



# A FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH TO EU SECURITY AND DEFENCE

## A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS

### ABSTRACT

The global order is pronouncedly turbulent with multiple crises unfolding around us, including armed conflict and war. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the war in Gaza have amplified the feeling of the EU and the rest of the world being insecure and vulnerable to military threat. Meanwhile, the EU has sought to prevent gendered inequalities and injustices through the adoption of Gender Action Plans and taking an active stance on the UN Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. Several EU member states have adopted feminist foreign policies (FFPs), seeking to combine that move with increased military expenditure in times of instability in Europe. Seemingly, they see no contradiction in spending more money on defence and committing themselves to feminist global transformations. Similarly, the EU has adopted a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), with some of those initiatives containing a commitment to gender equality and justice globally.

While the EU is nowhere near adopting a full-scale feminist stance on defence and war, it could engage in a more thoroughgoing set of reflections on what an explicit feminist approach could bring to the EU as a global security actor and involve several stakeholders in such deliberations. Moreover, the Union's CSDP initiatives should be informed by intersectionality, taking cues from some of the member states' FFPs in this regard. This policy brief reflects on the specific question of whether it would be possible for the EU to adopt a feminist approach to security and defence policy, assessing the Union's feminist credentials to date, and providing a set of policy recommendations on the compatibility between FFP and enhanced military expenditure.



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## INTRODUCTION

The world is battling multiple crises, including climate disasters, armed conflicts, pandemics and populism, the effects of which are all gendered and affect women, men and other sexed bodies differently.<sup>1</sup> For example, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the war in Gaza have led to forced displacement, leaving many women and children vulnerable and homeless. Conflict-related sexual violence defines many contemporary wars, with Russian soldiers systematically using it to dehumanise and oppress civilians and soldiers in Ukraine. Thus, it is important to ask what the EU could do to make the world safer and more gender-just.

The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has exposed the strategic vulnerabilities of the EU and Europe at large, giving rise to the urgent question of how the EU could better protect the rights, security and bodily integrity of its citizens and those of other nations. This involves staying committed to a value-based foreign policy and avoiding excessive securitisation of the Union's external policies, while recognising the current geopolitical situation in Ukraine and Europe at large. Over the years, the EU has sought to prevent gendered inequalities and injustices, for example, by adopting Gender Action Plans (GAPs) and by adhering to the UN Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.<sup>2</sup> In addition, several EU member states have adopted feminist foreign policies (FFPs), signalling their commitment to gender equality worldwide and the transformation of the structural gendered dynamics of the world order. The EU has also sought to enhance the rigour, range and capacity of the European Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), for example, by adopting an EU Strategic Compass on Security and Defence and a European Peace Facility (EPF).

This policy brief reflects on the specific question of whether it would be possible for the EU to adopt a feminist approach to foreign and security policy. What would this entail, and what are the obstacles to such a move? In short, is a feminist approach to external relations reconcilable with militarised responses to war, conflict and defence?

Feminist scholars and activists have long critiqued the idea that global challenges and conflicts can be solved through militarised means, favouring peaceful and non-lethal settlements of conflict and war.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, feminist scholars view FFP as a largely ethical project, committed to structural change across intersectional divides,<sup>4</sup> and advocating peaceful and demilitarised responses to war and conflict.<sup>5</sup> For example, together with Karin Aggestam, Professor at Lund University, I have drawn attention to the connections between actual FFPs, the UN WPS agenda and gender-just peacebuilding. We noted that peace diplomacy undertaken within the frames of FFP needs to be inclusive and intersectional, challenging the structural hierarchies that produce armed conflict in the first place.<sup>6</sup>

Fewer FFP studies specifically investigate the possibility of locating defence inside the FFP framework, though there is emergent scholarship on this matter.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I briefly explore the ways in which feminist actors envisage the reconcilability between FFP and such things as arms exports and increased defence expenditure and other militarised practices. I then go on to explore how EU FFP states envisage this relationship, which is followed by an analysis of EU-level initiatives and a set of policy recommendations.

