclusion of human rights when there is an opportunity to communicate, rather than only to scrutinise and shape policy, that is, when the negotiations are salient. When negotiations are salient and human rights are at stake, it is thus even more likely that the EP will adopt a resolution. Therefore, we expect that there is an interaction effect between salience and the fact that human rights are at stake. Hence, our expectation is that:

Hypothesis 5a: When human rights are a stake in a negotiation process *and* when negotiations are salient, the EP is more likely to adopt a resolution, more so than when considering the two explanatory factors separately.

The combination of human rights being at stake and early salience creates a situation in which the EP has more interest in adopting an early resolution: such an early resolution has the policy-shaping function specific to early resolutions but can additionally fulfil the communication function effectively because there is a wider audience. Therefore, we expect that:

Hypothesis 5b: When human rights are a stake in a negotiation process and when negotiations are salient early, early EP resolutions are more likely than late resolutions, more so than when considering the two explanatory factors separately.

III. Data and Methods

Our cases are international agreements concluded by the EU between the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty (December 2009) and April 2023 and for which the EP had veto power.³ To ensure that the cases are ‘instances of the same thing’, only negotiations of agreements that were actually ratified by the EU are studied.⁴ Resolutions adopted by the EP were searched for on the EP’s Legislative Observatory website. Whether a resolution is an early resolution or not was determined by the date of the Commission signature proposals.⁵

Our two dependent variables are binary. Therefore, we test our explanatory factors with two series of binomial logistic regressions. The first models deal with the occurrence of resolutions and are run with the whole population of agreements ($N = 344$). The second models only cover the agreements for which resolutions were adopted and compare agreements with at least one early resolution with agreements with exclusively late resolutions ($N = 84$). To ensure that there is no selection effect in the second model, we also ran Heckman selection models. The latter indicate no such selection effect.⁶

The explanatory factors⁷ related to *EP capabilities* are operationalised as follows. First, it is considered whether the INTA Committee was the responsible EP committee or not (Hypotheses 1a and 1b). Second, to test the effect of how recent the negotiation process is, the year of mandate adoption by the Council is used (Hypotheses 2a and 2b).

The set of explanatory factors regarding the *EP policy priorities being at stake* (Hypotheses 3a and 3b) is operationalised in two different ways. First, we consider whether the selected EP priorities are included in the text of the international agreement. Second, we take into account the extent to which the human rights and the environmental priorities are a concern in the third country (for bilateral agreements) or in the multilateral setting (for multilateral agreements).⁸ Therefore, we rely on rankings of third states concerning

³The article studies agreements to which Article 218(6)(a) TFEU was applicable and for which there is no procedural exception (see the supporting information).

⁴Negotiations that were discontinued, for example, the EU–US negotiations on TTIP, are not included in the dataset. Similarly, negotiation processes not completed by ratification by April 2023 are not included in the dataset.

⁵The date of the signature proposal was chosen because it indicates the date of the end of the negotiation stage.

⁶For Heckman selection models, see the supporting information.

⁷For details on data collection, operationalisation and coding, see the supporting information.

⁸When negotiations are conducted in multilateral settings, it is considered whether the agreement is dealing with each of the EP policy priorities.

human rights and the environment: respectively the Freedom House Index and the Yale Environmental Performance Index.⁹ The third policy priority, data protection, has a particular status: it is a concern primarily for its impact on EU citizens. Therefore, we only consider whether a data protection clause is included in the international agreement. In order to ensure robustness, we run two sets of models separately: (1) models considering whether one of the three priorities is at stake (with one variable for inclusion in text and one variable for concerns for the respect) and (2) models considering the three priorities separately.

The third explanatory factor of EP activities, the *salience of the negotiations* in the public sphere specialised in EU affairs (Hypotheses 4a and 4b), is measured by the reports on the negotiations in a specialised media outlet. Salience in the media is key in the mechanisms driving salience in the broader public sphere (Beyers et al., 2018). For each international agreement, all articles mentioning it and published before the adoption of the Council decision on conclusion were searched for in Euractiv.¹⁰ Due to the strongly skewed distribution of salience data, the salience variable was measured as the presence or absence of media articles on a given international agreement. For the occurrence of resolutions in general, it is considered whether or not Euractiv published articles about a given agreement (Hypothesis 4a). For early resolutions, it is considered whether or not articles were published before the Commission proposal of signature (Hypothesis 4b), that is, during the period in which adopted resolutions are considered to be early resolutions.

