

Fostering Political Solidarity through Language

A Diachronic Analysis of Politeness Strategies
in Zelensky's Addresses to the European
Parliament

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	6
2. Historical and political context	8
2.1 Timeline of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.....	8
2.2 The Ukraine-EU relationship.....	10
2.3 Zelensky's addresses to the European Parliament	11
3. Theoretical framework	13
3.1 Political discourse analysis.....	13
3.2 Politeness theory.....	14
3.2.1 The concept of face	14
3.2.2 What is politeness?	15
3.2.3 Critiques on and the relevance of the politeness framework	16
4. Methodology	19
4.1 Research question	19
4.2 Methodological approach	19
4.3 Data collection.....	19
4.4 Analytical framework.....	20
4.5 Limitations.....	25
5. Results and analysis.....	27
5.1 In-group marking.....	27
5.2 Directives	36
5.3 Praise	40
5.4 Gratitude expressions.....	43
5.5 Language choice	46
6. Discussion	48
7. Conclusion	54
8. References	57
9. Appendix.....	61

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Map of Ukraine (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)	8
Figure 2. Use of <i>Europe</i> and <i>European</i> across Zelensky's speeches	32
Figure 3. Use of directives throughout Zelensky's speeches	37
Figure 4. Use of gratitude expressions across Zelensky's speeches	44
Figure 5. Overview of the different politeness strategies used by Zelensky	48
Figure 6. Pronoun usage and relations between individuals and groups in the context of Zelensky's addresses	52
Table 1. Pronominal distribution in Zelensky (2022)	28
Table 2. Pronominal distribution in Zelensky (2023)	30
Table 3. Pronominal distribution in Zelensky (2024)	35

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
D	Social distance
EU	European Union
FTA	Face-threatening act
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
H	Hearer
P	Relative power
PDA	Political Discourse Analysis
R	Rank of imposition
S	Speaker
TTR	Type-token ratio

1. Introduction

“All of us enjoy this common European history – the Ukrainian European way of life that they tried to annihilate through total war. Why? Because after the European Ukrainian way of life, they want to destroy the European way of life in all 27 countries of the European Union. We will not allow that” (Zelensky, 2023). On February 9th of 2023 – one year after the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia – President Volodymyr Zelensky addressed the European Parliament, stating that the invasion of his country would exterminate “the European way of life” altogether. Throughout his address to the European Parliament, President Zelensky repeatedly frames Russia’s aggression as the onset of a total annihilation of Europe and the “European Ukrainian way of life”. This statement not only reaffirms Ukraine’s alignment with European values and identity, but also frames its struggle as one shared with the European Union (EU).

In this highly sensitive diplomatic context, Zelensky’s discourse is marked by a careful balancing act: the president has to issue urgent (often face-threatening) appeals for military, political, and economic aid, while simultaneously attempting to maintain and affirm unity and shared values. In the aforementioned quote, Zelensky creates the impression that Europe and Ukraine belong to one and the same group and that Ukraine is therefore deserving of aid and solidarity, although the country was, and is still far removed from official membership within the European Union. As to better understand how Zelensky navigates this dual task – issuing high-stake appeals while maintaining diplomatic ties – this thesis will draw upon the theoretical framework of political discourse analysis (PDA), supplemented by ideas from the field of politeness theory, building upon theories such as the one developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Their model offers valuable tools for examining how speakers manage interpersonal relationships and mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) in interaction. Chilton (1990) has drawn attention to the inherently political nature of certain negative and positive politeness strategies described and put forward by Brown and Levinson. The linguistic mechanisms used to claim common ground, show in-group behaviour, or avoid overly intruding into the other’s territory, for instance, can all be seen as “tactics”, governed by strategic political ends (Chilton, 1990: 221). Against the background of politeness theory, Zelensky’s speeches in the European Parliament will thus be analysed as a strategic negotiation of face. It is valuable to note that these addresses are not instances of ordinary or spontaneous language use. On the contrary, these texts are written-out and carefully prepared by Zelensky (as the main author) and his team (Shashkova, 2023). As such, the linguistic strategies employed by Zelensky can be assumed to reflect deliberate, intentional choices – making these speeches particularly well-suited for analytical investigation.

By drawing on insights from political discourse analysis and politeness theory, this thesis will examine different politeness strategies employed by President Zelensky in his addresses to the European Parliament in the initial stage of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict – notably on March 1st 2022, February 9th 2023 and November 19th 2024 – thereby examining how his discourse has evolved from the onset of the invasion to a more recent stage in the conflict. Hence, it aims to address a gap in the existing literature, which requires a broader linguistic analysis of Zelensky's public diplomacy during the invasion of Ukraine, especially when it comes to the president's speeches in the European Parliament. The findings of this thesis will allow for a deeper understanding of how linguistic choices can serve both persuasive and relational purposes in a time of urgent conflict.

The remainder of this thesis is structured as follows. First, the theoretical framework operationalised for this thesis will be laid out, with a focus on political discourse analysis and politeness theory (as initially developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and later advanced and critiqued by others). Afterwards, a politico-historical timeline of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as an overview of the existing EU-Ukraine relationship will contextualise the findings discussed in this thesis. Subsequently, the research question and methodological approach will be further detailed and expanded upon. The results and analysis section will summarise the main findings, examining how in-group marking, directives, praise, gratitude expressions and code-switching are strategically deployed by President Zelensky in his speeches to the European Parliament, across the three selected years. It will discuss the occurrence of each of these strategies over time, and the possible strategic motivations underlying their use within the broader context of the conflict. The discussion will centre on a potential connection between the use of these strategies over time and will attempt to explain the main political objectives underlying President Zelensky's calculated deployment of these strategies. It will hence point out how Zelensky strategically employs linguistic tools to continuously position Ukraine positively in relation to the European Union in the context of the ongoing conflict, while issuing (inherently face-threatening) appeals in a manner that minimises the risk of offense for the European Union.

2. Historical and political context

To fully understand and grasp the underlying motivation of the politeness strategies used by President Volodymyr Zelensky in his addresses to the European Parliament, it is imperative to first examine the broader politico-historical context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This section provides a concise overview of some key developments in Ukraine's relationship with Russia, starting with the annexation of Crimea in 2014, culminating in the full-scale invasion launched in 2022. Subsequently, the focal points of each of the different stages of the ongoing conflict will be expanded upon. Moreover, this section will briefly revise the relationship between Ukraine and the European Union, and discuss Ukraine's position in the path to EU membership. Situating Zelensky's speeches against this background will help understand the stakes and strategic purposes underlying his linguistic choices on the European stage.

2.1 Timeline of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

The ongoing tensions between Russia and Ukraine date back to 2014, when Russia occupied and annexed Crimea from Ukraine. In early 2014, the Euromaidan protests led to the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity (International Criminal Court, 2016; Mankoff, 2022): these protests were a series of demonstrations in Ukraine from November 2013 to late February 2014, whereby protesters gathered on Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti ("Independence Square"). They resulted in the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich, who had rejected the long-negotiated EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (a deal for greater economic integration with the European Union) (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; Plokhy, 2015; Ray, 2025).



Figure 1. Map of Ukraine (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2025)

Under the pretext of protecting Russian citizens and Russian-speaking populations, Russian forces then took control of Crimea and supported separatist movements in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk (see Figure (1)). After a highly disputed local referendum (where Crimeans had to vote to join the Russian Federation), escalating tensions led to armed clashes between Russian-backed separatists and Ukrainian forces. Since then, the Crimean Peninsula has been “administered by Moscow as a subject of the Russian Federation” (Chiluwa and Ruzaitė, 2024: 3). Although Russia denied direct military involvement in the region, evidence of its support was reported by Ukraine and NATO. These divisions resulted in an inconclusive conflict with many brief ceasefires along the eastern frontline of Ukraine (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; International Criminal Court, 2016; Ray, 2025).

After eight years of ongoing tensions, Putin announced the onset of “a full-scale land, sea, and air invasion” on February 24th, 2022, “targeting Ukrainian military assets and cities across the country” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). Putin claimed that, with this operation, the Russian Federation wanted to “demilitarise and denazify Ukraine” and end the alleged genocide of Russians in Ukrainian territory (Putin, 2022). As Mankoff (2022) observes, the invasion of Ukraine was thus not a completely new war; rather, Russia intensified its aspirations set in motion in 2014. Following President Putin’s speech, Russian forces began invading Ukraine from Belarus in the north, Russia in the east and Crimea in the south. Subsequently, President Zelensky declared martial law and called for a general mobilization of Ukraine’s military-age population (Ray, 2025). The Russian invasion was heavily criticised on an international scale; worldwide, leaders condemned the unprovoked attack and promised rapid and severe sanctions against Russia. Moreover, 141 of 193 UN member states voted to condemn Russia’s invasion in an emergency UN General Assembly session, “demanding that Russia immediately withdraw from Ukraine” (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025). Five days after the beginning of this full-scale invasion, on March 1st 2022, President Zelensky gave his first (virtual) address to members of the European Parliament.

After failing to capture the Ukrainian capital Kyiv in the first few months of the conflict, Russian forces largely centred on the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, with the intention of seizing full control of the Donbas region and establishing a land corridor from Kherson and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts, to Crimea in the south (Mills, 2025; see Figure (1)). In the second half of 2022, Ukraine, assisted by military support from its allies and partners, launched a significant counteroffensive, successfully reclaiming substantial areas of territory in the northeastern and eastern regions of the country (Mills, 2025). In this stage, Ukraine was also granted candidate status for membership within the European Union (European Commission, 2025).

Between November 2022 and June 2023, the conflict reached a stalemate. The winter and spring offensives conducted by Russia's forces failed to achieve significant territorial gains, resulting in largely static front lines. Russia's missile and drone campaigns against Ukrainian cities did continue, and despite improvements in Ukraine's air defence capabilities, civilian casualties continued to rise (Ray, 2025). During this impasse in the conflict, Zelensky gave his second speech to the European Parliament on February 9th 2023. In the summer of 2023, President Zelensky vowed to continue the Ukrainian counteroffensive and reclaim all of Ukraine's sovereign territory. However, progress was slow, and in November 2023, Commander-in-Chief Valerii Zaluzhnyi declared that the war had reached another stalemate after Ukraine's failed second counteroffensive (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; Mills, 2025). From December 2023 onward, the conflict thus finds itself in the latest stage, with continued military campaigns (including drone and missile attacks) on both sides. Since the end of 2023, North Korea has also been providing Russia with military support for its invasion of Ukraine, with up to 12,000 North Korean soldiers reported to be fighting on Russian ground (Mills, 2025). To commemorate a thousand days of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Zelensky addressed the European Parliament for a third time in an extraordinary plenary session held on November 19th 2024.

2.2 The Ukraine-EU relationship

The relationship between Ukraine and the European Union can be said to have been initiated shortly after Ukraine gained independence in 1991, with the country quickly signalling its aspiration to join the EU alongside other post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe. However, these ambitions were met with a cautious response from the EU, which consistently maintained a reserved stance toward Ukraine's membership prospects, despite successive Ukrainian presidents publicly advocating for a clear European trajectory for the country (Nielsen, 2023: 4). Both the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Revolution of Dignity in 2013-14 were aimed at Ukraine's position in relation to the EU and their desire to move closer to the EU. The Orange Revolution in 2004 was a mass protest triggered by fraudulent presidential elections, ultimately leading to a re-run won by the pro-European candidate Viktor Yushchenko. These events reflected Ukraine's growing desire for democratic reforms and closer ties with the European Union: Ukrainian leadership profited from the positive image that the country had obtained to move closer to EU membership and to "jump on the departing train of EU enlargement" in light of the 2004 Eastern enlargement (Plokyh, 2015: 334). Despite these efforts, the EU remained hesitant to offer a clear path to membership. As previously mentioned, the Revolution of Dignity or Euromaidan protests were a series of demonstrations in Ukraine in early 2014, which resulted in the removal of President Viktor Yanukovich, who had rejected the long-awaited EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which was intended to "save and strengthen Ukraine's democratic institutions [...] and bring European business standards to Ukraine" (Plokyh, 2015: 338). In later years, the

forementioned Association Agreement was ratified and entered into force, marking a crucial point in the EU-Ukraine cooperation.

Although Ukraine always had “a European orientation” after its independence (Plokhyy, 2015: 353), efforts to join the EU quickly accelerated after February 24th 2022. Only four days after the start of the invasion, on February 28th, Ukraine applied for EU membership (European Commission, 2025). In June of the same year, Ukraine was granted candidate status by the European Council. The European Commission then outlined seven steps which Ukraine needs to address in order to progress on their path to the EU (including i.a. economic and sustainability goals) (European Commission, 2025). While the situation is critical, and Ukraine would benefit from EU membership in the context of the ongoing conflict, accession to the EU is a difficult and lengthy process. The first step of the accession negotiations (discussing the country’s alignment with EU legislation) took place in July 2024 (European Commission, 2025), but full completion of the process could and will likely take another few years. Nonetheless, the European Union has offered considerable financial, humanitarian, and military support to Ukraine over the course of the current invasion. As they indicate themselves: “The European Union and its partners are doing their outmost to help Ukraine [...] The EU has reacted swiftly, adopting unprecedented sanctions against Putin’s regime, and its collaborator, the Lukashenko regime” (European Commission, 2025).

2.3 Zelensky’s addresses to the European Parliament

The previous sections have provided an overview of some of the central stages in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and have briefly touched upon the EU’s role in these struggles. This section briefly discusses the position of Zelensky’s addresses to the European Parliament against the different stages of this conflict.

Following eight years of existing tensions, set in motion after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th 2022. This marked the onset of the first stage in the conflict, during which Ukraine was being severely attacked on multiple fronts, prompting President Zelensky to adopt swift measures. Consequently, he addressed the European Parliament for the first time five days after the beginning of the invasion. Half a year later, during Ukraine’s first significant counteroffensive, the country was granted candidate status within the EU. This period (February – November 2022) was thus predominantly marked by a sense of urgency and the need for rapid action, which will be highly relevant for the analysis carried out in this thesis, as it might be assumed that this immediacy will be reflected in the way Zelensky addresses the European Parliament on March 1st 2022.

In a second stage (November 2022 – June 2023), the conflict reached an impasse. The context of Zelensky's second address to the EP is thus one of lowered pressure and reduced immediacy of necessary aid, which might again be observable in Zelensky's speech on February 9th 2023. Between June and December of this year, Ukraine launched a second counteroffensive; however, it yielded no major breakthroughs, leaving the conflict once again in a state of deadlock (Council on Foreign Relations, 2025; Mills, 2025). In November 2023, Ukraine was included for the first time in the EU's enlargement reports, and accession negotiations with Ukraine officially started on December 14th 2023 (European Commission, 2025). So, while significant breakthroughs in the conflict were lacking, Ukraine did make progress at the European level, moving closer to EU membership.

The last stage relevant to this thesis can be situated as of December 2023, with continued military campaigns on both sides and the landing of North-Korean support for Russia. To draw attention to the fact that the conflict had been ongoing for over 1000 days, an extraordinary plenary session was held in the European Parliament on November 19th 2024, during which Zelensky addressed Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) for a third time. The context of this speech is again one of increased urgency: after a thousand days of war, a considerable part of the EU population seemed to be experiencing a form of war fatigue and the degree of support for Ukraine was reported to be declining year after year (Consolini, 2025).

