



REPORT
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A EUROPEAN FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

THE NEED FOR A PROGRESSIVE
AND TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

Aline Burni | Laetitia Thissen



Bahá'í
International
Community



MESSAGE TO READERS

February 2023

While a feminist approach to international relations has made significant strides across Europe, the European Union lags in adopting a feminist foreign policy across the union.

At GWL Voices, our advocacy pushes for the integration of women's voices in all spheres of society, particularly in international peace and security, global governance, human rights, gender issues, environmental diplomacy, global health, and sustainable development.

Hence, as a collective voice of women's leadership, backed by the support of our partners, this report reflects our stance on an issue whose time is long overdue.

Further, the report provides an opportunity for reflection. It serves as a call to action and a timely reminder to shift from the traditional form of foreign policy towards one that places women at the front and center.

Research shows that women's leadership fosters empathy, transparency, inclusivity, shared progress, and peace.

In the wake of unending global challenges, a feminist foreign policy offers hope for transformational leadership we all can trust - one that is unequivocally the way forward.

We want to thank our partners, GGIN, C4UN, Bahá'í International, and the International Alliance of Women, whose foresight and support have enabled us to carry out this critical work.

Here's to elevating our voices for change and inclusion while advancing the issues we care about most.



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WHY A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

From Ukraine to Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen, Myanmar, and Iran, resilience against acts of deprivation of liberty and revolts against human rights attacks has had "a female face."¹ with women and marginalized groups taking the streets, becoming actively involved or directly attacked in (post-) conflict zones. This must be noticed in the international community's response, which needs a holistic security approach that puts human security at its core. Yet, unfortunately, there is a proven track record of women and girls taking a heavier toll from armed conflict settings and crises.² In addition, conflict and post-conflict countries tend to show the highest sexual violence rates worldwide, with rape and other forms of gender-based violence being used as weapons of war.³ Yet, women also play an essential role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.⁴ Feminist international relations scholars have demonstrated that countries with a focus on gender equality tend to pursue foreign policies that are less belligerent.⁵ Achieving gender equality therefore constitutes a precondition for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 "Peace, justice and strong institution," among others.⁶ Moreover,

FFP should not be just another buzzword. Neither does it correspond to just another topic. Much more than that, it is a process and comprehensive approach to foreign policy.

- 1 United Nations, "At Security Council debate, delegates call for women's inclusion in all peace processes, protection of human rights defenders," United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases, October 20, 2022, accessed on November 30, 2022, from: <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc15071.doc.htm>
- 2 UNFPA, "Ukraine: Conflict compounds the vulnerabilities of women and girls," *United Nations Population Fund*, November 14, 2022, accessed on November 30, 2022, from: <https://libguides.murdoch.edu.au/footnote/examples>
- 3 UNODC, "Global Study on Homicide," *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2019, accessed on November 29, 2022, from: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/global-study-on-homicide.html>
- 4 Valerie M Hudson and Patrica Leidl, *The Hillary Doctrine – Sex and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Valerie Hudson, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Mary Caprioli and Chad Emmett, *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).
- 5 Kirsten P. Williams, "Feminism in Foreign Policy" in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)
- 6 UN Women, "Why Gender Equality Matters across all SDGs: An excerpt of turning promises into action: Gender equality in the 2023 agenda for sustainable development", 2018. Accessed on 29/11/2022 from: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/2/gender-equality-in-the-2030-agenda-for-sustainable-development-2018>

in times of limited resources, evidence shows that investing in women and girls bolsters good governance, economic growth, community health, peace, and stability.⁷ Here precisely lies the essence of a feminist approach to international relations, which has gained significant ground across Europe – and in the Global South – since the original decision by the Swedish Social Democratic and Green coalition at the time to explicitly adopt a **feminist foreign policy (FFP)**.

Structural reforms of EU institutions dealing with foreign affairs are necessary, particularly cultural and institutional changes aiming at a more balanced composition of decision-making bodies, which incentivize the presence of women in office, and that lead to the adoption of more participatory and inclusive processes of decision-making. Furthermore, the EU must put in place a mechanism of listening to the stories and perspectives of women and all subaltern groups to reflect on one's privileged position and responsibilities within the global community.

The search for more peaceful and secure societies has increased the interest in and engagement on FFP, mainly by European national governments. While it is excellent news that FFP is becoming more 'normalized' in the public debate and increasingly gaining the attention of government actors, the development of a more ambitious concept, policy, and action should be continued. While there have been significant advancements with the adoption and practice of a FFP by some national governments, a more ambitious, progressive, and transformative approach must be continuously advocated by feminists, civil society organizations, and policymakers alike. In particular, the European Union (EU) should be more determined to adopt and practice feminist principles in its external action. Given its supranational and inter-governmental nature, a FFP at the EU level represents the opportunity to amplify the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of marginalized groups globally through a leading actor and a normative power in international politics. As Europe finds itself in the most severe security crisis since the end of World War II, there is momentum to transform its external action. At the same time, the feminist branding of foreign policy coincides with the increased political commitment to gender equality through numerous initiatives,⁸ including the EU's self-declared "Union of Equality" underpinned by its Gender Equality and LGBTIQ strategies. Amid what can be considered a "feminist turn in foreign policy,"⁹ we, therefore, reflect in this policy brief on the opportunities and challenges of more clearly linking the external action and (gender) equality agendas into a European feminist foreign policy and put forth some policy recommendations to contribute to the debates.

