



A EUROPEAN FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY?

THE NEED FOR A PROGRESSIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

ABSTRACT

The application of a feminist approach to international relations has gained significant ground across the globe since the original decision by the Swedish Social Democratic and Green coalition in 2014 at the time to explicitly adopt a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP). 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 a continued effort. A more ambitious, progressive, and transformative approach must be continuously advocated by feminists, civil society organisations, and policymakers alike. In particular, the European Union (EU) should be more determined to adopt and put into practice feminist principles in its external action. Given its supranational and inter-governmental nature, an explicit feminist foreign policy approach at the EU level represents the opportunity to amplify the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of marginalised groups globally. 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. Amid what can be considered a "feminist turn in foreign policy", this policy brief reflects 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 current debates.



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WHY A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY ?

From Ukraine to Afghanistan, Sudan, Yemen, Myanmar, Iran and the Middle East, resilience against acts of deprivation of liberty and revolts against human rights attacks has had “a female face”¹, with women and marginalised 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 heavy 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 war³. 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 and peace agreements where women and feminist civil society were involved have higher chances of lasting.⁵ Achieving gender equality therefore constitutes a precondition to reach Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 “Peace, justice and strong institution,” among others.⁶ Moreover, 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) in 2014.

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 a continued effort. While there have been significant advancements with the

adoption and practice of a FFP by some national governments, a more ambitious, progressive, and holistic transformative approach must be continuously advocated by feminists, civil society organisations, and policymakers alike. In particular, the European Union (EU) should be more determined to adopt and put into practice feminist principles in its external action. Given its supranational and inter-governmental nature, an explicit feminist foreign policy approach at the EU level represents the opportunity to amplify the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of marginalised groups globally through a leading actor and a normative power in international politics. As Europe finds itself in one of the most severe security crises of its history, 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 initiatives⁸, 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.

WHAT IS FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY ?

What is certain, FFP should not be just another buzzword. Neither does it correspond to just another subtopic of foreign relations. 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 definition¹⁰. 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 endeavours to show consistency across all domains of influence and closely connects with the work and experience of 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 women¹². 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 organisation, structures, and practice. To be able to walk the talk, freeing foreign policy from old structural power relations and methods is necessary.

Emphasizing its potential for promoting equality, justice, solidarity, and peace, the Center for Feminist Foreign Policy understands FFP as a “political framework” centred around the well-being of marginalised people. It invokes processes of self-reflection regarding foreign policy’s hierarchical systems¹³. 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 vulnerable¹⁴.” 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 marginalised. In that sense, FFP constitutes a multidimensional policy framework that aims to elevate women’s and marginalised

groups’ experiences, stories, and agency to scrutinise the destructive forces of patriarchy, colonisation, 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.

Another indispensable element of FFP is the context-specificity and the need to bring in the perspectives of those groups 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 IR¹⁷”. 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.”¹⁸ 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 fulfilment 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.

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.¹⁹ 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.”²⁰ 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.²¹ 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).²² Likewise, 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.²³ 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 recognise 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).

Therefore, when the idea of FFP was first introduced in 2014 by Swede²⁴, 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.²⁵ Nevertheless, the systematic integration in external affairs of women and girls’ rights, followed by the mobilisation 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 Appendix, Table 1). Canada followed suit in 2017. Then came France, Mexico, Spain, Luxembourg, Germany, Chile and the

Netherlands. Others have declared their intention to do the same, like Belgium, Libya, Cyprus, and Scotland.²⁶ 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 Finland, Denmark, Norway, Australia as well as Switzerland.²⁷ Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary of State, coined the “Hillary Doctrine” according to which the oppression of women constitutes a national as well as global threat.²⁸ Moreover, the phenomenon is not restricted to states; political parties also adhere to the FFP agenda. In the UK, the Labour Party²⁹ has namely adopted a feminist approach to development whereas the manifesto of the Women’s Equality Party³⁰ similarly outlines its vision for a FFP.

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. Ann 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.”³¹ 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 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.³² 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 centre of international peace

and security.³³ 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”³⁴ and suggesting that their empowerment is a precondition for the local communities economic growth, which limits the policy’s potential impact.³⁵ The ambiguity around the notion thus bears the risk of stripping it from its transformative potential or being instrumentalised 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.”³⁶ In this regard, the case of gender mainstreaming is all too telling. Being very 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 depoliticisation of equality policies.³⁷ 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 positive action.”³⁸ Paradoxically, there is also a parallel tendency whereby “gender equality” becomes over-politicised through its systematic erasure and replacement with “equality between men and women,” with important implications for narrowing the term.³⁹ Likewise, overemphasizing women and girls often leads to squeezing out issues related to the elimination of gender inequalities and patriarchal norms at large. Therefore, using the feminist label is only one step in the right direction, but avoiding it becoming either de-politicised or over-politicised and demonstrating that feminism is not only about fighting gender inequalities, but inequalities of all kinds in an intersectional and human rights-centred sense, remains the most significant challenge for a meaningful FFP.