Additionally, we include two control variables to ensure our model is not confounded by other explanatory factors. First, we control whether the agreement is negotiated with an accession or neighbourhood country. Because of the geographical proximity of these countries with the EU and the depth of co-operation, the EP is more likely to adopt resolutions in their case. Second, we control for whether the agreement creates direct economic opportunities for actors in the EU. Because of its links with EU voters and interest groups, the EP is more likely to invest resources in agreements that create direct economic benefits and opportunities.

IV. Results

In this section, we first present results for the conditions under which resolutions are adopted, regardless of their timing, and then the results for the adoption of early resolutions.

The regression results regarding the occurrence of resolutions are presented in Table 1. We find that the adoption of resolutions is more likely when INTA is the responsible committee, when human rights, personal data protection or environmental protection are included in the text and when negotiations are salient. Model 3 explains best the occurrence of resolutions.¹¹

⁹These rankings are not chosen for their scientific accuracy but rather for the publicity given to them, as they are likely to reflect widespread public perceptions of the non-EU countries. For the Freedom House Index, we use the categories developed in the index (free, partially free and not free), and for the Yale Environmental Performance Index, we use the quartile of the ranking to which the third state belongs.

¹⁰Euractiv is one of the main EU-specialised media outlets. The use of other media outlets such as Politico resulted in the compilation of extremely similar data, showing that relying on Euractiv data is a valid measurement.

¹¹See the supporting information on model choice and results for other models. Model 4 is more complex and does not bring significantly more explanatory power.

Table 1: Regression Models for the Occurrence of Resolutions.

	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 3</i>	<i>Model 4</i>
(Intercept)	2.55*** (0.69)	-2.23** (0.71)	-2.29** (0.71)	-2.49*** (0.75)
Responsible committee is INTA	0.73* (0.35)	0.55 (0.34)	1.28** (0.41)	1.29** (0.42)
Year of the mandate	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.06 (0.03)
At least one of the EP priorities in the text	1.91*** (0.39)			
At least one of the EP priorities is a concern		1.47** (0.49)		
Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are in the text			2.02*** (0.45)	1.94*** (0.48)
Environmental protection is in the text			0.83* (0.38)	0.87* (0.39)
Personal data protection is in the text			1.13** (0.37)	1.16** (0.38)
Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are a concern				0.56 (0.44)
Environmental protection is a concern				-0.17 (0.40)
Salience of the negotiations	2.74*** (0.66)	3.44* (1.37)	2.47*** (0.52)	3.48*** (0.72)
Interaction between EP priorities included and salience	-1.20 (0.77)			
Interaction between EP priorities being concerns and salience		-1.41 (1.41)		
Interaction between inclusion of human rights, democracy and the rule of law and salience			-1.63* (0.75)	-1.47 (0.79)
Interaction between concerns about human rights, democracy and the rule of law and salience				-1.81* (0.80)
Direct economic opportunities	0.58 (0.30)	0.87** (0.29)	0.18 (0.35)	0.23 (0.35)
Neighbourhood/accession country	0.31 (0.38)	-0.32 (0.35)	0.49 (0.41)	0.48 (0.47)
<i>N</i>	344	344	344	344
AIC	305.54	322.90	277.61	278.15
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.35	0.29	0.44	0.47

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

First, EP capabilities affect the probability that a resolution is adopted, but in a more complex way than expected. In line with expectations, when INTA is the responsible EP committee, the odds of resolution adoption are 3.6 times larger. The recentness of the negotiation process has no significant effect. Briefly, there is an effect of the INTA Committee, but not of time and learning processes. Consequently, the results support Hypothesis 1a, but not Hypothesis 2a.