The analysis and discussion (Section 5 and 6) will further draw upon possible links between these developments in the conflict and the linguistic strategies, as well as thematic emphases, present in Zelensky's speeches. Before we turn to those sections, the next section presents this thesis's theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Political discourse analysis

This thesis aims to investigate the use of language (and specific linguistic strategies) in the political sphere, as “embedded in the tradition of western political thought there is in fact a view that language and politics are intimately linked at a fundamental level” (Chilton, 2004: 4). More precisely, it will examine politeness strategies used in (public) diplomatic¹ speeches delivered within the European Parliament’s hemicycle. As stated above, language and politics are inextricably linked: diplomats, politicians and other governmental actors will “design and monitor wordings and phrasings”, with the goal of responding to and dealing with (potential) political challenges (Chilton, 2004: 8). How people use language in diplomatic contexts is a delicate matter, as “amateurs with words can cause, and on occasion have caused, as much damage and tragic waste as have amateurs in military command” (Oliver, 1951: 207). In the context of the ongoing conflict, analysing Zelensky’s speeches through a political discourse analytical lens will thus enable a more nuanced interpretation of the communicative intentions and strategic goals underlying the linguistic choices present in his addresses.

To examine the linguistic strategies employed by President Zelensky in his speeches to the European Parliament, this study draws on the principles of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) (cf. Chilton, 2004; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; van Dijk, 1997; Wodak, 1996). As a subfield of discourse analysis, PDA focuses on the ways language is used to construct, negotiate, and exercise power within political contexts. Besides being concerned with the linguistic aspects of political discourse, PDA is also “a critical enterprise” aimed at answering “genuine and relevant political questions” and dealing “with issues that are discussed in political science” (van Dijk, 1997: 11-12). It provides a critical lens through which political discourse can be interpreted, not only as a reflection of ideology and power dynamics, but also as a strategic tool in shaping public perception and international relations. Political discourse – as a genre – can be defined in various ways (Wilson, 2001), but van Dijk argues that it is first and foremost characterised by its actors or authors, namely politicians (1997: 12). But, “from the interactional point of view of discourse analysis”, it also includes “the various recipients in political communicative events, such as the public, the people, citizens, the ‘masses’, and other groups or categories” (van Dijk, 1997: 13). Political discourse often displays “rhetorical forms of persuasion or performance” (Wilson, 2001: 775), and can be contextualised in communicative events such as cabinet meetings or parliamentary

¹ Although diplomacy is often interpreted narrowly as the managing of international relations behind closed doors (typically by a country's representatives abroad), it should be understood here in a more broad sense, including all instances of communication by state representatives or intergovernmental institutions aimed at influencing events in the international system (so: also comprising parliamentary proceedings and other international activities of supranational entities) (Trager, 2016).

sessions, but also interviews with the media, protest demonstrations and election campaigns (van Dijk, 1997: 14). PDA can therefore be implemented as an instrument to unravel and understand connections between discourse and social or political processes at large (Chilton, 2004: 205; van Dijk, 1997: 24), for instance to expose inequality and domination (Wodak, 1996: 32). As it can clarify how bigger issues (here: the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the mobilisation of European support for Ukraine) are managed at the micro-level (Chilton, 1990: 206), the framework of PDA will guide this thesis's analysis of Zelensky's linguistic choices, particularly in relation to politeness strategies and the broader socio-political context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

In his research on political discourse, Chilton (1990) has broached upon the idea of extending the Brown and Levinson framework as an instrument of political discourse analysis. He argues that in discussing *strategies* of politeness, Brown and Levinson refer to the "planning of their choice of words by rational agents" (Chilton, 1990: 203). This planning can be considered strategic, in the sense that it aims to achieve something, and that speakers calculate the risk involved in completing these goals (203). Given the inherently strategic nature of political discourse, and the careful degree of deliberate planning behind prepared speeches delivered in the European Parliament, Brown and Levinson's comprehensive theory of politeness offers a valuable framework for analysing Zelensky's linguistic choices.

3.2 Politeness theory

3.2.1 The concept of face

In order to give a brief, but thorough overview of the linguistic concept of politeness, as predominantly (and/ or initially) developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), it is important to first expand upon Erving Goffman's (1967) notion of face, which Brown and Levinson reinterpreted to build their theory upon. Goffman describes face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (1967: 5). Important to note is that, for Goffman, face is not an entirely individual and static construct, as is the case in Brown and Levinson's interpretation. Rather, he conceptualises the notion of face as follows:

[Face is] constructed discursively with other members of the group in accordance with the line that each individual has chosen. So face is socially attributed in each individual instance of interaction, which implies that any individual may be attributed a potentially infinite number of faces. (Locher and Watts, 2005: 12)

Brown and Levinson, on the other hand, interpret face in more stable and individualistic terms, as something rooted in universal psychological needs, "that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost,

maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61). They consider face as a pre-existing need that individuals bring into interactions, and not as something emergent or negotiated. Generally speaking, this means that, when interacting, “speakers cooperate (and assume each other’s cooperation)” to maintain their own and the other’s face (61). Moreover, the concept of face, as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”, consists of two parts, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 61). First, speakers strive to be unimpeded by others; they fundamentally desire autonomy (i.e. “freedom of action and freedom from imposition”). This is what the authors refer to as *negative face*. Secondly, speakers want to feel respected, liked and approved of by others, thereby wishing that their wants are “desirable to at least some others”. This desire is termed *positive face* (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61-62). In interaction with others, people do not only pursue autonomy (negative face) and a positive self-image (positive face), but also realise that their interlocutors do too (Lee et al., 2021: 2).

Speakers are thus highly aware of their own and the interlocutor’s face and will adjust their behaviour to sustain the other’s face, to avoid acts or utterances that might threaten the interlocutor’s face, and to preserve their own (Lee et al., 2021: 2). This largely corresponds to what Goffman labels *face-work*: a basic condition and structural feature of social interaction, which involves all the actions a person can undertake to ensure that what they are doing is “consistent with face” (1967: 12). It means that in interaction, participants conduct themselves in accordance with a set of unwritten rules and standardised practices, as to “save” the public image of all of those involved and to counteract possible “incidents” (Goffman, 1967: 12-13). Consequently, every individual, subculture, and society appears to have their “own characteristic repertoire of face-saving practices” (13).

3.2.2 What is politeness?

The concept of politeness refers to the set of communicative (often verbal) behaviours that speakers employ to enhance face or mitigate threats to it. This implies that there are certain kinds of acts that intrinsically threaten face, “namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65). In politeness theory, these acts are commonly referred to as *face-threatening acts* (FTAs); they imply that the speaker (S) either overstepped the hearer’s (H) personal (mental or physical) personal territory (negative face threats), or reveal that they do not hold the hearer in high esteem (positive face threats). Examples of negative face threats are orders, requests or suggestions (66). Positive face threats often appear in the form of criticism, complaints or non-cooperation (66-67).

To deal with these FTAs, Brown and Levinson provide a classification of politeness strategies, ranging from avoiding the FTA altogether to performing it with varying degrees of mitigation (Kasper, 1996). If

the speaker decides to perform the FTA, they can do this off record (often also considered “implicitly”), meaning that the communicative intent of the act is indirect or ambiguous, allowing for multiple interpretations and plausible deniability (Lee et al., 2021: 4). A speaker can also carry out the FTA baldly on record: this means doing it “in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible”, without making any effort to mitigate or soften the threat to the hearer’s face (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69). However, it is also possible for the speaker to complete the act with redressive action, hoping to “counteract the potential face damage of the FTA” (69). Such redressive action can comprise positive and negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies are “approach-based” (70) and thus directed at addressing the hearer’s positive face wants. These strategies attempt to validate the listener “by establishing common ground, showing solidarity, and conveying shared interests” (Lee et al., 2021: 4). Commonly-used positive politeness strategies are the use of in-group identity markers, creation of common ground, and the expression of interest towards the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 102). Negative politeness strategies, on the other hand, are “avoidance-based” and mainly directed towards satisfying the hearer’s negative face wants, i.e. minimising the perceived imposition of a FTA. They indicate that the speaker recognises and respects the hearer’s negative face wants and will not (or only minimally) invade their personal territory or interfere with their freedom of action (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 129). Examples are the use of hedges, disclaimers, impersonalisation or minimisers (131).

Moreover, Brown and Levinson distinguish three factors that determine the weight or gravity of a FTA, and hence the most suitable politeness strategy. First, the relative power (P) of the speaker and the hearer refers to the extent to which the hearer can enforce their will over the speaker, i.e. the “degree to which H can impose his own plans and his own self-evaluation (face) at the expense of S’s plans and self-evaluation” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 77). Secondly, the social distance (D) between S and H – often measured by the frequency and type of interaction – affects how formally or deferentially the FTA is framed. Lastly, the rank of the imposition (R) concerns the degree to which the act is considered intrusive or burdensome in a given context and interferes with the speaker’s negative and positive face wants (Brown and Levinson, 1987:77).

3.2.3 Critiques on and the relevance of the politeness framework

Although Brown and Levinson’s framework is generally considered to be the foundational and most influential within politeness theory research, other authors have also made considerable contributions to the field (see Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1983/2014; Kasper, 1990/1996; Watts et al., 2005). Moreover, various critiques have been formulated vis-à-vis Brown and Levinson’s foundational work. As has been briefly discussed before, Brown and Levinson have been criticised for their handling of the notion of

face, seeing it as “an inalienable individual possession” (Kasper, 1996). This individualistic understanding of face is at odds with non-anglophone cultural orientations (Kasper, 1996; Leech, 2007; Watts et al, 2005). Hence, one of the fundamental critiques on Brown and Levinson’s work condemns it for its Western bias: although the authors frame their conceptualisation of politeness as largely universal, it does not fit, for instance, the traditional Eastern ethos of group identification, in which each person has a place in the social hierarchy, defined by rights and responsibilities in relation to others (Leech, 2007: 171).

This individualistic conception of the notion of face thus does not take into account the kinds of social order present in Goffman’s conceptualisation of the term (Watts et al, 2005: xxviii). Brown and Levinson seem to ‘neglect’ the fact that face is constituted in social interaction and largely disregard the social dynamics and situational factors (apart from P, D and R) that underpin and inform the emergence of politeness. More recent work within the field of politeness thus considers politeness as only one component of what more generally can be called “relational work”. Locher and Watts define relational work as “the ‘work’ individuals invest in negotiating relationships with others” (2005:10). It can be interpreted as a dynamic process by which individuals construct, negotiate, and maintain interpersonal relationships through language in context. It thus considers Goffman’s idea of face-work to span “the entire breadth of interpersonal meaning” (11). Locher and Watts argue that any “interpersonal interaction involves the participants in the negotiation of face” (2005:11), thereby reaching further than Brown and Levinson’s interpretation of face-work, which limits it to appropriate and polite behaviour, focused on face-threat mitigation. Hence, relational work encompasses polite, impolite, and non-polite (‘appropriate’) behaviour, emphasising that all forms of interaction contribute to managing social roles and relational meanings (Locher and Watts, 2005: 11).

Therefore, this thesis will depart from a dynamic understanding of politeness, viewing it not as a fixed set of norms, but rather as something continually negotiated and evaluated by speakers within a specific social context. The analysis carried out in this thesis focuses on how the broader context, i.e. the evolving phases of the conflict, shape and determine the way Zelensky balances appeals for aid with mitigating politeness strategies, constantly shaping and negotiating his relationship with the EU. While the thesis thus draws upon foundational concepts described by Brown and Levinson, it also incorporates more nuanced perspectives, such as those proposed by Locher and Watts (2005), or Watts et al. (2005), who conceptualise politeness as a form of (dynamic) relational work. This approach reflects the assumption that Zelensky’s linguistic choices are not static, but evolve (and are presumably deliberately adjusted) in line with changing political circumstances. Moreover, this thesis follows the idea that politeness strategies can exist autonomously. Sifianou (1995: 99) notes that “acts like offers, congratulations and compliments, while they may contain face-threatening aspects, are nevertheless

primarily face-saving or even face-enhancing". These face-enhancing or face-flattering acts (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005), which are also employed by Zelensky, are primarily aimed at benefiting the addressee, rather than serving the speaker. This conceptualisation acknowledges that positive politeness strategies are not always tied to mitigation, but can also be employed independently to cultivate or highlight a positive interpersonal relationship (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005: 196).

The theoretical framework discussed in this section, combining insights from PDA and politeness theory, will hence provide the background for analysing Zelensky's language use in his addresses to the European Parliament. This thesis thus understands politeness strategies in a broad and dynamic sense, encompassing not only FTAs and their possible mitigation, but also the performance of i.a. face-enhancing or face-flattering acts. The analysis and discussion will further elucidate how the various politeness strategies employed by Zelensky function as a form of relational work, demonstrating how Zelensky manages negotiating interpersonal and institutional relationships through language, in a highly sensitive diplomatic context.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research question

As stated above, this thesis aims to analyse the discourse produced by Ukrainian President Zelensky in his addresses to the European Parliament between 2022 and 2024, in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. More specifically, it seeks to investigate the different politeness strategies Zelensky uses in his speeches to manage the relationship with his European allies over time, as well as the possible intended pragmatic effects of these strategies. Concretely, the diachronic evolution of these strategies in Zelensky's addresses to the European Parliament will be examined, to discover how his discourse has evolved from the beginning of the invasion (March 2022) to a more recent stage in the conflict (November 2024). These results will allow us to reveal how Zelensky uses different linguistic mechanisms to simultaneously position himself (and the whole of Ukraine) positively vis-à-vis the European Union, as well as to request European support for Ukraine (an inherently FTA), without causing undue tensions or overly imposing on the EU.

4.2 Methodological approach

As mentioned in the theoretical framework section, this thesis is broadly situated within the field of political discourse analysis, seeking to critically interpret real-life data, uttered in a political context. Rather than applying a predefined top-down coding scheme, relevant politeness strategies or 'tactics' (cf. Chilton, 1990) were inductively identified in the data, allowing the analysis to remain sensitive to certain specific features and nuances of the discourse. The thesis adopts a diachronic perspective, tracing changes in the use and frequency of the identified tactics in Zelensky's speeches over time. This approach helps to capture changing dynamics in Zelensky's relational positioning towards the EU, in response to evolving political circumstances and developments in the conflict. Moreover, as to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data, the analysis carried out in this thesis is mixed-method: it combines a detailed qualitative examination – highlighting specific excerpts and their pragmatic interpretation/implications – with a descriptive, quantitative assessment, including the frequency and distribution of the identified strategies, as well as specific lexical and pronominal elements across the speeches.

4.3 Data collection

The data used in this thesis consist of three speeches (see Appendix), delivered by President Volodymyr Zelensky in the hemicycle of the European Parliament, on the occasion of Russia's full-scale invasion of

Ukraine. Over the course of the conflict, President Zelensky has addressed the European Parliament in Brussels on three occasions, with a speech in every year that the war has progressed:

- A speech on March 1st 2022,
- A speech on February 9th 2023,
- A speech on November 19th 2024.

The data were retrieved from the website of the European Parliament², where a verbatim report of proceedings is available for each plenary session held within the European Parliament. All of the speeches were analysed on the basis of their original transcription, as processed by the European Parliament and made available on their website. In addition, the video-recordings of all three speeches were examined, in order to confirm the accuracy of the available transcription, and to not miss out on any valuable information. The first address (707 words, approximately 9 minutes) and the second (1444 words, approximately 16 minutes) were delivered by President Zelensky in Ukrainian and were therefore analysed using the official English translations provided by the European Parliament. The third speech, which lasted around 6 minutes (639 words), was the only one delivered directly in English by the president. Notably, only the second speech was presented in person in the hemicycle of the European Parliament, while the other two were delivered in the form of a virtual address. Prior to each of Zelensky's speeches, a formal introductory address was delivered by the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola.

These three speeches were chosen for analysis due to their pivotal role: they mark key moments in the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia, and the EU's involvement in it (as discussed in Section 2). Zelensky actively addressed the European Parliament for a number of reasons, i.a. to ensure Europeans' understanding of the gravity of the situation, to ask Europe for aid in fighting Russia and (later) to thank the EU for its financial and military support. As each speech was delivered at a significant interval (with one speech in every year that the invasion has progressed), the selection of these speeches enables a diachronic examination of Zelensky's evolving linguistic strategies and the changes within his communication to the European Parliament over time.