Overall, the Swedish approach of FFP⁴⁰ 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 address sexism, racism, classism, and overlapping forms of discrimination experienced by women and other marginalised groups.

Similarly, Canada applies a so-called “GBA+” (gender-based analysis)⁴¹ 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. Appendix, 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 ingredients⁴²: 1) purpose, (2) definition, (3) reach, (4) intended outcomes and benchmarks to achieve over time and (5) plan to operationalise.

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., “[i]f the application of a feminist foreign policy doesn’t change practice, it isn’t feminist.”⁴³ 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?

IS A EUROPEAN FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY POSSIBLE?

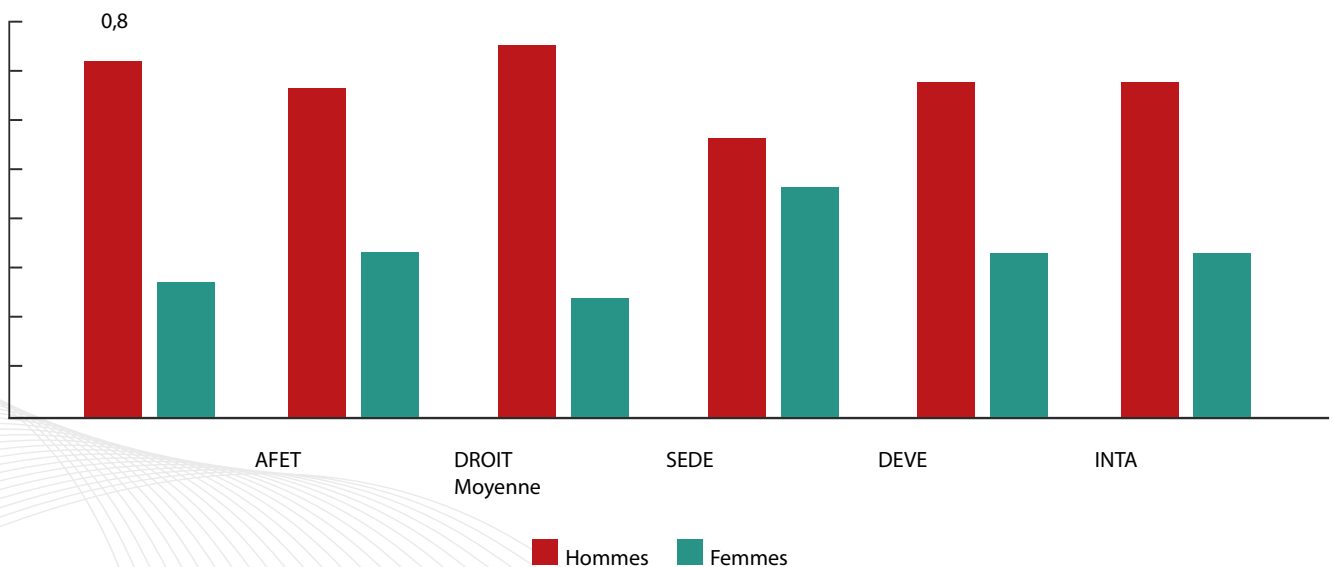
While several European countries have adopted a foreign policy with a strong focus on gender equality in different areas of foreign policy and external action, the EU still lags and lacks a clear plan. This does not mean that the EU hasn’t made any efforts to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in its external action, but for the time being, those 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 recognised 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, neighbourhood, and enlargement policy but also in its actions in fragile, conflict and emergencies. Accordingly, the current scenario of war in Europe’s neighbourhoods offers a timely reminder of these commitments in the face of severe challenges to the global order and international security. Belgium – committed to anchoring gender equality at the heart of its own

foreign policy⁴⁴– holds the Council Presidency from January to June 2024. This may constitute an opportune context to make progress towards a European feminist foreign policy approach before the start of the subsequent presidency held by Hungary.

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,

Graph 1 - Proportion of women in international relations committees and subcommittees in the European Parliament (2022)



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

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 has discussed⁴⁵, 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.

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 in spite of efforts to reverse this trend. 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).