7 Jamile Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein, "Understanding Gender Equality in Foreign Policy – What the United States Can Do" (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2020).

8 Cadesky, Jessica. "Built on shaky ground: Reflections on Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy." *International Journal*, (2020). Accessed November 30, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702020953424>.

9 Jennifer Thomson, "The growth of feminist (?) foreign policy," *E-International Relations*, 10 February 2020 <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/02/10/the-growth-of-feminist-foreign-policy/> (accessed on November 30, 2022)



WHAT IS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

What is certain, FFP should not be just another buzzword. Neither does it correspond to just another topic. Much more than that, it is a process and comprehensive approach to foreign policy. For the time being, FFP is a developing practice, and there is no single or consolidated definition.¹⁰ Considering this gap, feminist theorists have sought to offer ways forward by delineating the concept. Thomson et al.¹¹ namely conceive of it as "the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states, as well as movements and other non-state actors, in a manner that prioritizes peace, gender equality and environmental integrity, enshrines, promotes, and protects the human rights of all; seeks to disrupt colonial, racist, patriarchal and male-dominated power structures; and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve that vision." FFP looks not only at the immediate security needs in times of war and conflict to overcome inequalities, gender, and racist stereotypes but also colonial legacies and asymmetries of power in global relations. A FFP endeavors to show consistency across all domains of influence and closely connects with grassroots feminist movements while exercising those values abroad and at home. As such, it applies to all international efforts: peace and security but also trade, development aid, diplomacy, consular services, and immigration, among others. Moreover, it tries to do so while looking at the long-term challenges and the various factors affecting human security: social and economic development, healthcare, conflict prevention, and women's rights. Advancing human rights means promoting security and sustainable peace, as it has been shown that crucial factors fostering violence are gender inequality and the subjugation of women.¹² Likewise, FFP becomes effective through the simultaneous use of internal processes and measures coupled with external standards fed by the first-hand experience of civil society organizations (CSOs). It also requires questioning one's internal organization, structures, and practice. To be able to walk the talk, freeing foreign policy from old structural power relations and methods is necessary.

The traditional way foreign and security policy has been conducted has led to a status quo failing most people and causing harm to others, especially to the most vulnerable and marginalized.

10 Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, "Feminist foreign policy," Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy> (accessed November 30, 2022).

11 Thompson, Lyric, Gayatri Patel, Gawain Kripke, and Megan O'Donnell. 2020. *Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States*. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, p. 19. Accessed on November 29, 2022, <https://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/toward-feminist-foreign-policy-united-states>

12 Enloe, Cynthia. *The Big Push: Exposing and Challenging the Persistence of Patriarchy*. 1st ed. The University of California Press, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1g248zv>.

Emphasizing its potential for promoting equality, justice, solidarity, and peace, the Center for Feminist Foreign Policy understands FFP as a "political framework" centered around the well-being of marginalized people. It invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy's hierarchical systems.¹³ It states that "FFP takes a step outside the black box approach of traditional foreign policy thinking and its focus on military force, violence, and domination by offering an alternative and intersectional rethinking of security from the viewpoint of the most vulnerable."¹⁴ The traditional way foreign and security policy has been conducted has led to a status quo failing most people and causing harm to others, especially to the most vulnerable and marginalized. In that sense, FFP constitutes a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate women's and marginalized groups' experiences, stories, and agency to scrutinize the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonization, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and militarism. In other words, it offers a transformative tool to question current imbalances of power and inequalities perpetuating millions of people's state of vulnerability and injustice worldwide.

This approach is rooted in a transformative agenda aiming to “change structures and enhance the visibility of women and girls as actors” (ibid.). Moreover, it is part of an overall effort to tackle intersectional forms of discrimination, simultaneously seeking to tackle sexism, racism, classism, and overlapping forms of discrimination.

Another indispensable element of FFP is the context-specificity and the need to bring in the perspectives of those the policies affect. By drawing on feminist theory and the ethics of care, the theoretical framework of Aggestam et al enables us to think of FFP as "grounded in the locality of those at its receiving end".¹⁵ In this line of ethical thinking, care is understood in a broad sense as "everything we do to maintain, continue and repair our world."¹⁶ The centrality of care and dialogue is what underpins the moral ambitions of FFP, which "takes into account the situated moral stories and experiences of individuals and in particular women whose voices have not been considered in traditional foreign policy analysis and IR." Following the lines of care ethics scholars in foreign policy thus implies a qualitative shift in IR from a sovereign-based logic ("the right to intervene") to an ethics of global care based on "the responsibility to protect."¹⁷ By carefully deconstructing gendered power relations, FFP thus offers a way to address systemic discrimination and the structural barriers that prevent the achievement of more equal societies across the globe. FFP is, therefore, necessary to the fulfillment of international commitments on gender equality, social justice, non-discrimination, and human rights and should be coherently applied across all sub-fields of foreign policy, as well as in both the domestic and external dimensions.