4.4 Analytical framework

After collection, the data were imported into the data analysing software MAXQDA, in which multiple analyses were carried out. As a first grove measure, the software allowed to track and calculate the appearance of certain words. In this way, a **type-token ratio** (TTR) was determined. TTR is based on the

² Verbatim reports of parliamentary debates are available at:
<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>

number of words in a text, referred to as the number of *tokens*. However, several of these tokens are repeated. A word like *the*, or *of* will likely feature numerous times in a text, whereas more abstract or context-specific nouns will presumably feature less frequently. Each distinct noun is thus considered to be a different *type*. The relationship between the number of types and the number of tokens is generally known as the type-token ratio (Richards, 1987: 201). TTR is a valuable tool in discourse analysis, as it assesses the range of vocabulary used relative to the length of the text, with a higher ratio indicating greater lexical variety and stylistic variation (Richards, 1987: 201-202). Secondly, a **lexical frequency analysis** was carried out through MAQXDA: the software allows to calculate the absolute frequency of all of the words present in the data. Subsequently, a ranking (indicating the relative position of each word) was set up, which helps examine recurring lexical items and key terms in each speech separately and across the different speeches. Tracking these terms diachronically enables a clearer understanding of the evolution of thematic emphases in Zelensky's speeches. Furthermore, for a number of lexical items (pronouns in particular) their **indexicality** was examined, in order to uncover how certain expressions position different actors within Zelensky's discourse. In other words, for a couple of relevant terms (see Section 5.1 for a more detailed overview), it was investigated which referents they index and which identities they linguistically encode in each context (Braun, 2015; De Fina, 1995). In this thesis, special attention was for instance accorded to the pronoun *we*, examining how often Zelensky uses it to refer exclusively to Ukraine, or rather to a collective identity (i.e. Europe, including Ukraine).

Furthermore, five relevant linguistic strategies were identified, on the basis of a preliminary, bottom-up analysis of the data: in-group marking, directives, praise, gratitude expressions and code-switching. These strategies were marked with different codes, enabling to see the emergence of patterns within one and across the different speeches. To enable meaningful comparison across the speeches, the absolute frequencies of the appearance of these strategies were normalised (on the total number of words per speech), to indicate their relative occurrence (expressed in percentages). Each of these strategies will be briefly elaborated upon in this section, and examined in greater detail, through the lens of politeness theory, in the subsequent analysis.

In-group marking

The first strategy that was identified in Zelensky's speeches is in-group marking, a commonly used linguistic strategy whereby the speaker creates the impression that speaker and hearer belong to the same in-group, with outsiders belonging to the out-group. In the context of Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, in-group marking refers to the use of language that emphasises shared membership or solidarity within a group. It is often used to reduce social distance and signal closeness

between speaker and hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 107; Chilton, 1990: 212). In-group marking typically supports positive politeness strategies, which aim to appeal to the hearer's desire for inclusion and approval. A commonly used device within in-group marking is the use of first-person plural pronouns *we/us/our* (also referred to as "inclusive we" or the "we-device"), to include all desired members of the in-group (cf. Alharbi and Rucker, 2023; Chilton, 1990; De Fina, 1995; Rautajoki and Fitzgerald, 2022). These inclusive pronouns are deployed to convey empathy and assimilation (and hence solidarity), based on their structural property of encoding the meaning: [speaker + addressee] (De Fina, 1995: 380; Alharbi and Rucker, 2023: 5). In the context of Zelensky's speeches, it was thus examined how the president uses the pronouns *we/us/our* to express the same shared in-group (as in the example of "our Europe"): these instances were included in the quantification of the overarching strategy in-group marking. *You* and *your* were also taken into consideration for the analysis, but were not coded or quantified under this heading (as they are not explicitly used for in-group marking). Besides these pronouns, a number of lexical elements reflecting unity or cooperation (such as *friends*, *shared* or *together*) were also quantified and coded under the umbrella term of in-group marking in MAXQDA.

Directives

The second strategy that was identified is the use, or the lack of use of directives. Within Speech Act Theory, directives consist of a speaker telling (with varying degrees of strength) their addressee(s) to perform a certain action (Searle, 1979; Searle and Vanderveken, 1985). Directives thus principally include the speech acts of suggestions, requests, commands, and orders (Ruytenbeek, 2023). The propositional content of a directive speech act is "the state of affairs that the addressee should bring about in order to comply with the directive" (Ruytenbeek, 2023). Directives constitute a broad category, encompassing multiple kinds of forms and ranging from direct to more indirect cases. A distinction should thus be made between direct directives, where the speaker's intention is explicitly and clearly stated and the "locutionary aspect (linguistic features of utterance) and [the] illocutionary aspect (social act performed intentionally by the speaker when he or she produces the utterance) coincide perfectly" (Bernicot and Legros, 1987: 347), and indirect directives, where the request or command is implied rather than stated directly and the locutionary components and illocutionary force do not coincide (347), often using more polite or socially sensitive language. In this last case, the hearer will draw on background knowledge, Gricean principles, and contextual cues to infer the (implied) communicative intentions of the hearer (Ruytenbeek, 2023).

In the analysis carried out in this thesis, only direct directives – demonstrating explicit and transparent articulation of intent – were taken into account when coding the speeches. Under the heading of direct directives, the analysis considered the following occurrences: (i) explicit directive verbs (e.g. *I urge you to do this*), which at times can also be considered performative verbs as they state the (directive) act being performed directly, (ii) imperatives (e.g. *prove that you are with us*), and (iii) modal verbs with underlying directive force (e.g. *we must do this*). Modal verbs are included, as a verb like *must* can be said to have “an imperative-like component of meaning” and imposes “an obligation as part of its conventional meaning” (Portner, 2007: 364; see also Butler, 1982).

In the case of a political speech delivered to obtain support from the hearer, it should be noted that the use of these direct directives constitutes a FTA, as the hearer’s negative face is threatened when the speaker puts them under a degree of obligation and will likely impede their freedom of action (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, as discussed in Section 3.2.2, speakers can mitigate these directives by using positive and negative politeness strategies. Although directives themselves, as FTAs, do not fall under the heading of politeness strategies, their presence – or strategic absence – can indicate a degree of politeness, especially when mitigated or framed through positive or negative politeness strategies; hence why they were taken into account for the subsequent analysis. Directives constitute an essential part of Zelensky’s speeches, given that he must issue them to pursue his goals (i.e. obtaining European support), motivated by the urgency of the conflict. In the context of Zelensky’s speeches, it is thus highly relevant to examine how the president performs these necessary impositions and potentially balances them with politeness strategies.

Praise

A third strategy identified on the basis of the data, is the way in which praise features in Zelensky’s addresses to the European Parliament. Within the politeness framework, praise is considered to be a positive (even face-enhancing) politeness strategy. It generally attends to the hearer’s positive face, acknowledging their value, feelings or achievements (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, multiple kinds of praise can be distinguished. Firstly, *other-praise* directly enhances the hearer’s positive face by recognising that they are understood, approved of, or appreciated. *Self-praise*, on the other hand, is a more delicate (and not intrinsically polite) matter. Self-praise is considered “a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to the speaker for some ‘good’ (possession, accomplishment, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the potential audience” (Dayter, 2014: 92). While it risks being seen as boasting, self-praise may still function as a strategy to present competence, to establish credibility, or to build trust, especially in public diplomatic discourse. It might be a way for a speaker to show that their actions support and advance a common cause (Alharbi and Rucker, 2023:

7). Finally, *us-praise* can also occur within solidarity discourse, emphasising shared success or moral standing, thereby reinforcing a collective identity and mutual appreciation (Alharbi and Rucker, 2023: 8). Within the context of this thesis, all sentences which fall under Dayter's (2014) definition of praise – thus referring to positively valued accomplishments or traits of the speaker or addressee (or both of them) – were coded or labelled as praise in MAXQDA. It will hence be examined how and to which degree Zelensky praises Ukraine and its citizens for their strength and resilience (*self-praise*), the European Union for its values and rapid measures (*other-praise*) and lastly acclaims the success of their cooperation (*us-praise*), in each speech separately and across the speeches over time.

Gratitude expressions

A fourth element relevant to this study is the use of gratitude expressions. Through the lens of politeness theory, expressions of gratitude can function as a (face-enhancing) positive politeness strategy, specifically supporting the positive face wants of the hearer. Acknowledging and expressing gratitude for help, support, or solidarity from the other party will affirm the hearer's value and strengthen a positive relationship. Expressing thanks thus also constitutes a way for the speaker to restore an imbalance or lost equilibrium with the hearer (Alaoui, 2011: 9). Leech defines gratitude expressions as a "convivial" speech act, as expressions of thanks can be considered inherently respectful and polite (1983: 104). Moreover, communicating gratitude to the addressee can also serve as a mitigating or disarming move, softening prior or upcoming impositions. It posits the speaker as respectful and grateful, willing to humble their own face (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 67). For the analysis, all lexical items indicating gratitude in Zelensky's speeches (such as *thank* or *grateful*) were coded in MAXQDA.

Language choice

Finally, the analysis also examined Zelensky's choice of language and hence identified the use of code-switching as a relevant strategy deployed by Zelensky in his speeches to the European Parliament. Code-switching is defined as "any switch from one language or dialect to another in communities where the linguistic repertoire includes two or more such codes" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 110). In this context, the community at hand (i.e. the different MEPs) can be said to form a community of practice, identified "not in virtue of shared abstract characteristics (e.g. class, gender) or simple co-presence (e.g. neighborhood, workplace), but in virtue of shared practice" (Eckert, 2006: 1). The community revolves around mutual engagement, joint activities and shared repertoire (languages in this case) (Eckert, 2006). Within this specific community of practice, a speaker either speaks in their own language (which is interpreted simultaneously for all of the attendees), or in English, one of the

lingua francas of the European Union and the global lingua franca for diplomatic relations (Xhemaili, 2022).

In the case of the examined speeches, code-switching occurs in two distinct ways: on the one hand, in the sequence of speeches delivered by Zelensky, he delivers his first two speeches in Ukrainian (his mother language) and switches to English for his last speech in 2024. On the other hand, in his 2023 speech, delivered in Ukrainian, he actively switches from Ukrainian to English (the language understood by most people in the audience) to utter certain words and phrases. Code-switching to a language understood by the addressee is typically considered to encode positive politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 110), as it reduces social distance and enhances shared identity. In the context of public diplomacy, code-switching demonstrates “the versatility of language use and amplifies a leader's ability to connect with diverse populations, shape public sentiment, and influence policy outcomes” (Brittain-Hale, 2023: 14).

Section 5 will present the occurrence of the five previously described strategies in the data. The analysis of this concrete empirical evidence (i.e. their appearance in Zelensky's speeches) will centre on their meaning and the (likely intended) implications of their usage. In doing so, the analysis and discussion will try to define how each strategy – when and how it occurs in Zelensky's speeches – serves to further the broader diplomatic goals underlying Zelensky's discourse.

4.5 Limitations

Despite the structured application of discourse-analytical tools (drawing on political discourse analysis and politeness theory), this thesis inevitably faces a number of methodological limitations that have to be taken into account when assessing the results of the analysis. The most prominent limitation of this research concerns the issue of translation. The first and second address were delivered originally in Ukrainian by Zelensky, and interpreted simultaneously by conference interpreters of the European Parliament to the language of preference by the MEPs in attendance. The transcript of these two speeches made available by the European Parliament on their website thus constitutes an English translation of the original Ukrainian speeches. As such, the analysis of the 2022 and 2023 speeches was (necessarily) carried out on the basis of these English translations provided by the European Parliament. While these translations normally aim to preserve the content and intent of the original speeches, it must be acknowledged that certain linguistic nuances, cultural references, or other subtleties may have been lost or altered in the translation process. As linguistic politeness is a culture- and language-dependent phenomenon (cf. the critiques on Brown and Levinson's approach), analysing a speech by a Ukrainian speaker from a Western-anglophone framework might entail some elements

to get ‘lost in translation’³, potentially affecting the accuracy of the analysis. However, since face-work entails adjusting one’s (linguistic) behaviour to the face of the addressee, it might be assumed that Zelensky consciously adapts the language of his speeches to his audience, aligning with the Western politeness ethos. This is further underscored by the fact that one of Zelensky’s primary objectives is to distance himself and Ukraine from pro-Russian (Eastern-European) sentiments and reaffirm Ukraine’s orientation towards the West (especially after the events of 2014 (see Section 2)).

In addition, it is important to acknowledge that politeness theory constitutes a wide body of research; within the scope of this master thesis, it would thus be impossible to investigate and discuss everything related to politeness in these speeches. As stated above, certain choices thus had to be made, based on a bottom-up analysis of the data. Moreover, both discourse analysis and research into linguistic politeness inherently involve a degree of interpretative subjectivity. The identification and categorisation of relevant politeness strategies does not only depend on linguistic evidence, but is also based on (sometimes personal) contextual understanding. Nevertheless, efforts have been made to ensure consistency in the analytical process (cf. Section 4.4), and ambiguous or unclear data excerpts were discussed with the supervisor.

Finally, it has to be noted that, while it focuses on a specific set of politeness strategies, this thesis does not (and cannot) assess the potential consequences and impact of these strategies on the audience. Although the direct effect of an utterance on the addressee is usually highly relevant within politeness research, these effects cannot be investigated here, as the object of this research constitutes a speech (which is unidirectional), and not a conversation, as is often the case within politeness research.

³ Critiques vis-à-vis Brown and Levinson’s framework often pertain to the so-called universalism of their theory, and their neglect of politeness phenomena in the Global East. Whereas reference is usually made to aspects such as the fundamental group orientation of Eastern cultures in Asia (cf. Leech, 2007), the former Soviet Union (and the Middle East) are also included in a broader definition of the Global East. Ukraine thus finds itself in a kind of hybrid space, shaped by both Western and Eastern influences over the course of history (Portnov, 2022).

5. Results and analysis

The following section presents the outcome of the analysis, examining how each of the five strategies identified in Section 4 are strategically deployed in President Zelensky's speeches to the European Parliament, across the three selected years. For each strategy, the analysis will detail its occurrence over time, and discuss the possible strategic motivations underlying its use within the broader context of the relevant speech.

5.1 In-group marking

To recite what was stated in Section 4, in-group marking is a commonly used positive politeness strategy, whereby a speaker creates the impression that speaker and addressee belong to the same in-group. It hence concerns language use which emphasises shared membership or solidarity within a group. Within this section, three specific elements will be discussed, all contributing to the overall strategy of in-group marking, namely pronoun usage, lexical choice and the discursive construction of a shared enemy. For every speech (2022, 2023, 2024), the analysis will highlight how these linguistic features are purposely deployed by President Zelensky.

The 2022 speech

During his speech on March 1st 2022, Zelensky appears to invoke an explicit *we* versus *you* dichotomy, in terms of pronoun usage. Throughout his speech, the president continuously refers to Ukraine as his in-group (illustrated by the pronoun *we*) and paints the European Union as the other or out-group (indicated by the pronoun *you*). A sense of empathy and assimilation cannot yet be identified in this address (Alharbi and Rucker, 2023), as the two parties are (linguistically) constructed as two different entities, not yet belonging to the same group. Table (1) demonstrates the pronominal distribution of the 2022 address, reflecting the absolute frequencies of the pronouns *we/us/our* and *you/your* as used by Zelensky in 2022. The last column indicates for each pronoun which entities it indexes/refers to.