## FEMINIST MOVEMENTS, PEACE AND DEFENCE

For more than a century, feminist political activists have contributed to knowledge on armed conflict, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, urging states and other actors to exercise caution before opting for militarised responses to conflict and crises. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was established in The Hague in 1915 by suffragettes from 12 different countries, having met to unpack the root causes of armed conflict, not least those underpinning World War I. Throughout its history, WILPF has advocated peaceful conflict resolution, disarmament and demilitarisation, human security, and favouring pacifism over warmaking.<sup>8</sup> WILPF is critical of orthodox foreign policies that "typically focus on the use of military power and violence to threaten



or dominate people and nations”, further noting that they are “deeply rooted in colonialism”. It advocates a FFP framework that centres “around the social and economic well-being of marginalised individuals and communities”, favouring human security, rather than a policy that enables war and “insecurity, and injustice for women and for everyone”.<sup>9</sup>

In the same vein, Eryn Papworth observes in an *International Peace Institute Issue Brief* that the world is moving towards a normalisation of militaristic responses to conflict, leading “many states with FFPs to continue to spend heavily on their militaries”. Papworth also asks whether “states with high military expenditures can truly undertake feminist policymaking”.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI) analyst Jan Michalko notes that armed conflicts “represent ongoing tangible tests for feminist principles in FFP”, pointing, for example, to the tension between many Ukrainian feminists’ call for foreign provisions of arms to ensure “survival” and other feminists’ “lobbying for their government to do the opposite”.<sup>11</sup> The US-based Coalition for a Feminist Foreign Policy is less dismissive of defence as a route to peace, arguing that “peace should be the ultimate aim of defence”, though noting that military force “should be a last resort after fully utilizing the many and powerful tools available within the foreign policy apparatus: diplomacy, aid and trade”.<sup>12</sup>

Feminists vary somewhat in their stance on the merits of pacifism as an approach to global challenges versus the right to self-defence in times of wars of aggression and oppression.<sup>13</sup> For example, Ukrainian feminists have called for foreign military assistance, including weapons and military equipment, in the face of the Russian war of aggression, as well as joined the military campaign.<sup>14</sup> Yet, all feminists tend to agree that military responses to war and conflict should not be prioritised over peaceful conflict resolution and disarmament. Moreover, feminist activists and scholars have long contended that sustainable and just peace can only be realised if women, to a greater extent, are involved in peace negotiations and conflict resolution, in line with the key ambitions of the WPS agenda. Any FFP worthy of its name should be rooted in such feminist ideas,

as Karin Aggestam and I have argued previously.<sup>15</sup> Feminist insights then contribute to critical debates on the compatibility between FFP, peace and militarism, to which I turn next.

## EU FFP STATES – FEMINISM AND DEFENCE

Within the EU, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain have all adopted FFPs, following Sweden in this endeavour. While their FFPs are broadly steeped in the peace logic of the WPS agenda, they do not subscribe to absolute pacifism as a feminist idea. This section provides an overview of EU states’ FFPs, with a focus on their approach to security and defence.

### France

France announced in 2018 that it would pursue a pro-gender equality approach to diplomacy and later incorporated that commitment into its FFP. France’s FFP focuses on gender equality, feminist diplomacy, the eradication of gender-based violence, sustainable development, peace and security, defence and the promotion of fundamental rights, and climate and economic issues. Despite this ambitious agenda, there are few signs of intersectionality informing France’s FFP. France does not see a contradiction in viewing defence as one of the key pillars of its FFP, having recently committed itself to the NATO-set target of 2% GDP spending on defence.<sup>16</sup>

### Germany

Germany’s FFP aims to mainstream a feminist perspective across the full spectrum of its national, European and international policies to produce a “cultural shift” in foreign policy, taking its cue from the WPS agenda.<sup>17</sup> The Federal Foreign Office is responsible for the development and implementation of Germany’s FFP, with the latter existing alongside the country’s Feminist Development Policy. Notably, Germany’s FFP does not embrace defence policy, with the Ministry of Defence having no role to play in developing the country’s global feminist ambitions.