13 ibid footnote 10

14 ibid footnote

15 Aggestam, K., Bergman Rosamond, A., & Kronsell, A. (2019). Theorizing feminist foreign policy. *International Relations*, 33(1), 23–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117818811892>

16 The United Nations has organized four world conferences on women. These took place in Mexico City in 1975, Copenhagen in 1980, Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995. A series of five-year reviews followed the last. Source: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/world-conferences-on-women>

17 Tronto, Joan. 2008. "Is Peacekeeping Care Work?: A Feminist Reflection on the Responsibility to Protect." In *Global Feminist Ethics*, edited by Rebecca Whisnant and Peggy Des Autels, 179–200. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.



FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Early feminist activists paved the way long before FFP became popular. In 1915, around 1500 women from 14 countries (including Germany, England, Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Italy, and Canada) gathered for the International Peace Congress of Women in The Hague in the interest of world peace.¹⁸ These women met their sisters from countries at war with their own belligerent countries. At a time in which the international community was threatened, they gathered "to protest from [their] hearts against the barbarity of the war [...] but furthermore [they] would fain suggest ways by which this large internationalism may find itself and dig new channels through which it may flow."¹⁹ Likewise, Cynthia Enloe's work in 1990 revealed the crucial role of women in implementing governmental foreign policies deconstructing the idea of it being exclusively a men's domain.²⁰ Whilst FFP has recently found a strong resonance through national government commitments, these efforts find their roots in long-standing multilateral developments such as the 1979 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)²¹. The 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing was a decisive turning point for the global agenda for gender equality with the unanimously adopted Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action.²² The latter highlights women's essential role in the achievement of lasting peace. With a specific focus on feminist peace, the adoption of resolution 1325 has been the first to recognize the importance of women's perspectives and involvement in peace and security in an explicit manner. It has contributed to establishing the so-called Women, Peace, and Security Agenda (WPS).

FFP thus offers a way to address systemic discrimination and the structural barriers that prevent the achievement of more equal societies across the globe. FFP is, therefore, necessary to the fulfillment of international commitments on gender equality, social justice, non-discrimination, and human rights and should be coherently applied across all sub-fields of foreign policy, as well as in both the domestic and external dimensions.

18 Lochner, Louis P. "The International Peace Congress of Women." *The Advocate of Peace (1894-1920)* 77, no. 7 (1915): 173–75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20667269>.

19 *ibid.* footnote 18

20 Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. 2nd ed. The University of California Press, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt6wqbn6>.

21 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>

22 "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action", UN Women, accessed on November 30, 2022, https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/PFA_E_Final_WEB.pdf

Therefore, when the idea of FFP was first introduced in 2014 by Sweden²³, the gendered dimension of foreign policy was in fact, far from unknown. And yet, it was met with much suspicion and even ridicule, as declared by Margot Wallström herself.²⁴ Nevertheless, the systematic integration in external affairs of women and girls' rights, followed by the mobilization of adequate resources and the promotion of women's representation in decision-making (the so-called three R's of Swedish FFP) has produced tangible results and changes, ending by encouraging other pioneering countries which have incorporated (or made an effort to adopt) feminist principles into their foreign policies too. Several countries adhering to the approach have been on a constant rise (see Table 1). Canada followed suit in 2017. Then came France, Mexico, Spain, Luxembourg, Germany, Chile²⁵ and the Netherlands. Others have declared their intention to do the same, like Belgium, The Netherlands²⁶, Libya²⁷, Cyprus, and Scotland.²⁸ In other cases, the promotion of gender equality has been at the heart of the different dimensions of foreign policy, even without adopting the same labels, notably in Finland²⁹, Denmark, Norway, Australia as well as Switzerland. Hilary Clinton, then US Secretary of State, coined the "Hilary Doctrine" according to which the oppression of women constitutes a national as well as global threat.³⁰ Moreover, the phenomenon is not restricted to states; political parties also adhere to the FFP agenda. In the UK, the Labour Party³¹ has namely adopted a feminist approach to development and the manifesto of the Women's Equality Party³² similarly outlines its vision for a FFP.

A true FFP requires decisive action to address the domestic dimension of gender equality.

23 It is interesting to note that it was done the same year as Russia's invasion of Crimea: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/12/05/can-vladimir-putin-be-intimidated-by-feminism-sweden/>

24 Foreign Policy Magazine, "Sweden's Foreign Minister has no time for giggles," April 6, 2016, podcast, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/06/swedens-foreign-minister-has-no-time-for-giggles/>

25 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Minister Antonia Urrejola: 'The development of a feminist foreign policy will be a distinguishing hallmark and a vanguard element of our diplomacy,'" March 22, 2022, accessed on November 30, 2022, <https://www.minrel.gob.cl/foreign-minister-antonia-urrejola-the-development-of-a-feminist>

26 Government of the Netherlands, "Feminist foreign policy explained", November 18, 2022, accessed on November 30, 2022, <https://www.government.nl/latest/news/2022/11/18/feminist-foreign-policy-netherlands>

27 "What Does a Feminist Foreign Policy Mean for Libya?", *The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy*, February 28, 2022, accessed on November 29, 2022, <https://timep.org/commentary/analysis/what-does-a-feminist-foreign-policy-mean-for-libya/>