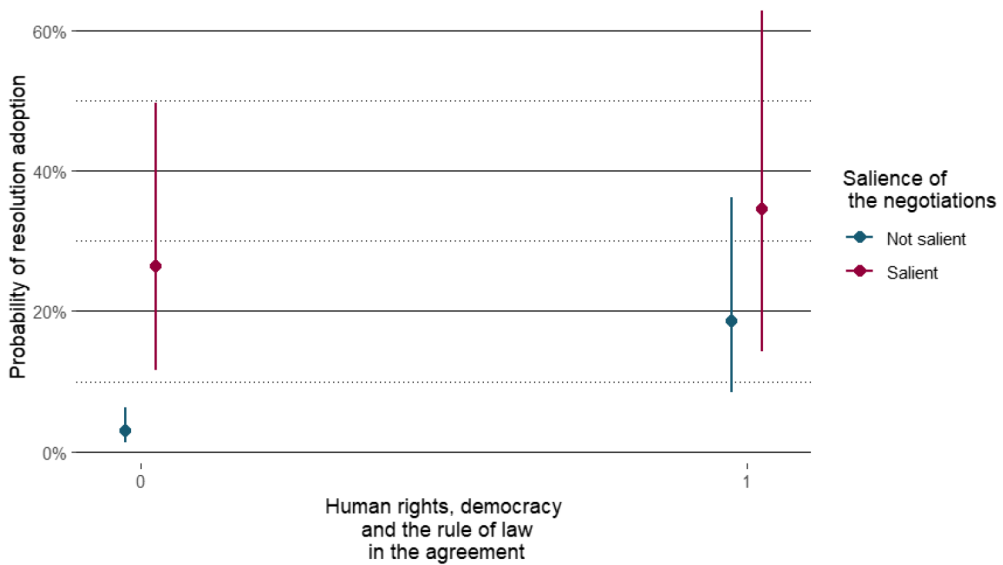
Second, some EP policy priorities have a significant effect on the probability that a resolution is adopted, but not all of them. The variables considering whether there is at least one EP policy priority at stake (Models 1 and 2) have a significant effect. Yet the models

considering EP policy priorities separately show that this effect is driven by the inclusion of provisions about human rights, democracy and the rule of law, personal data protection or environmental protection – and not by whether they are a concern. In line with expectations, the mention of human rights in the agreement has a strong and positive effect: when human rights are mentioned, the odds of a resolution being adopted are 7.5 times larger than when they are not mentioned. By contrast, the respect of human rights in the third country does not have a significant effect. In line with expectations, the inclusion of personal data protection provisions in agreements has a positive effect: when personal data protection is mentioned, the odds of a resolution being adopted are three times larger than when it is not mentioned. The third EP policy priority, environmental protection, has a significant effect, but smaller, with the odds of a resolution being adopted two times larger when it is mentioned. Thus, the results provide mixed support to Hypothesis 3a, displaying differences between the EP policy priorities in the size of the effect and between the effect of inclusion in the text as opposed to these priorities being a concern.

Third, in line with expectations, salience has a strong positive effect on the probability of resolution adoption. When negotiations are salient, the odds of a resolution being adopted are 11.8 times larger than when there are no articles. Thus, the results support Hypothesis 4a.

The effect of human rights provisions varies depending upon the salience of the negotiations, but not in the expected direction. Figure 3 plots the interaction effect. When human rights are included in the agreement *and* when the negotiations are salient, resolution

Figure 3: Interaction Effects Between the Presence of Human Rights and Salience. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]



¹²See the supporting information for model choice.

adoption is *less* likely than it would be considering the two independent variables separately. The interaction effect is statistically significant but does actually *negatively* affect the probability of resolution adoption. Thus, there is no support for Hypothesis 5a.

Finally, the two control variables – namely, the third country being a neighbourhood or accession country and the direct economic opportunities created by the agreement – do not have a significant effect on the probability of resolution adoption. Hence, they do not confound our model.

After having explained the occurrence of resolutions in general, we now present the results for the specific category of early resolutions. The analysis is performed on the 84 agreements for which resolutions were adopted, but some outliers having a disproportionate effect were withdrawn in one model. The analysis uses agreements for which only late resolutions were adopted as the baseline scenario. Table 2 presents the regression results.¹² Models including interaction terms are not presented in Table 2 because of their lack of robustness. Models 7 and 8 provide the most explanatory leverage.

Table 2: Regression Models for the Timing of Resolutions.