Pronoun	Amount	Indexicality
<i>We</i>	21	Ukraine (20) Europe and Ukraine (1)
<i>Our</i>	21	Ukraine (21)
<i>Us</i>	6	Ukraine (6)
<i>You</i>	14	Europe (13) Madam President (1)
<i>Your</i>	0	
Total number of words:	707	

Table 1. *Pronominal distribution in Zelensky (2022)*

As demonstrated in this table, Zelensky makes use of the first-person plural (personal and possessive) pronouns 48 times in total. In almost all of the occurrences of the first-person plural pronouns, they solely refer to Ukraine, as evidenced by the following examples:

- (1) We are losing our best, our strongest and our most valuable people. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (2) We often love to say that we will prevail over everyone [...]. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (3) We are strong. We are Ukrainians. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (4) Our nation is extremely motivated. We are fighting for our rights, for our freedoms and for our lives. Now we're fighting for our survival, and this is our highest motivation, but we're also fighting to be equal members of Europe. (Zelensky, 2022)

As reflected in examples (1)-(4), Zelensky constructs a narrative of national resilience and strength, portraying Ukrainians as a determined and courageous people. By foregrounding the courage and efforts of his citizens (see also Section 5.3 on (self-)praise), he implicitly appeals to the European audience for recognition and assistance, positioning Ukraine as a nation worthy of support and investment.

On the other hand, so-called “inclusive *we*” is not yet apparent in this address. This use of the pronoun *we* is used to evoke solidarity and similarity, because it structurally encodes the meaning [speaker + addressee] (De Fina, 1995: 380). It does not feature in this speech, apart from one singular instance, where Zelensky expresses his contentment in having brought together all the countries of the EU for this (unfortunate) occasion. This sentence is situated in the first lines of the speech, and might be considered a positive introductory remark, before initiating the central part of the speech.

- (5) I'm happy that we have brought together all the countries of the European Union today, but I did not know at what cost. (Zelensky, 2022)

Another interesting picture is painted when we look at the use of the pronoun *you*, which features 14 times in this speech. In Zelensky's usage of this pronoun, we might already observe some hints at a desire for shared membership, expressed through subtle in-group marking, as in the case of (4) (see above), (6) or (7), where Zelensky suggests that Ukraine shows (or wants to show) considerable similarities to the EU:

- (6) We have proven that, at the very least, we are exactly the same as you are. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (7) I believe that today we are giving our lives for values, for rights, for freedom, for the desire to be equal, just like you are – just like every human is. (Zelensky, 2022)

However, in most cases he seems to use the pronoun *you* in contexts where he is trying to convince the EU to offer support to Ukraine. *You* is thus often used in combination with directives (as in example (8) or (9)), as will be further elaborated upon in Section 5.2. Zelensky concludes his speech with the imperatives presented in example (9), thereby positing or emphasising them as the central take-away message of this address.

- (8) There is an expression, 'Ukraine chooses Europe'. That's what we have been striving for, and that's where we have been and are still headed. I would very much like to hear you say to us that Europe now chooses Ukraine. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (9) So prove that you are with us. Prove that you will not abandon us. Prove that you are indeed Europeans, and then life will prevail over death and light will prevail over darkness. (Zelensky, 2022)

Example (10) further demonstrates how Zelensky deliberately structures his sentences to conceive this dichotomy between in-group (Ukraine, *us*) and out-group (European Union, *you*), possibly mobilising this dichotomy in a plea for unity. The first part of the sentence echoes this desire for belonging (i.e. Ukraine's desire to obtain membership within the EU), but it is expressed in quite an obtrusive or forward manner. The second part constitutes an inherently FTA: Zelensky puts forward that the EU essentially has no other option than to help Ukraine, as otherwise "they will be alone". The dichotomy present in this speech can be explained by looking at the wider context of the conflict: at this stage, no real rapport had yet been established between Ukraine and the EU. Moreover, Zelensky's primary goal at this point was to convince the EU of the gravity of the situation in Ukraine and assure them Ukraine was a country worth fighting for; real claims for shared membership or belonging were not yet on the table.

- (10) The European Union will be much stronger with us – that's for sure. Without you, Ukraine will be alone.

It is worth noting that Zelensky utters this sentence near the conclusion of his speech, and that he is using a kind of chiasmus, where the ideas or grammatical structures of the first part of the sentence are reversed in the second part / second sentence. This device serves to emphasise the sense of contrast and dichotomy present in this address, and reinforces the memorability of his message for the audience.

The 2023 speech

In 2023, Zelensky's discourse undergoes a significant shift when it comes to the use of in-group marking. Instead of invoking a (linguistic) dichotomy, he now places strong emphasis on the idea of "our Europe", thereby implying that Ukraine is already an integral part of the European community. Table (2) demonstrates the absolute frequencies of the pronouns *we/us/our* and *you/your* as they are employed by Zelensky in 2023, highlighting a remarkable change in the indexed referent of these pronouns compared to the observations for 2022.

Pronoun	Amount	Indexicality
<i>We</i>	26	Europe, including Ukraine (23) Ukraine (3)
<i>Our</i>	26	Europe, including Ukraine (19) Ukraine (7)
<i>Us</i>	9	Europe, including Ukraine (3) Ukraine (6)
<i>You</i>	24	Europe (14) Madam President (8) generic use (2)
<i>Your</i>	3	Madam President (3)
Total number of words:	1444	

Table 2. Pronominal distribution in Zelensky (2023)

As shown in Table (2), second person pronouns are still used (notably 24 times in total), but they are no longer used to designate 'the other'; they are merely employed in gratitude expressions ("thank you") or in other positive contexts (see (11) and (12)), which Section 5.3 and 5.4 will further elaborate on. Interestingly, Zelensky also personally addresses the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola, for the first time. He calls her by her first name at multiple occasions throughout this speech (see (13) and (14)). This might be interpreted as a sign of increased familiarity or closer rapport with the European Parliament's president. This new use of *you* should be understood in relation to the evolving dynamics of the conflict. Whereas in 2022, the European Union was still perceived as 'the

other party' – one Ukraine needed to provide them with aid – by the time of the 2023 speech, the EU had already demonstrated its willingness to cooperate and provide substantial military and financial support, which they could now be thanked and applauded for:

- (11) We Ukrainians are on the battlefield together with you! I thank you now for defending it together with us. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (12) Each and every one of you is strong. Each and every one of you is capable of impacting and influencing our common outcome – our common victory! (Zelensky, 2023)
- (13) Dear Madam President – dear Roberta – I thank you for these powerful words, and I thank you for your personal attention, which is very important to Ukraine. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (14) I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, Members of the European Parliament, and you personally, Roberta. (Zelensky, 2023)

The first-person plural pronouns, on the other hand, also index a completely different referent than they did in 2022. While *we* and *us* still largely referred to Ukraine (Zelensky's first in-group) in 2022, he now is seen to use these pronouns in a different way, referring to a new in-group, i.e. Europe, including Ukraine. This is a clear example of what can be called "inclusive *we*" (Chilton, 1990: 212; Alharbi and Rucker, 2023: 5) or the "*we*-device" (Rautajoki and Fitzgerald, 2022: 14), used to satisfy the hearer's positive face and evoke a sentiment of solidarity. In examples (15)-(17), Zelensky thus uses *we* and *our* to encode the following meaning: [Europe, encompassing or including Ukraine]. The following examples highlight how the president clearly emphasises the idea that Ukraine belongs to the same in-group as other members of the European Union:

- (15) In order to be able to fight like this, the Kremlin, cynically and deliberately, year after year and step after step, has been trying to eliminate and destroy what we see as our values in Europe. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (16) Wherever we live, we always put our faith in integrity, for whatever we dream of for our children and grandchildren. The precondition for these dreams is peace and security. Will that be possible if we do not overcome the anti-European force that is trying to steal our Europe from all of us? (Zelensky, 2023)
- (17) We do not retreat in the face of the enemy – we defend ourselves! We are not wasting time – we are changing ourselves and we are changing things. Europe will always remain Europe, as long as we are together and as long as we take care of our Europe and of the European way of life. (Zelensky, 2023)

These examples also illustrate the importance of lexical choice in Zelensky's speeches. As the choice of certain words establishes an indexical link with a particular (mental or geographical) entity, their usage in this particular context can be seen as a strategic choice by Zelensky to claim an in-group relation and shared belonging. Firstly, the president uses the terms *Europe* and *European (Union)* a considerable amount in this speech, as reflected in the following graph, which indicates the relative frequencies⁴ of the use of the terms *Europe* and *European* over the different years:

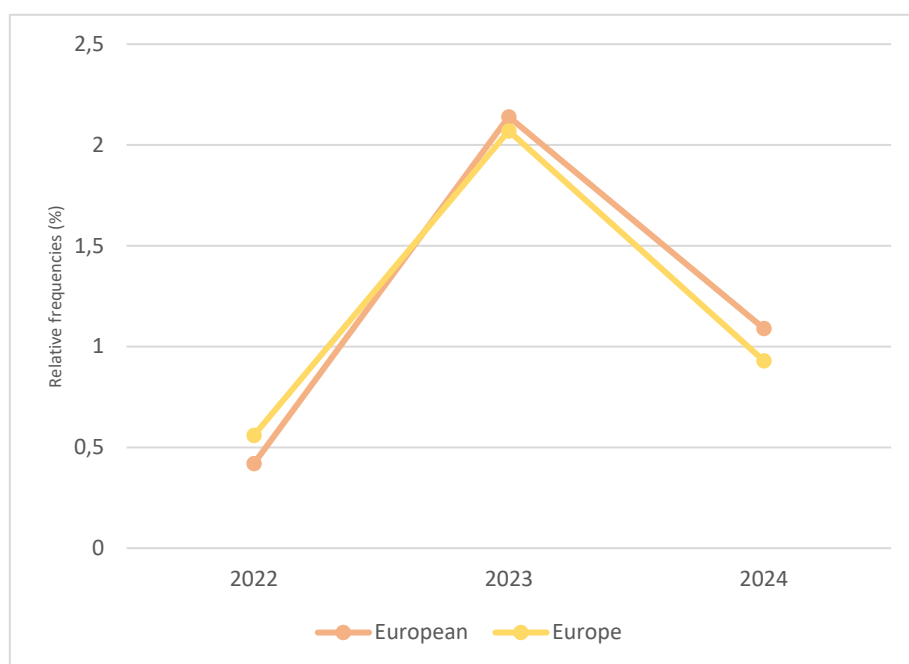


Figure 2. Use of *Europe* and *European* across Zelensky's speeches

An examination of this graph reveals that these terms were used significantly more frequently in Zelensky's 2023 address than in his other two speeches. Moreover, if we look at a ranking of lexical frequency, *Europe* and *European* together occur 61 times in the speech of 2023 (out of total of 1444 tokens), thereby ranking as the 5th most used type out of a total of 102 types in this speech (cf. type-token ratio). The frequent recurrence of these terms is revealing, as it underscores, among other things, Zelensky's sustained emphasis on praising Europe and its values (example (18)), while simultaneously reinforcing the notion that Ukraine rightfully belongs within the European Union (examples (19) and (20)). In saying things like "our Europe", Zelensky appears to suggest or imply that Ukrainians share these so-called 'European values' and that Ukraine is equally entitled to Europe's resources, just as any other EU member state.

⁴ For each graph, absolute frequencies were normalised (i.e. the number of manifestations was divided by the total number of words per speech), to indicate their relative occurrence across the speeches (expressed as a percentage).

- (18) This combination reflects what our Europe, a modern and peaceful Europe, gives to the world – the European way of life, European living standards, and European rules for life. It is in Europe where each and every person matters; where the rule of law exists; where states strive to be social and societies strive to be open; [...]. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (19) They are trying to make the inhumane realities of the 1930s and 1940s a reality today. But the answer to that for us is ‘no! No! Europe!’ (Zelensky, 2023)
- (20) We are getting closer to the European Union. Ukraine is going to be a member of the European Union – a victorious Ukraine! Ukraine is going to be a member of the European Union – a victorious European Union! (Zelensky, 2023)

Examples (18), (20) and (22) also exhibit a specific rhetorical device frequently employed by Zelensky, namely the use of parallels, sometimes including a chiasmic element, as in (21). This rhetorical mechanism is deployed here to emphasise the in-group sentiments that Zelensky is trying to convey throughout his discourse, and to make his claims stick with the audience. The allusion to in-group marking is especially clear in example (21), where – in introducing the idea of a “Ukrainian European” or “European Ukrainian way of life” – the president evokes the idea that the two are inextricably linked:

- (21) All of us enjoy this common European history – the Ukrainian European way of life that they tried to annihilate through total war. Why? Because after the European Ukrainian way of life, they want to destroy the European way of life in all 27 countries of the European Union. We will not allow that. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (22) Each and every one of us matters. Each and every one of you is strong. Each and every one of you is capable of impacting and influencing our common outcome – our common victory! (Zelensky, 2023)

In example (22) then, Zelensky uses parallels to praise the EU, and to accentuate or affirm the notion of a shared victory. This sentence highlights once again the importance of lexical choice throughout Zelensky’s speeches. In using words like *common* (3), *together* (4), or *friends* (1) in his speech, Zelensky underlines a sense of unity and togetherness, contributing to the broader (politeness) strategy of in-group marking. This speech was performed eight months after Ukraine was granted candidate status in its path to EU membership. As the administrative steps to obtain membership – which requires adopting the entire *acquis*⁵ of the EU – are lengthy (European Commission, 2025), Zelensky may have intended to put some pressure on the EU to accelerate this process, as this would make it significantly

⁵ The European Union *acquis* is “the collection of common rights and obligations that constitute the body of EU law, and is incorporated into the legal systems of EU Member States”. Candidate (applicant) countries are required to accept and adopt all of the laws, guidelines and recommendations of the *acquis* before they can join the EU (*EUR-lex*).

easier for the EU to offer (even more) economic and military support to Ukraine. So, although all of the elements discussed in this section can be classified as positive politeness strategies, deployed to create common ground, to foster a sense of unity, and to enhance the positive face of the addressee, it can be questioned whether these in-group sentiments are justified. It could be said that Zelensky shapes his discourse as though Ukraine were already a member of the EU. This could come across as face-threatening: Zelensky is imposing on the EU's autonomy, restricting its "freedom of action" (Brown and Levinson, 1967: 61). However, it also constitutes a reasonable and convincing persuasive technique: by presenting Ukraine as already aligned with these European values and concerns, Zelensky implicitly suggests that the only remaining step is the official administrative authorisation of membership. Moreover, he is not always completely resolute or forward in his phrasing. In assertions such as "we are getting closer to the European Union" (Zelensky, 2023), Zelensky is not making his demand fully explicit or stating it as if it were a settled matter already, but rather, he leaves room for a hint of graduality in the transition.

Finally, a last element contributing to the strategy of in-group marking in 2023 – which was already present in some of the preceding examples – is the discursive construction of a shared enemy. In constructing or reinforcing the notion of a common enemy, Zelensky aims to mobilise his audience (Chiluwa and Ruzaitė, 2024: 14). In other words, this enemy gives his solidarity discourse "a meaning and a cause" (Alharbi and Rucker, 2023: 8). In this speech, Zelensky twice refers to Russia as "the anti-European force" which is trying to destroy them, and which constitutes a danger to "the European way of life in all 27 countries of the European Union" (see example (21)). In portraying Russia as their common enemy, he indicates that they are fighting together against a shared threat (which makes them part of the same group), and he also gives the European Union another (perhaps even more convincing) reason to keep assisting Ukraine in their efforts against Russian aggression:

- (23) We are defending ourselves against the most anti—European force in the modern world. We are defending ourselves. We Ukrainians are on the battlefield together with you! (Zelensky, 2023)
- (24) The precondition for these dreams is peace and security. Will that be possible if we do not overcome the anti-European force that is trying to steal our Europe from all of us? (Zelensky, 2023)

The 2024 speech

In his speech on November 19th 2024, Zelensky upholds this insistence on the idea of "our Europe". Table (3) helps to demonstrate the pronominal distribution in this speech. When looking at the indexed

referent of the pronouns he uses in this address, we observe relatively similar results as for his 2023 speech.