28 Scottish Government, "Scotland's feminist approach to foreign policy: background note," November 2, 2022, accessed on November 30, 2022, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/background-note-scotlands-feminist-approach-foreign-policy/#:~:text=%22Feminist%20foreign%20policy%20is%20the,all%3B%20seeks%20to%20disrupt%20colonial%2C>

29 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, "What does a feminist foreign policy mean? ", October 27, 2022, accessed on November 29, 2022, https://um.fi/current-affairs/-/asset_publisher/gc654PySnjTX/content/mita-on-feministinen-ulkopolitiikka-/35732

30 Valerie M Hudson and Patrica Leidl, *The Hillary Doctrine – Sex and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)

31 Labour Party, "A world for the many, not the few," March 2018, Policy Paper, accessed November 30, 2022, https://www.policyforum.labour.org.uk/uploads/editor/files/World_For_The_Many.pdf

32 Women's Equality Party, "A manifesto not just to remain in the European Union, but to advance because equality is better for everyone," accessed on November 30, 2022: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/womensequality/pages/6633/attachments/original/1557929876/EU_Manifesto_Updated_compressed.pdf?1557929876

FFP first and foremost, encourages thorough reflection on the meaning of feminism because it forces foreign affairs officials to rethink what it means before applying the notion to their work. Anne Linde, former minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, says it "requires us to consider everything through a gender lens and highlight the need for a gender perspective in areas that have been considered gender-neutral by default."³³ When feminist (and human rights) values face setbacks across the world, this already constitutes an important step in acknowledging the gendered nature and effects of foreign policy and proposing some actions to do things differently.

When feminist (and human rights) values face setbacks across the world, this already constitutes an important step in acknowledging the gendered nature and effects of foreign policy and proposing some actions to do things differently.

Admittedly, the exact contours of a FFP agenda still need to be fixed, and the recent withdrawal by the new Swedish Government in 2022 clearly shows its fragility. Besides, the term "feminism" across the different FFPs tends to be used in very different ways and can carry negative connotations for some political actors. For instance, even though Sweden and Canada have endorsed the principle, they apply it in very contrasted manners.³⁴ In the Swedish case, FFP is centred around the problem of gender inequality as part of the more significant domestic effort to pursue feminist values and gender mainstreaming. The ethical normative framework of the WPS agenda has thus spurred countries like Sweden to reframe their foreign policies by putting gender equality at the center of international peace and security.³⁵ Instead, the Canadian FFP focuses on tackling poverty through international aid, whereby the private sector is presented as a driving force to pursue a feminist policy agenda. In other words, one critique of this approach is that it tends to underpin a neoliberal understanding of feminism, presenting women and girls as "superwomen"³⁶ suggesting that their empowerment is a precondition for the local communities economic growth, which limits the policy's potential impact.³⁷ The ambiguity around the notion thus bears the risk of stripping it from its transformative potential or being instrumentalized politically in support of measures failing to dismantle patriarchal systems entrenching gender inequalities. Cadesky warns that "concepts and tools related to gender equality have been over-politicized to serve larger political interests, leading to co-optation, misapplication, or erasure."³⁸ In this regard, the case of gender mainstreaming is all too telling. Being all too often reduced to an outdated "add and stir" method in development policy whereby gender issues are merely added to existing ones, it is rather illustrative of the depoliticization of equality policies.³⁹ Maria Stratigaki namely argued that gender mainstreaming – which was introduced in 1996 to promote gender equality across all EU policies – effectively resulted in "an alibi for neutralizing

33 Harvard International Review, "Spearheading Security: Interview with Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde," April 12, 2021, accessed on November 30, 2022, <https://hir.harvard.edu/ann-linde/>

34 Thomson J. What's Feminist about Feminist Foreign Policy? Sweden's and Canada's Foreign Policy Agendas. *International Studies Perspectives*. 2020 Nov 30;21(4):424-437. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isp/ekz032>

35 Aggestam and Rosamond, 2019

36 Laura J. Shepherd (2011) Sex, Security and Superhero(in)es: From 1325 to 1820 and Beyond, *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 13:4, 504-521, DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2011.611659

37 Laura Parisi, Canada's New Feminist International Assistance Policy: Business as Usual?, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, Volume 16, Issue 2, April 2020, Pages 163-180, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orz027>

38 Cadesky, J. (2020). Built on shaky ground: Reflections on Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy. *International Journal*, 75(3), p. 305. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702020953424>

39 Jahan, Rounaq, and Soofia Mumtaz. "The Elusive Agenda: Mainstreaming Women in Development [with Comments]." *The Pakistan Development Review* 35, no. 4 (1996): 825-34. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41260001>.

positive action."⁴⁰ Paradoxically, there is also a parallel tendency whereby "gender equality" becomes over-politicized through its systematic erasure and replacement with "equality between men and women," with important implications for narrowing the term.⁴¹ Likewise, overemphasizing women and girls often leads to squeezing out issues related to the elimination of gender inequalities and patriarchal norms at large.⁴² Therefore, using the feminist label is only one step in the right direction, but avoiding it becoming either de-politicized or over-politicized remains the most significant challenge for a meaningful FFP.