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 for 2021-2025 (which has been extended until 2027 after its mid-term evaluation):

1. To make gender equality a cross-cutting priority of EU external action in its programming and policy work, setting the ambition to have 85 percent of all new external activities contributing to gender equality by 2025 and with new trade agreements including a provision on this objective;
2. The compromise to promote strategic EU engagement on behalf of gender equality at multilateral fora, as well as regional and country levels;
3. A focus on critical areas of concentration, defined as:
 - fighting gender-based violence
 - promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights
 - empowering girls and women, advancing equal participation and leadership
 - implementing the women, peace, and security agenda
 - exploring the nexus with the green and digital transformations
4. The EU to lead by example
5. The implementation of GAP III should be subject to qualitative and quantitative monitoring.

The European Parliament instead, 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 recognised 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.

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 – all countries with challenging records on women's rights – have not endorsed it. 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 section.

TIME FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT: POLICY 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, impactful, and progressive EU FFP.

1) ADOPT A MORE AMBITIOUS APPROACH TO FFP

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, for the time being, not proposed adopting an explicitly 'feminist' foreign policy, neither as a strategy, nor in its policy practice. 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, marginalised, 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 recognise 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.

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 incentivise the presence of women in middle- and higher-management positions and in its diplomatic missions, 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 organisations in Europe and even more so in the partner countries and by financing such organisations to integrate their perspectives and needs in the policy conceptualisation and implementation levels.⁴⁷ This would namely create new means of financing that are easier accessed by movements and activists who currently struggle to access funding due to their overly bureaucratic nature and that do not meet their needs on the ground. 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, 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 incentivise 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, through the systematic application of gender mainstreaming and budgeting tools.

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 true FFP approach, the EU can act as a catalyst to design a coherent and solid framework for a more cohesive intersectional feminist foreign policy at the EU level revolving around the five key elements: purpose, definition, reach, intended outcomes/benchmarks and operationalisation 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 own action in the fields of equality and foreign policy. On the other hand, the Europeanisation of FFP can act as a uniting factor seeking to overcome ideological and political division by bolstering unity around commonly shared values based on peace, solidarity, human rights, and equality. To overcome the “depoliticisation/politicisation paradox” inherent to FFP⁴⁹, the EU must endeavour 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.

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)	Under implementation.
2018	France	Feminist Diplomacy	Under implementation.
2019	Mexico	Feminist Foreign Policy	Under implementation.
2020	Hawaii	Feminist Economic Recovery Plan for Covid-19	Under implementation.
2021	Spain	Feminist Foreign Policy	Under implementation.
2021	Luxemburg	Feminist Foreign Policy	Under implementation.
2021	Libya	Feminist Foreign Policy	Announcement made in July 2023.
2021	Germany	Feminist Foreign Policy and Feminist Development Policy	Under implementation.
2022	Scotland	A Feminist Approach to Foreign Policy	Under implementation.
2022	Chile	Feminist Foreign Policy	Under implementation.
2022	Netherlands	Feminist Foreign Policy	Under implementation

TABLE 2 – Key principles of FFP

	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 Gender equality specific: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advancement of rights most under attack (sexual and reproductive health and rights including LGBTQI+ and safe abortion; environmental and climate commitments) UNSCR 1325 Explicit support for women’s human rights and LGBTQI+ rights defenders Protection of and support for women peacebuilders 	<p>Gender equality specific:</p> <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.) <p>General:</p> <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 organisations 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 programmes
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
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 IFFP 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, defence, 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 FFP Stated SMART goals for the policy Benchmarks over time

Source: Author’s own elaboration

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**A FIVE-POINT AGENDA FOR HOW
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 CAN SUPPORT THE
 EU'S STRATEGIC
 AUTONOMY**

ABSTRACT

The European Union and its member states have consistently been the single largest contributor of official development assistance (ODA). One effect of this is that the main way the EU interacts with a large section of the developing world is through development cooperation. However, there appears to be a reluctance among European policymakers to acknowledge the fact that the EU and its member states could implement a development cooperation policy that connects with foreign policy objectives. This policy brief argues that development cooperation has never really been divorced from national – or in the case of the European Union, regional – interests. Acknowledging this fact, and communicating the linkage both to itself and its development partners, is a critical first step in the EU identifying how development cooperation can support its strategic autonomy ambitions. This might also start a process that leads to some policy coherence within the EU and among the EU institutions. The policy brief provides some insight into how such policy coherence might enable development cooperation to support the EU's strategic autonomy across five priority policy areas: people and skills, climate policy, critical raw materials and supply chains, energy policy, and digital policy.

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