Pronoun	Amount	Indexicality
<i>We</i>	11	Ukraine (2) Europe, including Ukraine (8) Europe + Ukraine + USA + “partners around the world” (1)
<i>Our</i>	6	Ukraine (4) Europe, including Ukraine (2)
<i>Us</i>	0	
<i>You</i>	15	Europe (12) Madam President (3)
<i>Your</i>	5	Europe (5)
Total number of words:	639	

Table 3. Pronominal distribution in Zelensky (2024)

He mostly uses second person pronouns (*you* and *your*) in gratitude expressions, as in example (25), but they also reappear (as they did in 2022) in combination with directive verbs (example (26)):

(25) Thank you, again! Thank you so much! Thank you for your resolutions, your decisions, your principles, your visits to Ukraine during the war, during the first year of war especially, because you were here when it was so difficult, and thanks for your faith in Ukraine. (Zelensky, 2024)

(26) Even with North Korea’s Kim Jong-un by his side, Putin remains smaller than the united strength of Europe. I urge you not to forget this. (Zelensky, 2024)

When it comes to the use of *we* and *our*, these pronouns seem to refer to Ukraine alone in certain instances, but often also to the collective identity [Europe, including Ukraine], as in the following examples:

(27) If we could stop Europe's way of life from falling, then we can surely push Russia towards a just peace. (Zelensky, 2024)

(28) Together, we have accomplished much. But we must not fear doing even more. (Zelensky, 2024)

Interestingly, the dichotomy between the different entities involved is also expanded. Whereas the speeches in 2022 and 2023 mainly talked about Ukraine, Russia and the EU, two new parties now entered Zelensky’s discourse, namely the United States and North Korea (cf. Section 6). In the following example, *we* thus indexes a new referent:

- (29) Ukraine, all of Europe, and our partners in America and around the world - we have succeeded not only in preventing Putin from taking Ukraine but also in defending the freedom of all European nations. (Zelensky, 2024)

In terms of lexical choice, there are no very significant observations to note, but Zelensky does once again revert to terms such as *shared* (1), *united* (1) or *together* (3), to highlight a sense of unity and solidarity. To further these in-group sentiments, Zelensky also highlights the importance of a continued collaboration and cooperation in order to destroy their common enemy, Putin and the Russian Federation:

- (30) Even with North Korea's Kim Jong-un by his side, Putin remains smaller than the united strength of Europe. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (31) You in the European Parliament were among the first to support the Peace Formula. The only one who opposes it is the one who started this war - it's Russia. (Zelensky, 2024)

5.2 Directives

The next strategy that was identified on the basis of a bottom-up analysis of the data is the use – or lack of – directives. As was mentioned in Section 4, directives consist of a speaker telling their addressee to perform a certain action (Searle, 1979). As direct directives constitute an inherently FTA (imposing on the hearer's freedom), they can be mitigated or softened through the use of politeness strategies. This section will discuss the appearance – or strategic absence – of direct directives (encompassing imperatives, performative verbs, and modal verbs expressing necessity or obligation) in Zelensky's speeches, and the possible motivations the president might have had for using them.

The 2022 speech

In Zelensky's first address to the European Parliament, a sense of urgency is clearly palpable. This pressing tone is expected and understandable in light of the rapidly escalating circumstances – the invasion had only started five days ago. However, given the urgency of the situation, the amount of directives used by Zelensky is surprisingly low, with only five explicit examples (three separate imperative sentences in example (34)):

- (32) I would very much like to hear you say to us that Europe now chooses Ukraine. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (33) Believe you me – every square in every city of our country from today on, no matter what it's called, is going to be called Freedom Square. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (34) So prove that you are with us. Prove that you will not abandon us. Prove that you are indeed Europeans, and then life will prevail over death and light will prevail over darkness. (Zelensky, 2022)

The last example has an unmistakably urgent tone: the fact that the imperative is repeated three times, combined with the fact that this is the last sentence of the speech, suggests that the president is intent on reinforcing this idea. However, the fact that Zelensky overall only uses so little directives in this speech might be considered a deliberate move: he likely does not want to come across as overly demanding (or face-threatening), as he cannot risk alienating the EU at this stage.

The 2023 speech

This tone of urgency observed earlier is considerably tempered in Zelensky's address on February 9th 2023. Figure (3) demonstrates the amount of directives (indicated in terms of relative frequency (%)) present throughout the speeches. In comparison to the other two speeches, the sense of immediacy and hence use of directives are significantly low in 2023. Again, this can be explained by looking at the wider context of the conflict, because Ukraine had already received support from the EU in the meantime, and from November 2022 until June 2023, the conflict had reached a stalemate. Since the pressure on Ukraine had eased somewhat during this period, this was the ideal time for Zelensky to thank Europe for the support it had provided over the past year – accompanied by a noticeable decline in requests for additional aid.

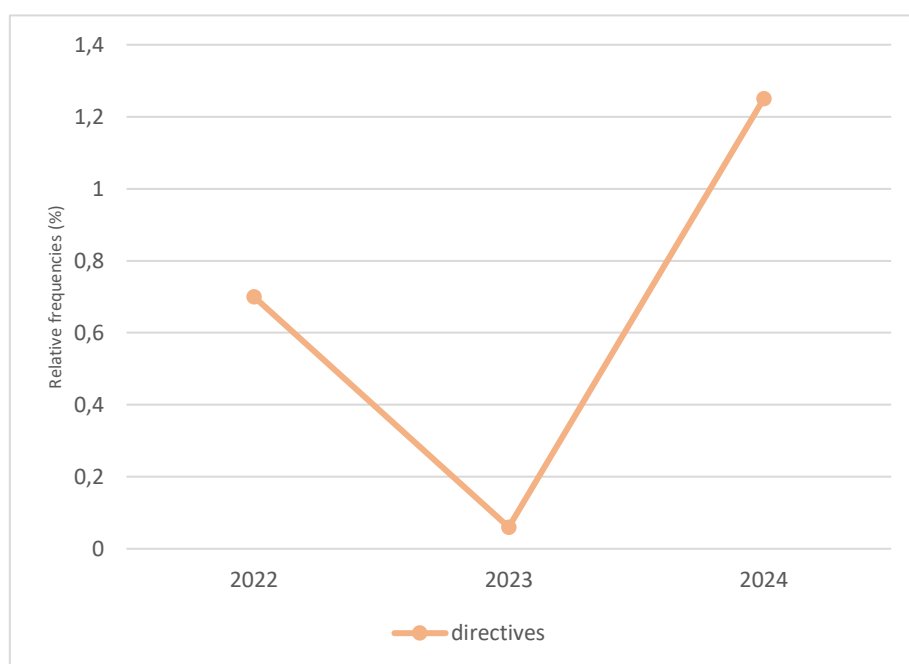


Figure 3. Use of directives throughout Zelensky's speeches

The only real instance of a direct directive in Zelensky's 2023 address can be found in example (35), indicated by the use of "imperative-like" *must* (Portner, 2007: 364). However, this sentence does not seem overly face-threatening (despite the use of this modal verb), since the pronoun *we* (and not *you*)

is used, indicating that this action (i.e. defending Ukraine and Europe as a whole) should be carried out together. Zelensky is thus not placing the sole responsibility for carrying out these actions on the EU, which would increase the level of imposition of this directive:

- (35) We must defend ourselves. It's important not only for the states of Europe, but also for communities and societies in Europe, no matter who we are or what we are. (Zelensky, 2023)

Nonetheless, there are some other instances in this speech where Zelensky seems to call upon Europe to undertake action (or rather keep taking action), but which are less easily identifiable as direct directives. In the following examples, Zelensky does not directly or explicitly ask his addressee to carry out a certain action, but he does press the idea of taking concrete measures and furthering the Ukrainian cause. As directives are sometimes defined quite broadly, as all utterances which count as an attempt to make the addressee perform a certain action (Searle, 1979), the following examples might be classified as a kind of directives, since they can also be interpreted as a spur or incitement to action. However, they are clearly more indirect or implicit than those including an imperative or performative verb like *demand* or *urge*. These kinds of 'veiled' directives were taken into consideration for the analysis, but were not included in the encoding process or quantification of the different strategies, for which only the (explicit) direct cases (imperatives, performative verbs and modal verbs with a directive, imposing force) were taken into account. Nonetheless, these veiled or indirect directives could be perceived as face-threatening, as there is not a lot of room for disagreement in these cases. What we observe in the following examples are other kinds of speech acts (commissive (36), assertive (37) or declarative (38)), which could be said to have an underlying directive strength or force.

- (36) [...] they want to destroy the European way of life in all 27 countries of the European Union. We will not allow that. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (37) Wherever we live, we always put our faith in integrity, for whatever we dream of for our children and grandchildren. The precondition for these dreams is peace and security. Will that be possible if we do not overcome the anti-European force that is trying to steal our Europe from all of us? No! Only our victory will guarantee all that. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (38) Ukraine is going to be a member of the European Union [...]. (Zelensky, 2023)

The 2024 speech

The more peaceful and less overtly persuasive tone observed in the 2023 speech appears to have largely disappeared in the 2024 speech, in which Zelensky once again makes more frequent use of explicit directives, with eight concrete examples, as was illustrated in Figure (3). This last address was performed on November 19th 2024, in a special plenary session held to commemorate 1000 days of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This piece of context helps to explain the renewed sense of urgency visible in this speech: Zelensky wants to reiterate the seriousness of the situation in Ukraine, and emphasise that, even after all this time, the EU cannot ‘forget’ about Ukraine. To underscore this, he makes use of a number of direct directives, including imperatives (the most direct way to perform a directive speech act), and other modal and performative verbs which imply ordering and commanding (Leech, 1983):

- (39) Putin remains smaller than the united strength of Europe. I urge you not to forget this. And do not forget how much Europe is capable of achieving. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (40) We must push Russia towards a just peace. Every blow and every threat from Russia must be met with firm sanctions. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (41) Together, we have accomplished much. But we must not fear doing even more. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (42) We must do everything to end this war fairly and justly [...]. (Zelensky, 2024)

Interestingly, Zelensky does not employ any (directly) mitigating devices to soften these directives. He could have used hedges, impersonalisation or a more hypothetical modal verb (like *should*) to tone down these demands (Chilton, 1990: 210), but decides to realise them baldly on record. Using a verb like *must* really indicates that there is no room for optionality. Zelensky thus does not appear to be as careful or hesitant to threaten the EU’s face as he was in 2022. This could be the case because he already knows that the EU will support Ukraine – given that they have done so consistently over the last 3 years. Moreover, at this stage, Ukraine is already further advanced in the administrative process to EU membership, and it is unlikely that their candidate status would be withdrawn. Furthermore, in most of these examples, Zelensky uses the pronoun *we*, indicating that these actions should be carried out together. He is thus not forcing the EU to carry out these actions alone, but suggests that the EU and Ukraine will do it together as one group (cf. Section 5.1), reducing the imposition of these directives.

Besides these direct directives, Zelensky again seems to employ a number of indirect or veiled directives, which can be interpreted as a stimulus for action for the EU. The following examples all take the form of an assertive speech act, following the reasoning that they can be assessed or characterised by a simple “true or false” (Searle, 1979: 12-13). However, they could be said to have an underlying

directive force. In example (44), for instance, “he will not stop on his own” might be said to imply that they (Ukraine and the EU) should stop him.

- (43) Strong sanctions are essential. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (44) [...] Putin is focused on winning this war. He will not stop on his own. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (45) Ukraine deserves to make the next year of peace. (Zelensky, 2024)

Lastly, it should be noted that all of these directives are situated within the context of the rest of this speech: they are performed alongside a number of praise markers (Section 5.3) and gratitude expressions (Section 5.4), which also serve to mitigate their threat to the ‘face’ of the audience, as will be described in the following sections.

5.3 Praise

The third strategy that was identified on the basis of the data is praise, including self-, other- and us-praise. Within the politeness framework, praise is considered to be a positive (even face-enhancing) politeness strategy, as it appeals to the hearer’s positive face, acknowledging their worth or accomplishments (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This section will discuss for each year how Zelensky constructs *self-praise* (by which a speaker praises themselves to present competence or prove credibility), *other-praise* (which enhances the hearer’s positive face by recognising that they are understood or appreciated), and finally what could be labelled *us-praise* (emphasising shared success or values, reinforcing a collective identity and mutual appreciation).

The 2022 speech

In his 2022 speech, Zelensky is trying to show the EU what Ukraine is worth: he is praising the citizens of his country for the resilience and strength they have exhibited so far. His assertions thus include “announcements of accomplishments as well as explicit positive evaluations of some aspect of self” (Dayter, 2014: 92), as illustrated by the following examples:

- (46) Ukrainians are incredible. We often love to say that we will prevail over everyone, [...]. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (47) Nobody is going to break us. We are strong. We are Ukrainians. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (48) Our nation is extremely motivated. (Zelensky, 2022)
- (49) We have proven our strength. (Zelensky, 2022)

While, in any other context, these examples would risk being seen as bragging or boasting, in this context of wartime and public diplomacy, the self-praise used by Zelensky can be seen as a strategic move to present competence in front of the European Parliament, and to demonstrate that Ukraine is

worthy of cooperating with their (hopefully) newfound ally. The president likely wants to prove to the EU that their actions advance a common cause (Alharbi and Rucker, 2023: 7), and that Ukrainians' character and motivation are in line with the EU's spirit; hence why he feels confident to state that the "European Union will be much stronger with [them]" (Zelensky, 2022).

Other-praise is not really present in this speech, but Zelensky does praise the different member states of the EU for having gathered all together to listen to him, and the "unifying mood" (Zelensky, 2022) he observes in the European Parliament. Us-praise does not feature in this first speech given by Zelensky, as there is no 'we' or 'us' yet at this point in the conflict (as was discussed more profoundly in Section 5.1).

The 2023 speech

The self-praise which could be observed in 2022 decreases significantly in 2023, with only one clear example present in this speech. In example (50), Zelensky is applauding the fact that while "fighting and defending itself", Ukraine is undergoing important reforms, reshaping its foundations to adhere more closely to European standards. What is remarkable, is that he refers to Ukraine as a "European country": the country is thus depicted as if it could be deemed 'European enough' to qualify for this adjective.

- (50) I see a positive assessment of the reforms in a European country that is fighting and defending itself while modernising and reforming its institutions. (Zelensky, 2023)

Unlike the 2022 speech, Zelensky now predominantly uses other-praise in this speech, granting it a very face-enhancing dimension (Sifianou, 1995). As was noted for the use of directives in 2023, the invasion of Ukraine had reached a kind of impasse at this stage. So, given the reduced intensity of pressure on Ukraine, Zelensky could now use this speech to praise Europe for the support it had provided over the past year, as the examples below will illustrate. This change in tone from 2022 to 2023 arguably reflects a strategic adaptation to the evolving context of the war and allows Zelensky to strengthen his relational ties with the European Union through more positively marked discourse. Furthermore, a lot of the praise he uses is directed towards the face of President Roberta Metsola, whom he thanks personally for all of her efforts and support (see example (53)).

- (51) I thank you for your principled and energetic approach – two qualities that we see have remained unchanged during this struggle for Europe. The combination of those two qualities is a precondition for progress. (Zelensky, 2023)

- (52) It is in Europe where each and every person matters; where the rule of law exists; where states strive to be social and societies strive to be open; where diversity is a value and the values of different people are united by fairness and equality [...]. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (53) I thank [...] you personally, Roberta. With your decisions, you defend the European way of life steadfastly; you defend the Ukrainian European way of life. You approve courageous decisions and you strengthen the European ambition to be a home for justice and freedom. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (54) The European Parliament approved a resolution not simply to support our state, but also to approve our country's status as a candidate for membership of the European Union. That was the vision that motivated us to be strong and to stay the course. (Zelensky, 2023)

The speech is filled with compliments, originally “aimed at benefiting the addressee” (Sifianou, 1995: 90), but it could be argued that, ultimately, they also serve to benefit the speaker, namely Zelensky and the Ukrainian cause he is advocating for. Uttering these compliments and other markers of praise might help “flatter” the EU (cf. Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005) and softens the underlying motivation of his speech, i.e. the request for continued support to Ukraine.