Overall, the Swedish approach of FFP⁴³ is based on the "three R's" rule revolving around rights, resources, and representation for women. The latter is complemented with a fourth R considering the reality in which women live. This approach is rooted in a transformative agenda aiming to "change structures and enhance the visibility of women and girls as actors". Moreover, it is part of an overall effort to tackle intersectional forms of discrimination, simultaneously seeking to tackle sexism, racism, classism, and overlapping forms of discrimination experienced by women.

Likewise, Germany's FFP is inspired by the 3Rs model complemented with a "D" for diversity. Making it clear that FFP is about including – not excluding – its policy is based on the understanding that it is not exclusively about women but all those who are marginalized on a different basis, such as gender, origins, religion, or sexuality whose voices need to be heard in the construction of sustainable peace and security. Similarly, Canada applies a so-called "GBA+" (gender-based analysis) to ensure the inclusion of all people in all their diversity, taking an intersectional lens. To fully operationalize FFP, two further measures of success can be considered core components of FFP: research & reporting and reach (cf. Table 2). More recently, the Global Partner Network to Advance Feminist Foreign Policy, a collective whose aim is to encourage the learning and adoption of a shared framework for FFP, has identified five key ingredients⁴⁴: (1) purpose, (2) definition, (3) reach, (4) intended outcomes and benchmarks to achieve over time and (5) plan to operationalize.

Making FFP a reality thus demands a radical shift in conceiving, carrying out, and deciding about foreign policy. Although some critical policy initiatives have been put in place, substantial change will likely happen by breaking current power dynamics at the EU level and beyond, as stated by Ridge et al.⁴⁵, "[i]f the application of a feminist foreign policy doesn't change practice, it isn't feminist." The question ahead of us is, therefore, whether the European Union has the potential to help advance the objectives of a feminist foreign policy globally?

40 Stratigaki, M. (2005). Gender mainstreaming vs. positive action: an ongoing conflict in EU gender equality policy. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 12(2), 165-186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506805051236>

41 See, for instance, how Poland and Hungary systematically block reference to gender equality: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/poland-hungary-block-gender-equality-from-eu-social-summit/> see also: Rebecca Tiessen and Krystel Carrier, The erasure of "gender" in Canadian foreign policy under the Harper Conservatives: The significance of the discursive shift from "gender equality" to "equality between women and men," *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal* 21 no. 2 (2015).

42 see footnote 38

43 Government Offices of Sweden Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Handbook - Sweden's feminist foreign policy," 2019, accessed on November 29, 2022, <https://www.government.se/492c36/contentassets/fc115607a4ad4bca913cd8d11c2339dc/handbook---swedens-feminist-foreign-policy---english.pdf>

44 "Feminist Foreign Policy: A Framework", available at: https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FFP_Framework_EN_June2021update.pdf

45 Ridge, A., Lambert, C., and Crawford, J., Clement, R., Thompson, L., Gammage, S., and Goetz, A.M., 2019. Feminist Foreign Policy Key Principles & Accountability Mechanisms: A Discussion Summary, International Women's Development; International Center for Research on Women; Center for Global Affairs (New York University), p. 5.



IS A EUROPEAN FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY POSSIBLE?

While several European countries have adopted a foreign policy with a strong focus on gender equality, the EU still lags and lacks a clear plan. This does not mean that the EU hasn't made any efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in its external action, but for the time being, they seem to be insufficient and conceptually limited. The European Commission has committed itself to a "Union of Equality" as of its first day in office, back in 2019. Stating that it "will enhance gender mainstreaming by systematically including a gender perspective in all stages of policy design in all EU policy areas, internal and external" while "using intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle," the Commission also recognized the need for coherence in the EU's action internally and externally. The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 explicitly identifies gender inequality as a "global problem" to be curbed as "the core objective of EU external action". It hails the role the EU must play as a promoter of gender equality and women's empowerment through its international partnerships, in political and human rights dialogues with partner countries, as well as its trade, neighborhood, and enlargement policy but also in its actions in fragile, conflict and emergencies. Accordingly, the current scenario of war offers a timely reminder of these commitments in the face of severe challenges to the global order and international security. Sweden and Spain will hold successive Presidencies of the Council of the EU in 2023 – both countries where FFP has already been adopted. This could be an opportunity to advance a European feminist foreign policy further.

A truly feminist foreign policy understands gender beyond a binary definition. It aims at tackling inequalities, promoting justice, and addressing intersectionality concerning a broad range of vulnerable, marginalized, and subaltern groups, including LGBTQ+ communities, indigenous peoples, disabled people, etc.