	<i>Model 5</i>	<i>Model 6</i>	<i>Model 7</i>	<i>Model 8</i>
(Intercept)	-2.18 (1.41)	-2.11 (1.43)	-1.87 (1.49)	-2.30 (1.33)
Responsible committee is INTA	-0.23 (0.66)	-0.19 (0.68)	0.09 (0.60)	0.15 (0.62)
Year of the mandate	0.15* (0.06)	0.14* (0.06)	0.14* (0.06)	0.14* (0.06)
At least one of the EP priorities in the text				-0.27 (0.64)
At least one of the EP priorities is a concern			-0.78 (0.89)	
Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are in the text	-0.08 (0.68)			
Environmental protection is in the text	-0.04 (0.65)			
Personal data protection is in the text	-0.75 (0.66)	-0.80 (0.59)		
Human rights, democracy and the rule of law are a concern		-0.11 (0.59)		
Environmental protection is a concern		-0.10 (0.61)		
Early salience of the negotiations	1.65* (0.65)	1.65** (0.63)	1.51* (0.60)	1.41* (0.59)
Direct economic opportunities	-1.81** (0.66)	-1.83** (0.64)	-1.98** (0.67)	-1.90** (0.66)
Neighbourhood/accession country	1.42* (0.69)	1.51* (0.71)	1.58* (0.66)	1.44* (0.65)
<i>N</i>	84	84	84	82
AIC	110.22	110.16	107.34	106.87
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.33	0.33	0.32	0.29

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Two variables have a significant effect in Models 7 and 8, in addition to the two control variables. These results are robust across models. First, the more recent the negotiations, the more likely are early resolutions compared to late resolutions. This effect is consistent across almost all models. Thus, Hypothesis 2b is supported.

Second, when the negotiations are salient early, early resolutions are more likely compared to late resolutions. This effect is relatively consistent across models. Thus, Hypothesis 4b is supported. Other hypotheses are not supported.

V. Discussion

Our findings demonstrate that EP capabilities, EP policy priorities and salience have a statistically significant effect on the adoption of (early) resolutions by the EU, albeit in a more complex way than expected. What do these findings reveal about EP involvement in the international treaty-making processes of the EU?

First, the EP's relatively limited capabilities available to deal with international agreements – which make that the EP has to 'choose its battles' – have an effect on the probability of resolution adoption. Everything else being equal, resolutions are more likely to be adopted when the responsible committee is INTA, which is a particularly well-organised and resourceful committee for that type of files. This finding is in line with the existing literature that demonstrates the specificity of INTA when it comes to international agreements (Bardou, 2024). Remarkably, this effect of INTA being the responsible committee does not hold for the adoption of early resolutions. This could indicate that INTA has developed practices for being involved during the authorisation and negotiation stages via other activities than adopting resolutions, such as regular discussions and exchanges with the Commission.

Interestingly, our results also qualify the argument made in the literature that overall, the EP learned how to deal with international agreements in the post-Lisbon era and that it developed tools and practices in order to get more involved (Coremans and Meissner, 2018). This led us to expect that the probability of resolution adoption in more recent negotiations would be higher than in less recent cases. However, this hypothesis is not supported. In fact, more recent negotiations are associated with a higher probability of early resolution adoption compared to late resolutions. This pattern indicates that the EP does not adopt more resolutions over time but adopts resolutions differently.

Second, starting from the observation that the EP traditionally emphasises a number of policy priorities in the EU's foreign policy, we find that resolutions are more likely to be adopted when human rights, personal data protection or environmental protection are mentioned in international agreements – and are thus a topic in the negotiations between the EU and its international partners. The EP tends to adopt resolutions as defender of individual rights and freedoms and as an 'environmental champion', but the effect of human rights is larger. The pattern could however evolve in the future as international agreements that started to be negotiated under the Commission that launched the European Green Deal, which calls for a stronger integration of environmental considerations in the EU's foreign policy, get ratified. The results could also indicate that the EP utilises other activities than resolutions when it comes to environmental protection and personal data protection.

EP policy priorities have an effect when policy priorities are included in the agreement (and were thus an issue in the negotiations), yet not when the respect of these EP policy priorities by the third country is a concern or the major topic in multilateral fora. This difference can be interpreted in two different but non-mutually exclusive ways. On the one hand, the results might suggest that the EP focuses on the actual content of the negotiations rather than on broader issues that may be at stake. On the other hand, the results can be interpreted as pointing to the importance of endogenous processes through which specific issues are *constructed* as being a concern. Indeed, it is not the absolute level of concern about human rights that matters, but rather whether human rights provisions are included in the agreement.

Third, in line with expectations, resolutions are more likely to be adopted in salient cases. This suggests that the EP is responsive to debates in the public sphere specialised in EU affairs. Everything else being equal – including the EP's policy priorities being at stake – the EP is more likely to adopt a resolution when the negotiation of an international agreement is salient. Similarly, the EP is more likely to adopt at least one early resolution than only late resolutions when negotiations are salient in the early stage of the negotiations. This provides support for one of the main hypotheses formulated in the existing literature regarding variation in EP involvement: salience is central in explaining why the EP gets involved (inter alia Héritier et al., 2019).