Within solidarity discourse, a third group or party can be involved in praise, namely the newly created in-group, referred to as the new *we* or *us* (Alharbi and Rucker, 2023: 7). This so-called us-praise is invoked by Zelensky for the first time in his 2023 speech. He praises the Ukraine-EU cooperation in fighting Russia, thereby not only enhancing the addressee's face, but also furthering sentiments of unity and solidarity existing between the two entities:

- (55) Now, together, Ukraine and the countries of the European Union have made our strength obvious. (Zelensky, 2023)
- (56) Because we combined a principled and energetic approach. We are all equal in representing Europe and integrity. We know that everybody is a leader of Europe in his or her own life and specific place. We do not retreat in the face of the enemy – we defend ourselves! (Zelensky, 2023)

The 2024 speech

In 2024, we notice a decline in the amount of praise Zelensky uses, especially in comparison to the 2023 speech. Interestingly, there is no longer any self-praise apparent, perhaps because Ukraine could be said to have demonstrated their worth already at this point in the conflict. There are nonetheless some cases of evident us-praise, where Zelensky applauds the shared accomplishments Ukraine and the EU have brought about together. These utterances could also be seen as encouragements to continue the apparently successful Ukraine-EU collaboration.

- (57) We've proven that these values are not just words - not something abstract. European values and the European way of life - when transformed into action - protect the lives of real people. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (58) Together - Ukraine, all of Europe, and our partners in America and around the world - we have succeeded not only in preventing Putin from taking Ukraine but also in defending the freedom of all European nations. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (59) Together, we have accomplished much. (Zelensky, 2024)
- (60) Putin remains smaller than the united strength of Europe. (Zelensky, 2024)

There is one other noticeable instance of praise in this speech. However, in this occurrence, we cannot be entirely sure whether the reference to Europe also indexes Ukraine. Nevertheless, the message is clearly face-enhancing, regardless of whether Ukraine is included in the implied meaning:

- (61) And do not forget how much Europe is capable of achieving. (Zelensky, 2024)

This decline in markers of praise in 2024 could be explained by looking at the broader context of the conflict. As suggested in Section 2.3, in 2024, a renewed sense of urgency is palpable. After 1000 days of conflict, possibly influenced by indications of war fatigue attested in different European countries (cf. Consolini, 2025), the president wants to reiterate the urgency and gravity of the situation in Ukraine, and emphasise that, even after all this time, strong measures still have to be taken. The explicit expression of praise thus fades a little more into the background.

5.4 Gratitude expressions

A fourth element worth discussing when it comes to Zelensky's addresses is the use of gratitude expressions. Through the lens of politeness theory, expressions of gratitude can function as a face-enhancing strategy, contributing to the positive face wants of the hearer. Acknowledging and communicating gratitude for help or support from the other party will affirm the hearer's value and thereby strengthen a positive relationship. Additionally, voicing gratitude to the addressee can also help to adjust an imbalance or lost equilibrium with the hearer (Alaoui, 2011) and mitigate earlier or upcoming impositions, portraying the speaker as someone willing to humble their own face (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

The 2022 speech

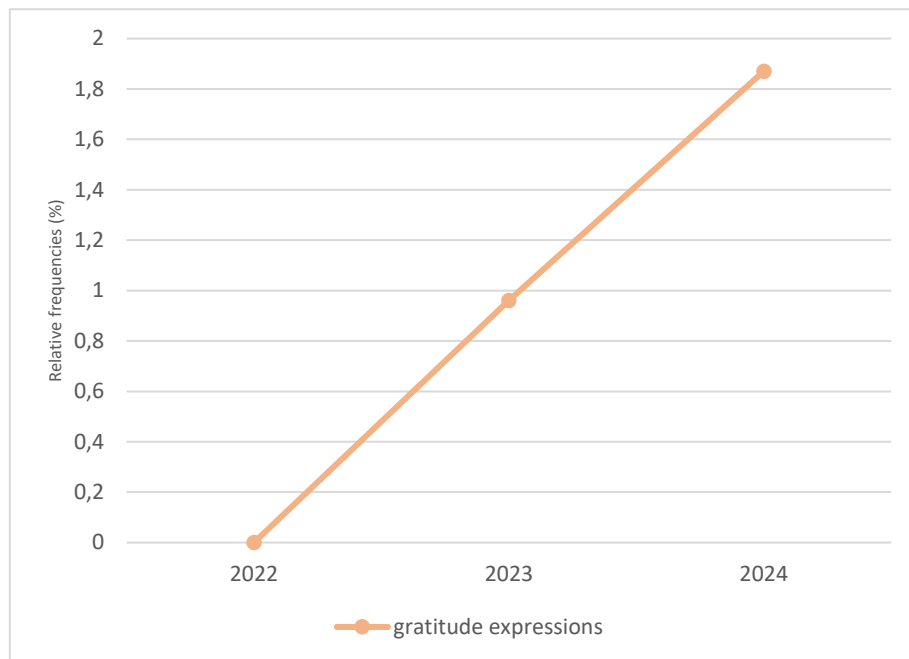


Figure 4. Use of gratitude expressions across Zelensky's speeches

When we look at the amount of gratitude markers or expressions used by Zelensky, of which the relative frequencies are rendered in Figure (4), it becomes apparent that he only starts using them from 2023 onward. In 2022, Zelensky does not yet explicitly voice his gratitude – as would be expected, given that the invasion had only just begun, so at that point there was nothing for which gratitude could yet be meaningfully expressed. However, in two instances, he does seem to express a kind of recognition or gratefulness for the EU's behaviour:

(62) I'm very pleased with what I've seen here – this unifying mood. I'm happy that we have brought together all the countries of the European Union today, [...]. (Zelensky, 2022)

(63) I'm very happy that you are not only talking about it, but you can also see it. (Zelensky, 2023)

The 2023 speech

As exhibited in Figure (4), the number of gratitude expressions used by Zelensky rises sharply in 2023. As was noted in the previous section, Zelensky uses his speech in 2023 to praise and thank Europe for the support it had already provided Ukraine with. This positively marked discourse permitted Zelensky to strengthen his relationship with the European Union after the first speech he had given in 2022. The president uses the word *thank* 14 times throughout this speech (out of a total of 1444 tokens). When it comes to a ranking of lexical frequency, *thank* is the 16th most used type in this speech, out of a total

of 102 types. In terms of percentage, this amounts to 0.97%. The following excerpt effectively illustrates this (almost excessive) emphasis on thanks and appreciation:

(64) This applause is not directed to me. I'd like to thank all of you in Europe – in hundreds of towns and villages – who have supported Ukraine in this historic battle. Thank you! I would like to thank all of you who have been helping our people, our ordinary citizens and our resettled people here, and who called on their leaders to increase and step up their support to protect our ordinary people. I thank those who were on the squares, who were raising questions, who were spreading the truth about the Russian aggression, who were not tempted by Russia to consume Russian disinformation, and who are standing by us in our fight for life and for Europe. I thank you. I thank all of you who help Ukraine with vitally important supplies, weapons, ammunition, energy equipment and fuel, with the thousands of things without which we would not be able to endure this total war. I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, Members of the European Parliament, and you personally, Roberta. (Zelensky, 2023)

Moreover, to render his gratitude more concrete and personal, Zelensky also directly addresses President Roberta Metsola, along with a broad range of other members of the EU. In doing so, he makes his gratitude appear less general, as it seems to align or relate more closely to the positive face wants of all of the specific addressees he mentions. In this way, Zelensky demonstrates that he is not only grateful for the aid offered to Ukraine by EU officials and institutions, but that he also acknowledges the support he is getting from the 'ordinary' citizens of the EU, who have also proven continuous solidarity with the people of Ukraine:

(65) Dear leaders of Europe! Dear Madam President, ladies and gentlemen! Dear Members of European Parliament! Dear officials of the European Parliament and of other European institutions here! Dear journalists, security service workers, military and army personnel, police officers and rescue workers! Dear workers of municipalities, diplomats, teachers, professors and scientists! Dear doctors, drivers, seaport workers, farmers and industrialists! Dear workers in industrial enterprises! Dear owners of small and large businesses! Dear workers at banks! Dear energy workers and electricity grid workers! Dear trade union workers! Dear students and representatives of NGOs! Dear producers and actors, lawyers, defence lawyers and human rights defenders! (Zelensky, 2023)

The 2024 speech

As shown in Figure (4), Zelensky continues expressing his gratitude to the EU in 2024. In this speech, the word *thank* features 11 times, out of a total of 639 tokens, thereby constituting the 10th most used type in this speech. This amounts to a percentage of 1.72%, which tells us that, in terms of relative

frequencies, this speech has an even higher number of gratitude expressions than the one from 2023. Given that this speech was delivered during a special plenary session organised by the EU to commemorate 1000 days of conflict in Ukraine, there might have been an implicit expectation for Zelensky to express his appreciation for the support the EU had extended over these 1000 days. This considerable insistence on the expression of gratitude can be illustrated by the following excerpts, respectively at the very beginning and end of the speech:

- (66) Dear Roberta, Madam President, dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, our friends, friends of Ukraine, I thank you for supporting Ukraine. Thank you, Roberta, for calling this extraordinary session of the European Parliament to mark one thousand days of full-scale war. Thank you for ensuring that not a single one of the thousand days of this terrible war became a day of betrayal of our shared European values.
- (67) Thank you, again! Thank you so much! Thank you for your resolutions, your decisions, your principles, your visits to Ukraine during the war, during the first year of war especially, because you were here when it was so difficult, and thanks for your faith in Ukraine. Thank you very much! (Zelensky, 2024)

This frequent display of gratitude might initially appear to reflect a strong face-enhancing dimension. However, the use of these kinds of expressions could also be interpreted as a positive politeness strategy aimed at ‘covering up’ or mitigating the number of FTAs embedded in this speech. As discussed in Section 5.2, Zelensky issues a number of directives baldly on-record in this speech, such as “We must push Russia towards a just peace” (Zelensky, 2024). The speech thus continuously interweaves directives with compliments and gratitude expressions, as to reduce the risk of overly imposing on the EU.

5.5 Language choice

The last element relevant to this analysis concerns Zelensky’s language choice. In particular, it is worth examining how Zelensky makes use of code-switching throughout his speeches. As previously mentioned, code-switching occurs in two ways in the examined addresses. In the series of speeches delivered by Zelensky, the president switches to English for his last speech in 2024, whereas the first two are delivered in Ukrainian. Moreover, in his 2023 speech, he switches from Ukrainian to English for certain utterances. In Section 4, it was noted that code-switching to a language understood by the addressee typically encodes positive politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987): invoking a “we code” for in-group relations (Gumperz, 1982: 66) allows to reduce the social distance between speaker and addressee (or audience). Brittain-Hale has demonstrated that leaders like Zelensky leverage code-

switching “to expand their reach through social networks”, making the power of code-switching undeniable, especially in an era of digital diplomacy (2023: 14-15).

When we look at the first type of code-switching, Zelensky’s switch to English for the 2024 speech can be seen as another example of a Ukrainian move towards the EU, or at least an attempt at solidarity. By addressing the audience in a language that is familiar to most of them, Zelensky is displaying positive politeness: he indicates that he is aware of the lingua franca of his audience, and simultaneously demonstrates his proficiency in this language. It allows Zelensky to minimise social distance (positioning himself in closer alignment with the EU), whilst addressing the positive face wants of his audience. Moreover, this code-switching demonstrates that Zelensky is ‘one of them’. By speaking English, Zelensky signals that – like other prominent EU leaders – he is also capable of addressing an international audience in English. Brittain-Hale notes the following in this regard:

By aligning Ukraine with the linguistic norms of the EU and NATO, Zelenskyy seeks to enhance Ukraine's diplomatic and economic ties with these entities, facilitating smoother cooperation and positioning Ukraine as an active participant in international affairs. (Brittain-Hale, 2023: 5)

Additionally, listening to the audio of the 2023 speech revealed that this speech was delivered completely in Ukrainian, apart from the following eight phrases, which were uttered in English by the president: *European way of life, way of life, home, Ukrainian European way of life, rules, Ukrainian European way of life, European way of life, European way of life*. It is not incidental that Zelensky refrains from pronouncing these particular phrases in Ukrainian. Given that Ukraine’s approximation or resemblance to the “European way of life” constitutes the central part of Zelensky’s message, he supposedly wants these utterances to come across as clearly as possible for his European audience. Moreover, the deliberate choice to pronounce these specific terms in English suggests that he intends to emphasise their importance, which he then also explicitly communicates to his audience. In sum, investigating Zelensky's use of code-switching brings to light the president’s “linguistic flexibility” (Brittain-Hale, 2023: 6), which appears to be contributing significantly to the sympathy raised for Ukraine and its progress on the global stage.

6. Discussion

Finally, this last section will consider how these results provide an answer to the initial research question posed above. To recapitulate, this thesis seeks to analyse the discourse produced by Zelensky in his addresses to the European Parliament between 2022 and 2024, in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict. More specifically, it aims to investigate the different politeness strategies employed by Zelensky to manage the relationship with his European allies, and examine how and why the use of these different strategies has evolved from the beginning of the invasion (March 2022) to a more recent stage in the conflict (November 2024).

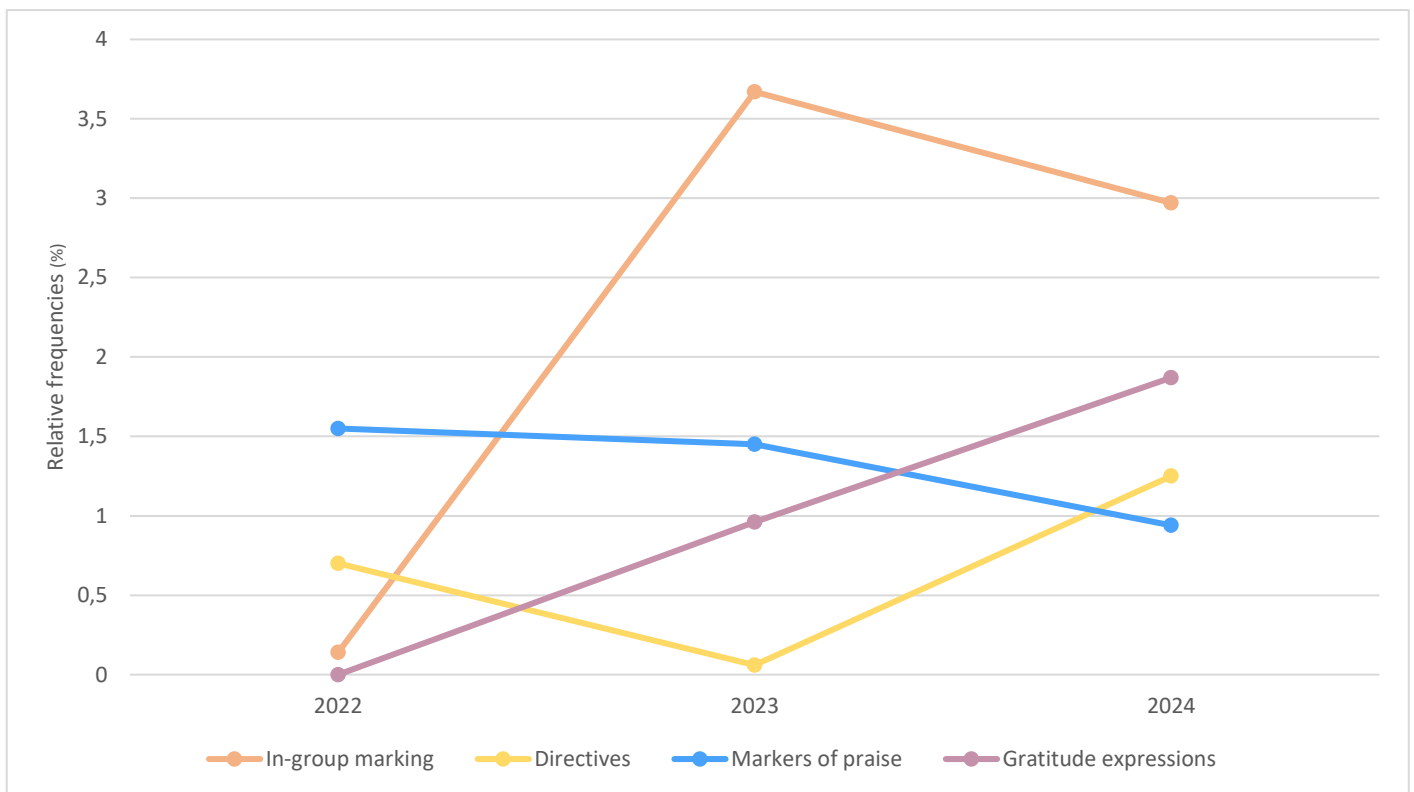


Figure 5. Overview of the different politeness strategies used by Zelensky

We can start this discussion by looking at a broad picture of the data, taking into account all of the politeness strategies discussed in the preceding analysis. Figure (5) provides an overarching representation of the speeches, based on all the quantified elements identified in the analysis, and demonstrates how the different politeness strategies deployed by Zelensky have evolved during the initial phase (2022-2024) of the Russian-Ukrainian war. The use of code-switching does not feature in this graph, as this element could not be 'calculated' or coded strictly per year, since it was only observed in a measurable manner in 2023. Certain other features, such as references to *Europe* or *European*, shared enemy construction or indirect directives were also discussed in the previous analysis, but could

neither be quantified or coded in a straightforward manner (and are thus not included in this figure). Therefore, the graph does not offer a fully conclusive picture. However, it successfully captures the broader patterns in Zelensky's use of politeness strategies, and may tell us a number of things about the possible connection or relation between the use of these different strategies.