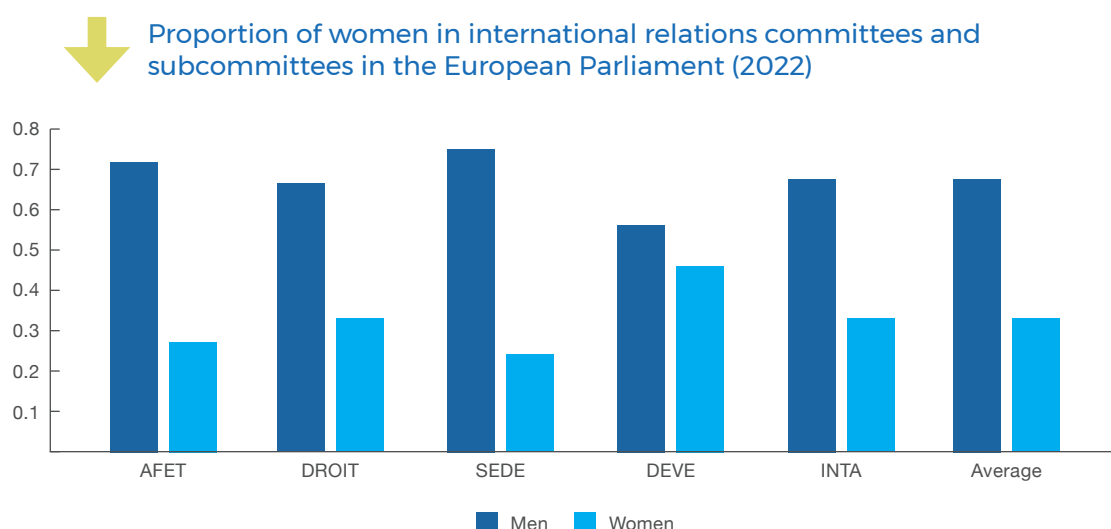
With specific attention to women's rights, the EU has launched the Spotlight Initiative in a multiyear partnership with the UN. This global program worth EUR 500 million aims to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls by 2030. It drew on the #WithHer campaign to highlight the stories of survivors and activists to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Moreover, the EU Strategic Approach and Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024 continues to be implemented, whereas the Council also approved the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2020-2024)

in November 2020. Through its active engagement with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), it seeks to apply a gender lens to its trade policy, for instance, by providing gender-disaggregated data to ensure trade-related aspects of gender are adequately addressed in trade agreements and to consider gender impacts in trade initiatives.

However, beyond the initiatives of the Commission in those multilateral fora and on top of the EU's internal commitments to gender equality, one may wonder to what extent gender equality and other feminist principles have also been reflected in the EU's external action policy as such. To what extent has the EU adopted and applied feminist principles in its international relations? The answer is a little. And it starts from the fact that the EU's internal structures dealing with and deciding on foreign policy remain anchored in a traditional approach. As Laura Chappell (2021) has discussed, even though the European External Action Service (EEAS) created the position of Principal Advisor on Gender and on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2015, there is a lack of gender mainstreaming both within the EEAS and the policies it promotes and implements.

Another indispensable element of FFP is the context-specificity and the need to bring in the perspectives of those the policies affect.

Furthermore, gender mainstreaming is viewed as purely a tick-box exercise, and there is an apparent underrepresentation of women in various parts of the EEAS. For example, almost 80 percent of senior and nearly 70 percent of middle management posts in the EEAS are held by men. A similar pattern of male dominance is observed in the European Parliament, where the central committees and subcommittees dealing with foreign policy do not reflect gender balance nor the increasing representation of women as identified in the EP as a whole over the last few years. As shown in Graph 1 below, on average, only 33 percent of those committees and subcommittees dealing with an external policy are composed of women. Without surprise, the International Development (DEVE) committee is the one closest to gender balance, with 55 percent of men and 45 percent of women Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). However, the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE) are primarily composed of men (more than 70 percent).



Source: Authors' compilation based on data from the European Parliament (<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/portal/en>)

At the policy level, the EU lacks an ambitious approach to feminist principles. Since 2010, two successive Gender Action Plans have been adopted - GAP I and GAP II - extending until 2020. Furthermore, in November 2020, as part of its Work Programme, the Commission and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security communicated a new Gender Action Plan for its external action, GAP III, entitled "An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external action ."In a nutshell, GAP III puts forth five pillars:



The European Parliament has taken a more ambitious perspective on the promotion of feminist principles in the EU's external action. In March 2022, it adopted a resolution expressing a positive view on several initiatives by GAP III but also calling for strengthening and being more concrete about others. In particular, the EP has pledged to gender mainstreaming, protecting women's rights, promoting women's equitable participation in conflict prevention and mediation, and advocated that 85 percent of official development assistance (ODA) goes to programs with gender equality as a significant or primary objective. Furthermore, the EP recognized the need for an intersectional approach and called for mandatory training on GAP III for all managers at headquarters, EU delegations, and all staff working in EU external action.

FFP constitutes a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate women's and marginalized groups' experiences, stories, and agency to scrutinize the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonization, heteronormativity, capitalism, racism, imperialism, and militarism.

Despite those positive policy initiatives, the EU has not yet managed to advance a feminist foreign policy. On the one hand, GAP III has not yet found the support of all EU institutions, namely because the Council could not reach a position on the document as Bulgaria, Hungary, and Poland have not endorsed it- all countries with problematic records on women's rights. On the other hand, several policy documents following the communication of GAP III have overlooked the principles of gender equality put forth by the latter, for instance, the EU's Strategic Compass of 2022. Considering those pitfalls, we advance some policy recommendations towards a European feminist foreign policy in the next session.

FFP first and foremost, encourages thorough reflection on the meaning of feminism because it forces foreign affairs officials to rethink what it means before applying the notion to their work.