As expected, the effect of salience on the occurrence of resolutions interacts with the presence or the absence of human rights in the international agreement. Existing case study research indicates that the EP is advocating for the inclusion of human rights in (trade) agreements not when they are more a concern but when the agreements are more salient (Meissner and McKenzie, 2019). Complementing these insights and contrary to expectations, our results demonstrate that the adoption of resolutions is less likely when taking into account the interaction than when considering salience and human rights separately. In other words, salience does not 'boost' the probability of resolution adoption when human rights are included. In fact, when salience is higher, the presence of EP policy priorities matters less in explaining the adoption of resolutions.

Fourth, the results indicate a puzzling pattern for early resolutions. With the exception of the effect of the recentness of the mandate and an effect of early salience, our findings do not allow an explanation of when the EP uses the policy-shaping function of resolutions (i.e., with early resolutions) and when the EP does not use that function (i.e., with late resolutions). The variables impacting the occurrence of resolutions do not have an effect on their timing. This finding arguably indicates that there is a difference not only in the intensity but also in the nature of the explanatory factors for occurrence and timing. Moreover, it should be noted that our two control variables – agreements with neighbourhood of accession countries and agreements creating direct economic opportunities – have a significant effect only on the timing of resolutions, not on their occurrence.

Taken together, this article explains under which conditions the EP 'chooses its battles' when adopting resolutions on international agreements. As our explanatory factors can be underpinned by a policy-seeking or an office-seeking logic, our results do not allow this article to argue whether the EP is more a policy-seeking or office-seeking parliament. In practice, resolutions may be adopted because of a mix of these two logics. Moreover, because resolutions are adopted by the EP as a whole, they require the involvement of several individual and collective actors within the EP. Each of these actors may have a

different logic of action, but this leads all of them to support the adoption of resolutions when certain conditions are present.

Conclusion

This article has tested explanatory factors for the occurrence and the timing of the adoption of EP resolutions about the negotiation of international agreements. Resolutions allow the EP to publicly voice an institutional position at any time during the negotiation of international agreements, complementing and possibly reinforcing its formal veto power at the end of the negotiation process. Adopting such resolutions requires the investment of limited resources. The article has identified the kinds of agreements for which these resources are actually invested.

Three main findings stand out. First, resolutions are more likely to be adopted when the responsible committee is INTA and, consequently, when the international agreement under negotiation is a trade agreement. Second, resolutions are more likely to be adopted when provisions on human rights, personal data protection or environmental protection are included in the agreement. Third, resolutions are more likely to be adopted when the negotiations are salient in the public sphere specialised in EU affairs. Salience interacts with the inclusion of human rights in the agreement, but not in the expected direction: the effect of salience is lower when human rights are mentioned than when they are not mentioned. With regard to the timing of resolution adoption, early resolutions are more likely when negotiations are more recent and when negotiations are salient early in the process. Overall, the results indicate that the explanatory factors for the occurrence and timing of resolutions correspond to two different logics, the latter still needing to be disentangled by further research.

With its novel and comprehensive large-N approach, the article empirically confirms two arguments that have been found in case studies on the EP's involvement in the negotiation process of international agreements. First, the INTA Committee, and with it the policy area of trade, stands out as distinctive in terms of level of EP involvement. Importantly, this implies that findings from case studies on trade policy – which dominate in the literature on the role of the EP in international treaty making – do not necessarily travel beyond this policy field. Second, salience is indeed a major factor for explaining the variation of EP involvement in the process of negotiation of international agreements.

Our results also raise new questions. First, whilst the level of concern for EP priorities does not have an effect on the probability of resolution adoption, the inclusion of provisions about these priorities in agreements does have such an effect. Further research should disentangle why that is the case and tackle the causal mechanisms through which the inclusion of EP priorities triggers the adoption of resolutions. Second, whilst the EP has often portrayed itself as a defender of environmental protection, this policy priority does not have an effect as strong as human rights. Future studies, including international agreements that are currently being negotiated, are necessary to test whether this is due to the time window adopted in this article. If not, this would nuance the image of the EP as an advocate for environmental protection and indicate potential dynamics of prioritisation relative to human rights.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Data S1. Supporting information.