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Geostrategy

**What's at Stake in the EU Elections:
Ukraine Aid**
Niklas Ebert

What's at Stake in the EU Elections: Ukraine

By Niklas Ebert | February 20, 2024

The European Parliament elections in 2024 will shape the political direction of the EU over the next five years and, therefore, constitute a defining moment. In this series, GMF experts discuss the impact the elections will have on EU policy in key areas, consider what can—and should—be done before the elections, and outline potential post-election scenarios. This piece examines issues related to support for Ukraine.

Over the past two years, the EU has been remarkably united when it comes to supporting Ukraine. Despite internal disagreements, the EU has remained strongly pro-Ukraine, providing the country with substantial financial aid and even some military support through the European Defense Agency. The upcoming elections for the European Parliament (EP) will not fundamentally change the EU's pro-Ukraine stance, but secondary effects might make providing support for Ukraine more difficult in the future.

Before June 2024: Realize “As Long as It Takes”

The EU's foreign policy decisions remain largely the prerogative of the heads of state in the European Council. The members have recently made significant decisions to support Ukraine for the longer term. Importantly, the council [finally passed a new aid package](#) on February 1, 2024, overcoming Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's temporary blockade and securing €50 billion in aid over a four-year period. In October 2023, the EP had [already approved the aid package](#) to support Ukraine as part of the EU's multi-annual financial framework for 2024–2027. The vote showed overwhelming support for Ukraine, with 512 members of the EP voting in favor and 45 against, with 63 abstentions. Given current projections, it is unlikely that the shift to the right would be so consequential as to threaten this majority. Despite these encouraging signs, there are two areas in which the EU should take immediate action to strengthen support for Ukraine:

- **Scale up the supply of ammunition.** Ukraine is suffering a severe shortage of ammunition, especially 155mm artillery shells. This shortage has a direct impact on the situation on the battlefield. Ukraine currently has to [ration its ammunition](#) at the risk of running out. The EU's defense-industrial base has been [greatly expanded](#), but the union is [projected](#) to miss its target of providing one million artillery shells to Ukraine by March. While the target will likely be reached at some point in 2024, member states need to act decisively to secure a continuous supply of ammunition to Ukraine beyond the one million rounds currently promised, using instruments such as the [Act in Support of Ammunition Production \(ASAP\)](#) to further strengthen European production capacity. In the meantime, the EU must acquire further ammunition from third parties to keep Ukraine in the fight.
- **Be prepared to talk about Russian assets and long-term financial support.** As public money is becoming harder to mobilize, attention will inevitably return to Russian state assets. The EU must be prepared to address the [opposing views](#) among its members as other Western allies will be sure to move forward on this issue at the G7 meeting in June.

The recently agreed-upon €50 billion is an important step signaling the EU's continued support. However, the EU will need to adjust to the new reality that further macro-financial aid from the United States is highly unlikely. It is [already foreseeable](#) that even with the EU package and the previously pledged IMF support, Ukraine will need more money to keep its economy afloat.

Scenarios and Risks: What Happens After the Elections?

Polls suggest that there will be a significant [shift to the right](#) in the European parliament after the elections, with support for mainstream parties declining and for extremist parties increasing. While this shift is not likely to threaten the parliament's pro-aid stance (as the larger, mainstream groups remain supportive), a new center-right majority may be less inclined to support funding for some of the more ambitious sustainable reconstruction aims.

The election will probably result in an increased number of EP members who do not support helping Ukraine or are even pro-Russian, especially in the extreme right-leaning Identity and Democracy (ID) group and among non-affiliated members. Future Ukraine aid might be complicated as more extreme voices become ever louder, impacting national debates. Ukraine aid has already become a polarizing subject in several countries.

Some of the right-wing parties that stand to gain in the June elections range from skepticism about continued EU aid for Ukraine to supporting pro-Russian narratives. Parties such as the German AfD and the Dutch PVV could well be more strongly represented in the new parliament. The PVV recently won the national elections while [pledging to stop aid](#) to Ukraine; the AfD has been pushing the [narrative](#) that sanctions on Russia have brought significant economic hardship with little or no advantage. They argue that Europe needs to reengage with Russia to ensure peace and prosperity. The success of these parties in June would stand to impact national debates and calculations ahead of national elections, potentially shifting the discourse away from consensus on the necessity of supporting Ukraine.

The new parliament could also influence EU aid to Ukraine via its budgetary competencies. A more right-leaning EP could affect the nature of the reconstruction planning. The EU and Ukraine have been planning the reconstruction process based on [sustainable principles](#), often referred to under the rubric of "build back better". This principle combines apparent reconstruction needs with EU ambitions regarding sustainable development and emission reductions, also in the effort to pave the way for an eventual Ukrainian EU membership.

A more right-leaning parliament might be less inclined to support funds for reconstruction efforts that are perceived as "ideologically motivated". Just as it will likely become more difficult to pass EU green deal initiatives in the parliament, it will become more difficult to fund ambitious sustainable reconstruction projects. As public funds for reconstruction are increasingly hard to come by, the idea of "building back better" could conceivably be replaced by the principle of "good enough". Some might argue that building an ecological wonderland in Ukraine is not a priority task for Western taxpayers.

Such changes in attitude could well impact the negotiations for the next multi-annual financial framework among the European parliament, the EU Commission, and the EU Council. In a more sanguine scenario, only implementation timelines and goals relating to, for example, emission targets might be affected. A worst-case scenario would involve reduced funding for parts of the reconstruction agenda such as sustainable housing and the development of green energy sources, as this would potentially impact larger plans for the decentralization and modernization of Ukraine's energy infrastructure.

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About the Author

Niklas Ebert is a program coordinator at GMF East. Based in the Berlin office he coordinates GMF's work on designing Ukraine's reconstruction. Prior to joining GMF, he worked as a research assistant with the International Institute for Strategic Studies' Defence and Military Analysis Programme in Berlin. Previously, he worked for the German Federal Foreign Office focusing on (nuclear) disarmament and non-proliferation. He gained additional experience at PricewaterhouseCoopers and the German Council on Foreign Relations. His areas of interest include the reconstruction of Ukraine and US and EU defense and security policy,

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