TIME FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT: RECOMMENDATIONS

A European FFP would be an opportunity to create and implement external action based on feminist principles at the level of the EU, thus considerably expanding its scope and protecting FFP from political fluctuations at national governments. Furthermore, although the Union shares foreign policy competencies with its member states, it has a set of initiatives and legislation with an impact on partner countries, notably in the fields of international trade, development cooperation, and Common Security and Development Policy (CSDP), as well as the external dimension of the Green Deal, which could primarily benefit from a feminist approach. Considering the above reflections, we formulate four main policy recommendations for a more critical, ambitious, and progressive EU FFP.

ADOPT A MORE AMBITIOUS APPROACH TO FFP

1

While it is excellent news that the EU has made some efforts to promote gender equality in its external action, the concept of gender remains limited and narrowly defined. In contrast, the EU has not proposed adopting an explicitly 'feminist' foreign policy for the time being. The EU generally refers to 'equality between men and women' and therefore approaches gender from a binary perspective mostly. However, a truly feminist foreign policy understands gender beyond a binary definition. It aims at tackling inequalities, promoting justice, and addressing intersectionality concerning a broad range of vulnerable, marginalized, and subaltern groups, including LGBTQIA+ communities, indigenous peoples, disabled people, etc. An expansive notion of gender, as elaborated by UN Women, acknowledges that there are more than two fixed categories of "men" and "women" and that "gender identity and sexual identity and expression may be more fluid and plural in forms."⁴⁶ Moreover, it is indispensable that a European FFP is aware of and addresses the European colonial history and its impact on current power asymmetries in international relations and gendered social structures, including by adopting a post-colonial approach in its relations with partners. The EU should recognize its historical legacy as an imperialist power and start to debate issues of power asymmetries and colonial legacies internally and how existing policies might be reproducing them, intending to change policies and practices that only reinforce unjust and unequal relations.

46 Citation retrieved from Friesen, I., & Wisskirchen, A. (2022). *Ten recommendations for Germany's feminist development policy* (IDOS Discussion Paper 17/2022). Bonn: German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS). <https://doi.org/10.23661/idp172022>

2

REFORM EU INSTITUTIONS TOWARDS EQUAL COMPOSITION, MORE INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES, AND INCREASED DIALOGUE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

Structural reforms of EU institutions dealing with foreign affairs are necessary, particularly cultural and institutional changes aiming at a more balanced composition of decision-making bodies, which incentivize the presence of women in office, and that lead to the adoption of more participatory and inclusive processes of decision-making. Furthermore, the EU must put in place a mechanism of listening to the stories and perspectives of women and all subaltern groups to reflect on one's privileged position and responsibilities within the global community. One way to do this is, for instance, by working closely with feminist and civil society organizations and by financing such organizations to integrate their perspectives and needs in the policy conceptualization and implementation levels, as suggested by Friesen and Wisskirchen (2022)⁴⁷. Additionally, considering many practices of feminist foreign policy already adopted at the level of member states, the EU should actively foster FFP networks at the European level by promoting spaces for the exchange of best practices and their consolidation and policy diffusion.

3

INCREASE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL POLICY COHERENCE BY ADOPTING FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ACROSS FOREIGN POLICY DOMAINS, ALLOCATING ADEQUATE RESOURCES, AND MAINSTREAMING GENDER

A true FFP requires decisive action to address the domestic dimension of gender equality. The GAP III already mentioned the need for the EU to lead by example and this means that the EU should first and foremost fight discrimination and promote gender equality, justice, and inclusion internally, in its societies, member states, and institutions. For that, the EU should not only set gender objectives for its joint external action but also incentivize member states to achieve such objectives in their bilateral external action. In addition, addressing gender inequalities requires financial commitments that reflect the respective priorities and gender awareness and goals across all external policies. In that sense, there should be coherence between the adoption of gender equality targets and objectives in all fields of external policies, as well as in internal policies.

4

FOR AN EU BLUEPRINT FOR FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY 2.0

Considering the wide variety of interpretations due to the lack of an overarching understanding of what constitutes a FFP approach, the EU can act as a catalyst to design a coherent and solid framework for a more cohesive intersectional feminist foreign policy approach at the EU level revolving around the five key elements: purpose, definition, reach, intended outcomes/benchmarks and operationalization plan.⁴⁸ On the one hand, the EU could help to rethink feminist foreign and domestic policy as two sides of the same coin by ensuring greater complementarity between its action in equality and foreign policy fields. On the other hand, the Europeanisation of FFP can act as a uniting factor seeking to overcome ideological and political division by bolstering a shared approach around commonly shared values based on peace, solidarity, human rights, and equality. To overcome the "depoliticization/politicization

⁴⁷ https://www.idos-research.de/uploads/media/DP_17.2022.pdf

⁴⁸ Thompson, Lyric, Gayatri Patel, Gawain Kripke, and Megan O'Donnell. 2020. Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, Accessed on November 29, 2022, <https://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/toward-feminist-foreign-policy-united-states>

4

paradox" inherent to FFP⁴⁹, the EU must endeavor to disentangle gender equality from its current misuses to refocus it on the original and more ambitious political project of feminism: uncover power structures and promote transformation. Concretely speaking, the EU should use all its means to gain more direct ownership of FFP, bringing it to a new level while taking advantage of its normative power in international relations to share good practices of FFP.