Firstly, it reveals that, percentage-wise, in-group marking is the principal linguistic strategy employed by Zelensky in his speeches, rising exponentially after 2022, and remaining salient up to 2024. A similar growth can be observed for the use of gratitude expressions, which are, like the in-group markers, (for the most part) absent in 2022 and are increasingly used in the other two speeches. Secondly, in terms of praise, this graph exhibits a slight decrease from 2022 to 2023 and 2024. This can be explained because the quantification of praise also included self-praise, which was especially on the high side in 2022. If self-praise would not be taken into consideration, all of the features – apart from the use of directives – could be said to increase significantly from 2022 to 2023, which would be in line with external developments in the conflict (going from the onset of the invasion with full-scale attacks to more of an impasse in the conflict). Thirdly, as previously noted, the overall number of direct directives used across the three speeches is relatively low – contrary to what one might expect in a context characterised by wartime urgency. Notably, these direct directives are virtually absent in 2023, which aligns again with the external circumstances mentioned earlier. Finally, the data for 2024 seems to 'combine' or showcase elements from both 2022 and 2023. The urgency which was palpable in 2022 (reflected by the use of explicit directives) resurfaces again in 2024, after having decreased in 2023. The use of in-group marking, (us-)praise and gratitude markers on the other hand, which were all more or less absent in 2022 and used frequently in 2023, also remain noteworthy in 2024. The 2024 speech can therefore be said to reflect both a sense of immediacy (as present in 2022), due to the protracted nature of the conflict, as well as a tone of appreciation and solidarity (as present in 2023), owing to the commemorative or reflective character of this last address.

It is worth expanding a bit upon the idea that in-group marking serves as the principal politeness strategy employed by Zelensky, if we want to uncover the main motivation underlying Zelensky's speeches. The fact that the president mostly relies on this specific strategy in his discourse, seems to indicate that his foremost objective is cooperation and creation of affinity, which can be achieved by "performing solidarity in language" (Kampf, 2016: 48). In-group marking (comprising 'inclusive we', lexical terms indicating unity and the discursive construction of a shared enemy), as well as the expressive speech acts of praising and thanking, and the use of code-switching all contribute to the establishment of a solidarity discourse (Chilton, 2004: 201). Kampf notes the following with regard to this phenomenon in political discourse:

Solidarity – the manifestation of involvement and concern (Scollon et al., 2011) – underlines what interlocutors have in common and is enacted by positive politeness strategies such as sharing the same concerns with a hearer, expressing a compatible stance, or showing appreciation for others' character and achievements (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Politeness strategies of solidarity serve political actors' face needs for recognition and appreciation. They address their desire for consensual identity, namely to be endorsed by others (Gruber, 1993) so as to lead a community on the basis of "mutually believed values and facts" (Chilton, 1990:204). (Kampf, 2016: 48)

The aforementioned strategies thus all function as so-called "solidarity-enhancing devices" (Kampf, 2016: 58). At the interactional level, these devices can reaffirm or reinforce relationships between actors in both national and international politics (58). This can be linked to Locher and Watts' (2005) concept of relational work: Zelensky is using these linguistic solidarity-enhancing mechanisms to construct a relationship of trust and shared affiliation with the EU.

It is therefore not incidental that in-group marking (and specifically pronoun usage) is the primary linguistic device employed by Zelensky. De Fina (1995: 383-384) notes that pronominal reference is one of the important mechanisms through which a speaker can express "both his own presence in discourse, the presence of others and the relationships that he/she entertains with these others". In the case of the examined speeches, this last use is of particular significance. Zelensky might be said to deploy specific pronouns, as in the case of "our Europe" (Zelensky, 2023), as a deliberate 'tactic' (Chilton, 1990), to advance his political goals. The pronominal choices made by Zelensky in 2023 and 2024 give rise to a three-dimension discourse structure, transcending the binary opposition of 'self' and 'other' (as in 2022), by introducing a third party – a collective 'we' or 'us' (Alharbi and Rucker, 2023: 10). Creating common ground thus appears to be an important strategy used by Zelensky to further Ukraine's position on its path towards EU membership. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 103), claiming common ground refers to a speaker signalling that both speaker and hearer "belong to some set of persons who share specific wants, including goals and values". In Zelensky's speeches, the president creates this common ground by emphasising shared membership and objectives with his audience. As was pointed out in Section 5.1, it could be argued that, in 2023 and 2024, Zelensky is continuously highlighting the fact that Ukraine already shares the EU's concerns, values, and beliefs to suggest or imply that all that remains is the official administrative endorsement of membership – especially after their request for candidate status was approved. To further accentuate this, Zelensky utters specific (key) terms in a shared "in-group language" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 110) or "we code" (Gumperz, 1982: 66), namely English, in the 2023 address, and even fully switches to this language for his last speech in 2024. As unfortunate as the current situation may be, Zelensky thus might have seized it as an opportunity to accelerate Ukraine's longstanding aspiration for EU

membership – an ambition set in motion many decades ago (as was alluded to in Section 2.2), yet consistently met with reluctance and hesitation by the EU.

However, as Brown and Levinson (1987: 57) have noted, people will “tend to use language that stresses in-group membership and social similarity”, of which inclusive *we* is a well-known example, when formulating requests. As has been discussed before, the positive politeness strategy of in-group marking can also be used to cover up or mitigate FTAs, such as requests or commands. This brings us to the second layer of Zelensky’s motivation, which goes hand in hand with the previous one: securing (continued) support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia. While EU membership also offers considerable symbolic and geopolitical benefits, from Zelensky’s perspective, one of its most significant immediate advantages is the facilitation this status would entail for the provision of supplementary military and financial assistance to Ukraine. This demand for support is intrinsically face-threatening, in the sense that it “predicate[s] some future act of H, and in so doing put[s] some pressure on H to do (or refrain from doing) the act” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65). By pointing out a number of actions that *must* be carried out, it could be argued that Zelensky is ‘restricting’ the EU in its freedom of action. So, to preserve a sense of unity and to maintain both the positive and negative face of the addressee (Chilton, 1990: 213), these FTAs have to be mitigated or at least ‘concealed’ to a certain extent. Given that “conflict and co-operation is at least in part constituted, and undermined, by and through discourse” (Chilton, 1990: 212), Zelensky has to construct his discourse carefully; this presumably explains why, next to these face-threatening demands, he makes ample use of markers of praise and gratitude expressions, especially in 2023 and 2024.

In sum, Zelensky’s discourse in the European Parliament boils down to two primary (closely related) functions or motivations. Firstly, the president aims to claim common ground with his addressees, realised primarily through solidarity-enhancing devices (cf. Kampf, 2016), in order to signal Ukraine’s aspiration for EU membership. The second (complementary) function lies in the mitigation of the inherent FTA underlying or accompanying his speeches (the appeal for support for Ukraine in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict), through expressions of praise and gratitude for the EU.

To end this discussion, the wider implications of Zelensky’s speeches can be briefly considered, as PDA is also concerned with “the various recipients in political communicative events” (van Dijk, 1997: 13). This thesis has consistently discussed the impact of Zelensky’s words and actions on his direct addressees or audience. Figure (6), inspired by Chilton’s work (1990: 219), clarifies and illustrates who exactly is included in this audience.

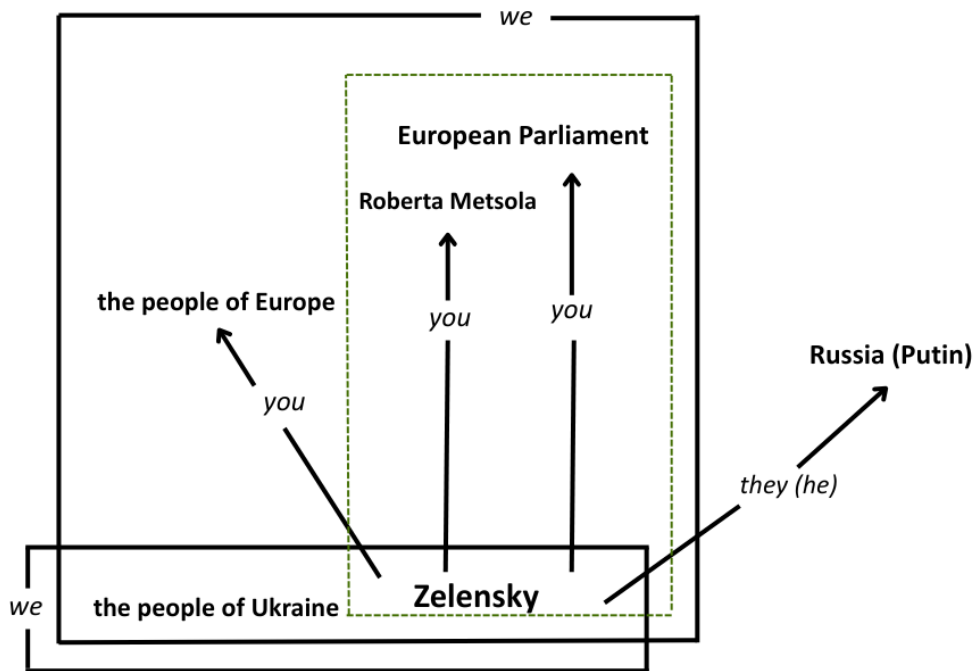


Figure 6. Pronoun usage and relations between individuals and groups in the context of Zelensky's addresses

The green frame encompasses everyone present (either virtually or in person) in the hemicycle of the European Parliament in Brussels: Zelensky himself, President Roberta Metsola and all of the MEPs present. The latter two constitute Zelensky's addressed or ratified recipients, following the terminology present in Goffman's Participation Framework Theory (1981), which describes an individual's "participation status" in communicative interaction (137). However, Zelensky's speeches are situated in a context where terms like speaker and hearer do no longer "fully and neatly apply" (Goffman, 1981: 129). Kampf notes the following in this regard:

Public speech acts are mediated by media platforms within and across political communities, thus their consequences transcend the perlocutionary effect achieved in dyadic communication. They serve as a resource for political actors to initiate and accomplish things in the world. (Kampf, 2016: 49)

In national and international politics, speakers are aware of the fact that what they are saying can be interpreted by various hearers (ratified participants), as well as overhearers (unratified participants); and they can "either accommodate it or exploit it" (Chilton, 1990: 221; Goffman, 1981: 9-10). In the context of Zelensky's speeches, this means that there are more people listening than Roberta Metsola and the MEPs in attendance. The president directly refers to three other groups in his speeches, also illustrated in Figure (6), i.e. the people of Ukraine (part of his own in-group), the people of Europe (part of his new in-group) and Putin and the Russian federation (the so-called 'other' or shared enemy).

While these groups can also be classified as overhearers, their unratified participation does not appear incidental; rather, it might even be considered anticipated or even tacitly endorsed by Zelensky. However, as everyone has access to the online recording and transcript of these speeches, many other different overhearers – or unratified recipients – are to be expected. Within this context of digital public diplomacy, online communication platforms facilitate knowledge sharing and enable the diffusion of political messages all around the world (Canevez et al., 2022). Other countries implicated in this conflict, such as the United States, Iran, or North Korea, may likewise benefit from hearing what Zelensky has to say in these speeches. Therefore, the president needs to be aware not only of the effect his discourse has on (the face of) the immediate addressees or recipients, but also the potential impact his words could have in the wider political arena.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has examined how Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, in his addresses to the European Parliament on March 1st 2022, February 9th 2023 and November 19th 2024, strategically employs politeness strategies to manage Ukraine's relationship with the European Union, in the context of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Putin and the Russian Federation. By tracing the diachronic evolution of these strategies, the analysis has revealed how Zelensky carries out the FTA of demanding assistance for Ukraine – mitigated through various positive politeness strategies – all whilst reinforcing shared values and solidarity with his European allies. To do this, the three speeches were interpreted through political discourse analysis, seeking to clarify how the vast issue of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the mobilisation of European support for Ukraine is managed at the micro-level. Fundamental ideas by Goffman (1967, 1981) and Brown and Levinson (1987) were hence reinterpreted to examine how strategic political objectives can be targeted and achieved through linguistic 'tactics' (Chilton, 1990). In this way, the thesis provides a meaningful contribution to the existing literature, shedding light on the role of linguistic politeness in Zelensky's diplomatic discourse; it aspired to provide a critical and deeper understanding of Zelensky's Europe-oriented discourse in the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

Following an exploration of the politico-historical background of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, along with a brief introduction into PDA, facework and politeness theory, the analysis examined five different politeness strategies (each of which was identified on the basis of a bottom-up examination of the data), across each of Zelensky's speeches, corresponding to the three consecutive years of the conflict. It should be repeated that speeches delivered in the European Parliament are not instances of spontaneous or impromptu language use, but carefully prepared and constructed texts. Therefore, the linguistic strategies employed by Zelensky were treated as the result of deliberate, calculated choices.

Firstly, in terms of in-group marking, the analysis pointed out that the 2022 speech was characterised by a linguistic dichotomy, implying a clear *we* versus *you* reasoning. In 2023 and 2024 then, this discourse changed significantly, with Zelensky emphasising the idea of "our Europe", highlighting shared goals and values, further reinforced by the use of lexical items like *shared* or *together* and the discursive construction of a shared enemy (the "anti-European force"). In terms of directives, an examination of the data revealed that the overall amount of direct directives (including imperatives, modal and performative verbs) used throughout the three speeches is relatively low, with a significant moment of decline in 2023, when only one explicit directive was used. However, it was noted that next to these direct directives, Zelensky also seems to employ more indirect or so-called 'veiled' directives, especially prominent in the 2023 address. Thirdly, the analysis demonstrated that the 2022 speech was

characterised by a considerable amount of self-praise, calling attention to the courage and resilience of the Ukrainian people. Self-praise then virtually disappears in the addresses of 2023 and 2024, which include more instances of other- and us-praise. With regard to gratitude expressions, it was shown that Zelensky's use of lexical terms like *thank* or *grateful* rises exponentially over the course of the three speeches, reaching the highest (relative) frequency in 2024. Finally, the analysis touched upon the element of code-switching, which was primarily present in the 2023 speech, in which Zelensky switched from Ukrainian to English for eight specific expressions, but which could also be observed more generally in the 2024 speech, which was delivered entirely in English, compared to the other two addresses which were in Ukrainian.