⁴⁹ Cadesky, Jessica. "Built on shaky ground: Reflections on Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy." *International Journal*, (2020). Accessed November 30, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702020953424>.

APPENDIX



TABLE 1
Timeline of Feminist Foreign Policy

| Year | country | Policy agenda | Stage of implementation |
|------|-------------|---|---|
| 2014 | Sweden | 1 st (*) Feminist Foreign Policy | Entered into force as the very first explicit FFP (*) but no longer in place since the formation of the new Government in 2022. |
| 2015 | Norway | Action Plan for Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Foreign and Development Policy (2007-2009, extended for 2010-2013; 2016-2020) Government Action Plan for Women, Peace and Security (2019-2022) | Successive national action plans in place. |
| 2018 | UK | A feminist approach to development (UK Labour) Commitment to a feminist foreign policy (UK Women's Equality Party) | Party-level commitment to a feminist approach to foreign policy. |
| 2017 | Canada | Feminist International Assistance Policy (2017) | In implementation. |
| 2018 | France | Feminist Diplomacy | In implementation. |
| 2019 | Mexico | Feminist Foreign Policy | In implementation. |
| 2020 | Hawaii | Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Covid-19 | In implementation. |
| 2021 | Spain | Feminist Foreign Policy | In implementation. |
| 2021 | Luxemburg | Feminist Foreign Policy | In implementation. |
| 2021 | Libya | Feminist Foreign Policy (announcement) | Announcement made in July. |
| 2021 | Germany | Feminist Foreign Policy | <u>Guidelines presented on 01/03/2023 following the Government coalition agreement of 2022.</u> |
| 2022 | Scotland | A Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy | Under development in consultation with key stakeholders. Next step: policy statement underpinned by action plan. |
| 2022 | Chile | Feminist Foreign Policy | Under development. |
| 2022 | Netherlands | Feminist Foreign Policy | Broad consultations will be held to ensure the meaningful development of the Netherlands' FFP.⁵⁰ |

⁵⁰ Government of the Netherlands, Letter of May 13 2022 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to the Senate on the added value for the Netherlands of a feminist foreign policy, May 17 2022, accessed on November 30 2022, <https://www.government.nl/documents/letters/2022/05/17/letter-on-the-added-value-for-the-netherlands-of-a-feminist-foreign-policy>



TABLE 2
Key Principles of FFP⁵⁰

| | INTERNAL AND PROCESS MEASURES | EXTERNAL AND OUTCOME MEASURES | ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| RIGHTS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Internal policies and protections to advance gender equality (e.g. paid leave, sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination protections) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improvement of LGBTQI+, women's, indigenous/ minority, disability, youth/aging rights standards at global, regional, national and state levels ■ Advancement of rights most under attack ■ (sexual and reproductive health and rights including LGBTQI+ and safe abortion; environmental and climate commitments) ■ Explicit support for women's human rights and LGBTQI+ rights defenders Protection of and support for women peacebuilders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Gender equality specific: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women ■ Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action ■ UNSCR 1325 ■ Regional agreements (Maputo Protocol, Istanbul Convention, etc.) General: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development/SDGs ■ Universal Declaration on Human Rights ■ Human Rights Council (incl. Special 6 Procedures, Gender Office)• Trade dispute mechanisms |
| RESOURCES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Percent increase investment in domestic and foreign affairs budgets/staffing ■ Flexible funding ■ Gender Budgeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Increasing support for feminist organizations ■ Increasing control of funds by feminist funders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ OECD DAC gender marker – 20/100 principal/significant ■ External validation for all self-reported metrics ■ Training on applying a gender equality approach to international policies and program |

51 Source: Thompson, Lyric, Gayatri Patel, Gawain Kripke, and Megan O'Donnell. 2020. Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States. Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, Accessed on November 29, 2022, <https://genderandsecurity.org/projects-resources/research/toward-feminist-foreign-policy-united-states>

| | INTERNAL AND PROCESS MEASURES | EXTERNAL AND OUTCOME MEASURES | ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|
| REPRESENTATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Number of minority ministers, deputies, ambassadors ■ Percent increase in gender advisors ■ Parity at all staff levels ■ Inclusion of feminist civil society in the process of policy-making, implementation, evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Co-creation of feminist policies, programs with civil society ■ Increased numbers of minorities in social, economic and political leadership roles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quotas (at home and abroad) ■ Parity pledges ■ Implementation of the GAPS UK consultation process |
| RESEARCH & REPORTING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Monitoring and evaluation for the impact and uptake of internal policies ■ Rigorous and independent impact evaluations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Investments and policy decisions are rooted in rigorous evidence across all streams of FFP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound or “SMART” indicators ■ Public, independent and outcomes-based reporting on impact of FFP annually ■ Use of feminist evaluation techniques |
| REACH | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Horizontal integration of gender-responsive measures by applying a gender lens to all policies and programs ■ Coherence across aid, trade, defense, diplomacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Mirror priorities in domestic and foreign policies ■ Embrace of intersectionality in focus areas and approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clear definition of FF ■ Stated SMART goals for the policy • Benchmarks over time |



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