The discussion section then revealed a possible interpretation of these results, highlighting how Zelensky uses these politeness strategies for different purposes. The strategies of in-group marking and code-switching can be said to contribute to the creation of common ground between Zelensky and his audience, invoked by the president to further Ukraine's pursuit of EU membership. Furthermore, the president continuously interweaves directives, which he employs to ask for support, but which constitute FTAs, with expressions of praise and gratitude. He might be said to do this to preserve a balance or equilibrium in his discourse, carefully avoiding excessive violation of the EU's autonomy (or negative face). Lastly, brief attention was paid to the broader implications of Zelensky's discourse; through Goffman's Participation Framework Theory (1981), it was pointed out how President Roberta Metsola and the other MEPs are not the only recipients of Zelensky's speeches. On the contrary, in the case of public political discourse, the unratified audience is often extensive in scope. Therefore, Zelensky must cautiously formulate his words, bearing in mind the potential impact or repercussions they might have in the broader political context.

Further research could follow the evolution of Zelensky's discourse beyond 2024, tracing how new developments in the conflict – recently, there has been talk of a possible ceasefire (Walker, 2025; Whitehead and Lamche, 2025) – affect his choice of politeness strategies and relational positioning. Such a study might also consider the impact of Zelensky's discourse on his own face (both as an individual and as representative of his country) – which was not explored in this thesis, due to the already comprehensive nature of the current analysis. Moreover, it would be valuable to examine how politeness strategies differ when Zelensky addresses other (non-European) audiences, such as the U.S.

Congress⁶ or UN General Assembly⁷, but also the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea⁸ or the National Congress of Chile⁹, thereby offering insight into how relational work can be tailored to different audiences in various geopolitical contexts. Results of such a study could be compared to those observed within this thesis, to paint a more nuanced picture of Zelensky's linguistic behaviour against the background of the ongoing conflict. Attention should continue to be paid to the crucial role language (and in particular these solidarity-enhancing politeness strategies) can play in navigating international conflicts, because "at the heart of what we call 'politics' is the attempt to get others to 'share a common view' [... and] language is the only means for doing this" (Chilton, 2004: 199).

⁶ Zelensky (2022): <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelenskogo-pered-kong-73609>

⁷ Zelensky (2022): <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-na-zagalnih-debatah-77-yi-sesiya-77905>

⁸ Zelensky (2022): <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-v-nacionalnij-asambleyi-respubli-74257>

⁹ Zelensky (2023): <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ne-mozhut-buti-normoyu-taki-vijni-yak-zaraz-vede-rosiya-prot-82093>

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9. Appendix

A) Transcript speech Zelensky (2022)

Extraordinary plenary sitting of 01/03/2022 - Debate on the Russian aggression against Ukraine

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, *President of Ukraine*. – *(The following is a transcription of the interpretation of the original speech from Ukrainian into English)*

Madam President, you know, over the last couple of days I have not known how to greet anybody properly, because I can't say 'good' morning, 'good' afternoon or 'good' evening. This is absolutely true, because for some people every day is definitely not 'good'. For some people, this day is their last.

I speak today now about my citizens – the citizens of Ukraine – who are manning the walls and defending freedom and paying the ultimate price. I'm very pleased with what I've seen here – this unifying mood. I'm happy that we have brought together all the countries of the European Union today, but I did not know at what cost. This is a tragedy for me, for every Ukrainian and for every state – thousands of people killed, two revolutions, one war and five days of full-scale invasion by the Russian Federation.

I'm not reading from a sheet of paper, because the paper phase in the life of my country has ended. Now we are dealing with reality. Those people who died – this is real life. I believe that today we are giving our lives for values, for rights, for freedom, for the desire to be equal, just like you are – just like every human is. We are losing our best, our strongest and our most valuable people.

Ukrainians are incredible. We often love to say that we will prevail over everyone, and I'm very happy that you are not only talking about it, but you can also see it. I am convinced that we will indeed prevail over everyone. There is an expression, 'Ukraine chooses Europe'. That's what we have been striving for, and that's where we are have been and are still headed. I would very much like to hear you say to us that Europe now chooses Ukraine.

I have a few moments to talk with you now since there is a lull in missile strikes and bombardments. This morning was a very tragic one for us. Two cruise missiles hit Kharkiv, a city located close to the border with the Russian Federation. There were always many Russians there, and the people have always been friendly and had warm relations. There are over 20 universities there. It's the city that has the highest number of universities in our country. The youth there is bright and smart. They have always gathered and continue to gather there to celebrate all the festivals in the largest square in our country, Freedom Square, which is also the largest square in Europe. Yes, it is truly called Freedom Square. Can you imagine that, this morning, two cruise missiles hit Freedom Square? Dozens were killed. This is the price of freedom.

We're fighting for our land and for our freedom. Despite the fact that all large cities of our country are now blocked off, nobody is going to come in and interfere with our freedom and our country. Believe you me – every square in every city of our country from today on, no matter what it's called, is going to be called Freedom Square. Nobody is going to break us. We are strong. We are Ukrainians.

We have a desire to see our children live. I believe this to be a fair one. Yesterday, 16 children were killed. President Putin will say yet again that it's some kind of operation and that they are hitting military infrastructure where our children happen to be. What kind of military factories are they working at? Are they riding around in tanks or launching cruise missiles? You killed 16 people just yesterday!

Our nation is extremely motivated. We are fighting for our rights, for our freedoms and for our lives. Now we're fighting for our survival, and this is our highest motivation, but we're also fighting to be equal members of Europe. Today, I believe that we are all showing the world exactly what we're made of. The European Union will be much stronger with us – that's for sure. Without you, Ukraine will be alone.

We have proven our strength. We have proven that, at the very least, we are exactly the same as you are. So prove that you are with us. Prove that you will not abandon us. Prove that you are indeed Europeans, and then life will prevail over death and light will prevail over darkness. Glory to Ukraine!

(The House accorded the President a standing ovation)

B) Transcript speech Zelensky (2023)

Formal sitting of 09/02/2023 - Address by Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine. – (The following is a transcription of the interpretation of the original speech from Ukrainian into English)

Glory to Ukraine! Dear Madam President – dear Roberta – I thank you for these powerful words, and I thank you for your personal attention, which is very important to Ukraine. I thank you for your principled and energetic approach – two qualities that we see have remained unchanged during this struggle for Europe. The combination of those two qualities is a precondition for progress. Europe is lucky that here, in the Chamber of Europe's largest parliament – the European Parliament, a principled and energetic approach commands an absolute majority.

Thank you, dear representatives of Europe and leaders of Europe. All of us Europeans, each of the hundreds of millions of people in our continent, combine these two attributes, as do the representatives and leaders of Europe. This combination reflects what our Europe, a modern and peaceful Europe, gives to the world – the European way of life, European living standards, and European rules for life.

It is in Europe where each and every person matters; where the rule of law exists; where states strive to be social and societies strive to be open; where diversity is a value and the values of different people are united by fairness and equality; where borders are not violated, but where you don't notice when you are crossing borders; where people trust and have faith in tomorrow and are ready to take to the streets to fight for their future; and where there's only one barrier between protesters and the president, and that is honest elections. This is our Europe. These are rules. This is our way of life.

For Ukraine, it is the way home. I am here in order to defend the way home for our people, for all Ukrainians of all ages and of various political convictions, various social statuses, various religious convictions and different histories. All of us enjoy this common European history – the Ukrainian European way of life that they tried to annihilate through total war. Why? Because after the European Ukrainian way of life, they want to destroy the European way of life in all 27 countries of the European Union. We will not allow that.

The total war that is now being waged by Russia is not only for territory in this or that part of Europe. The danger is that there is a dictator with massive supplies and reserves of Soviet weapons and weapons from dictatorial regimes, Iran in particular. In order to be able to fight like this, the Kremlin, cynically and deliberately, year after year and step after step, has been trying to eliminate and destroy what we see as our values in Europe.

The value of human life has been destroyed in Russia. For the authorities there, nobody is of value apart from those who are in the Kremlin and have their own wallets at heart. The 140 million Russian citizens are, for the leaders of Russia, just bodies capable of carrying weapons for Russia on the battlefield and in order to keep everybody obedient. The supremacy of violence and obedience are the rules instead of law.

The Russian regime not only hates any social justice and diversity, but they are also investing in xenophobia and trying to make it the norm on our continent. They are trying to make the inhumane realities of the 1930s and 1940s a reality today. But the answer to that for us is 'no! No! Europe!' We are defending ourselves against the most anti-European force in the modern world. We are defending ourselves. We Ukrainians are on the battlefield together with you!

I thank you now for defending it together with us. We must defend ourselves. It's important not only for the states of Europe, but also for communities and societies in Europe, no matter who we are or what we are. We always fight against disrespect and neglect. Wherever we live, we always put our faith in integrity, for whatever we dream of for our children and grandchildren. The precondition for these dreams is peace and security. Will that be possible if we do not overcome the anti-European force that is trying to steal our Europe from all of us? No! Only our victory will guarantee all that. Each of our European values makes our victory essential.

Dear leaders of Europe! Dear Madam President, ladies and gentlemen! Dear Members of European Parliament! Dear officials of the European Parliament and of other European institutions here! Dear journalists, security service workers, military and army personnel, police officers and rescue workers! Dear workers of municipalities, diplomats, teachers, professors and scientists! Dear doctors, drivers, seaport workers, farmers and industrialists! Dear workers in industrial enterprises! Dear owners of small and large businesses! Dear workers at banks! Dear energy workers and electricity grid workers! Dear trade union workers! Dear students and representatives of NGOs! Dear producers and actors, lawyers, defence lawyers and human rights defenders! The fate of Europe has never depended on politicians, and there should be no such illusion now. Each and every one of us matters. Each and every one of you is strong. Each and every one of you is capable of impacting and influencing our common outcome – our common victory!

(Applause)

This applause is not directed to me. I'd like to thank all of you in Europe – in hundreds of towns and villages – who have supported Ukraine in this historic battle. Thank you!

(Applause)

I would like to thank all of you who have been helping our people, our ordinary citizens and our resettled people here, and who called on their leaders to increase and step up their support to protect our ordinary people. I thank those who were on the squares, who were raising questions, who were spreading the truth about the Russian aggression, who were not tempted by Russia to consume Russian disinformation, and who are standing by us in our fight for life and for Europe. I thank you.

I thank all of you who help Ukraine with vitally important supplies, weapons, ammunition, energy equipment and fuel, with the thousands of things without which we would not be able to endure this total war.

I thank you, ladies and gentlemen, Members of the European Parliament, and you personally, Roberta. With your decisions, you defend the European way of life steadfastly; you defend the Ukrainian European way of life. You approve courageous decisions and you strengthen the European ambition to be a home for justice and freedom.

I recall the first day of the large—scale invasion, when the Russian ambition to break us and Europe as a whole was still adamant. It was when the Russian aggression was beginning to break its teeth fighting our defences on the sixth day of the large—scale invasion. The European Parliament approved a resolution not simply to support our state, but also to approve our country's status as a candidate for membership of the European Union. That was the vision that motivated us to be strong and to stay the course.

(Applause)

Today, during the meeting of the European Council, I will be able to thank personally the heads of state and government for the decisions that, over the course of the last year, have allowed our continent to do what the previous wave of leaders considered impossible. Europe, at last, is relieving itself of the ruinous dependence on the Russian fossil fuels. Europe is cleansing itself of the corrupting influence of Russian oligarchic business. Europe is defending itself from infiltration by agents of Russia's secret services, who look at Europe as a hunting ground for opponents of the Russian regime.

For the first time in its history, the European Union is providing military assistance on such a large scale, and I see a positive assessment of the reforms in a European country that is fighting and defending itself while modernising and reforming its institutions. We are getting closer to the European Union. Ukraine is going to be a member of the European Union – a victorious Ukraine! Ukraine is going to be a member of the European Union – a victorious European Union!

Dear friends, perhaps some of you have not felt before the power of the European way of life. Now, together, Ukraine and the countries of the European Union have made our strength obvious. How is this possible? Because we combined a principled and energetic approach. We are all equal in representing Europe and integrity. We know that everybody is a leader of Europe in his or her own life and specific place. We do not retreat in the face of the enemy – we defend ourselves! We are not wasting time – we are changing ourselves and we are changing

things. Europe will always remain Europe, as long as we are together and as long as we take care of our Europe and of the European way of life.

I thank all of you. I invite you all to Ukraine. Glory to all Ukrainians who are fighting, and glory to Ukraine!

(The House rose and accorded President Zelenskyy a standing ovation)

(The House remained standing for the National Anthem of Ukraine and the European Anthem)

C) Transcript speech Zelensky (2024)

Extraordinary plenary sitting of 19/11/2024 - 1000 days of Russia's invasion of Ukraine: Address by Volodymyr Zelensky

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, *President of Ukraine*.

Dear Roberta, Madam President, dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, our friends, friends of Ukraine, I thank you for supporting Ukraine.

Thank you, Roberta, for calling this extraordinary session of the European Parliament to mark one thousand days of full-scale war.

Thank you for ensuring that not a single one of the thousand days of this terrible war became a day of betrayal of our shared European values.

We've proven that these values are not just words - not something abstract. European values and the European way of life - when transformed into action - protect the lives of real people. Thank you so much.

Together - Ukraine, all of Europe, and our partners in America and around the world - we have succeeded not only in preventing Putin from taking Ukraine but also in defending the freedom of all European nations.

Even with North Korea's Kim Jong-un by his side, Putin remains smaller than the united strength of Europe. I urge you not to forget this. And do not forget how much Europe is capable of achieving. If we could stop Europe's way of life from falling, then we can surely push Russia towards a just peace.

Peace is what we desire most. Two years ago, we proposed the Peace Formula, and I am grateful to all of Europe and every partner who has supported it. You in the European Parliament were among the first to support the Peace Formula. The only one who opposes it is the one who started this war - it's Russia.

We must push Russia towards a just peace.

Every blow and every threat from Russia must be met with firm sanctions.

For a thousand days, it has been crucial to radically reduce Russia's ability to fund its war through oil sales. Oil is the lifeblood of Putin's regime, and the shadow fleet of tankers is what keeps it alive.

As long as these tankers operate, Putin continues to kill. Strong sanctions are essential.

I thank each of you - thank you Roberta again - who supports our people, our resilience, our ability to restore safety even after the most devastating mass attacks by Russia. Together, we have accomplished much. But we must not fear doing even more.

Now, Putin has brought 11 000 North Korean troops to Ukraine's borders. This contingent may grow to 100 000.

While some European leaders think about elections, or something like this, at Ukraine's expense, Putin is focused on winning this war. He will not stop on his own. The more time he has, the worse the conditions become.

Every 'today' is the best moment to push Russia harder. And it is clear - without certain key factors, Russia will lack real motivation to engage in meaningful negotiations: without fires in its ammunition depots on Russian territory, without disrupted military logistics, without destroyed Russian air bases, without its lost capabilities to produce missiles and drones, and without its assets being confiscated.

You know very well that Putin does not value people or rules; he values only money and power. These are the things we must take away from him to restore peace.

If anyone in Europe thinks they can sell Moscow Ukraine - or any other country, like the Baltic states, or the Balkans, Georgia, Moldova - and gain something in return, let them remember this simple truth - no one can enjoy calm waters amid a storm.

We must do everything to end this war fairly and justly, as you said, Roberta, and, of course, together. A thousand days of war is a tremendous challenge. Ukraine deserves to make the next year the year of peace.

Thank you, again! Thank you so much!

Thank you for your resolutions, your decisions, your principles, your visits to Ukraine during the war, during the first year of war especially, because you were here when it was so difficult, and thanks for your faith in Ukraine.

Thank you very much!

Slava Ukraini!

(The House rose and accorded President Zelenskyy a standing ovation)