This might explain why Germany's defence policy shows few signs of adhering to feminist principles. Rather, the country has seen a considerable increase in defence expenditure driven, to a large extent, by its support to Ukraine.<sup>18</sup> Yet, Germany developed its FFP amid Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The German government has rejected the notion that FFP requires pacifism, noting that "feminist foreign policy does not provide a magic formula that can be used to eliminate immediate threats", but rather "human lives must be protected by military means [...] Thus feminist foreign policy is not synonymous with pacifism".<sup>19</sup>

## Luxembourg

In 2019, Luxembourg's Minister of Foreign and European Affairs declared that his country would implement a FFP which would focus on

*the promotion of women's rights as an integral part of human rights, strengthening the representation and participation of women, as an under-represented sex, at all levels of society, as well as the promotion of an active policy of gender equality within the very structures of Luxembourg diplomacy.*<sup>20</sup>

It rests on a "3Ds" approach, that is, diplomacy, development and defence, while adhering to the UN WPS agenda. Yet, it is not clear whether the Luxembourg government seeks to conduct a feminist defence policy, or whether defence is viewed as a policy instrument designed to achieve more gender equality. Luxembourg has recently announced its plans to increase its defence expenditure.

## Slovenia

In January 2023, Tanja Fajon (Minister of Foreign Affairs) noted that her country would adopt a FFP strategy and that it would be drafted in dialogue with civil society actors.<sup>21</sup> While Slovenia's FFP seeks to eradicate all forms of discrimination, regardless of gender, sexual orientation and other intersectional attributes, there is a tendency to equate gender

with women, rather than staying committed to a pronouncedly intersectional approach. Slovenia's defence budget is estimated to grow by 8% during the period 2024-28.<sup>22</sup>

## Spain

In 2021, Spain adopted its FFP, stressing the importance of feminist diplomacy, the mainstreaming of gender equality across external policies and within the EU, multilateral diplomacy, the urgency of dealing with conflict-based sexual violence, and supporting women's reproductive rights. Spain's 2023-2024 FFP action plan contains a commitment to intersectionality as a principle, but there is little attempt to explain what an intersectional approach could involve. Defence as a feminist policy instrument is not very visible in Spain's FFP. Yet, its defence expenditure has increased considerably in recent years, making Spain the tenth-highest spender within NATO.<sup>23</sup>

## Sweden

Sweden based its former FFP on the principles of rights, resources and representation. While its FFP rested on a strong commitment to gender-just peacebuilding, it did not deal with military and defence policy. This was not an effort to demilitarise the country's defence policy; rather, it should be viewed as a reluctance to position defence inside the Swedish FFP framework. In fact, Sweden's adoption of FFP coincided with its gradual increase in military expenditure; the reintroduction of conscription; the securitisation of its national borders and, ultimately, its bid for NATO membership. In October 2022, Sweden's FFP was dropped by the conservative-led coalition government, in an effort to distance itself from the previous social democratic government's feminist project, officially declaring that FFP principles do not serve Sweden's national interests. This is a somewhat puzzling position given that several NATO states have adopted FFPs, suggesting that Sweden's FFP, in all likelihood, would have found resonance with its allies in NATO.<sup>24</sup>

## The Netherlands

The Netherlands' FFP is rooted in a commitment to women's human security, reproductive health, bodily integrity, the eradication of conflict-based sexual violence and the promotion of LGBTIQ+ rights. Gender analysis is viewed as a key approach to promoting such goals, employing the methodological question "what will this mean for women and girls, LGBTIQ+ people and minorities?" There is also an emphasis on the significance of implementing FFP principles in dialogue with civil society actors.<sup>25</sup> Despite its commitment to a set of progressive feminist policy goals, the Netherlands has recently announced that it will increase its defence expenditure by 10%, investing in military equipment and defence systems, often using Russia's invasion of Ukraine to legitimise this increase.<sup>26</sup>

## Need for reflection on FFP and defence

As demonstrated here, although EU FFP states vary in their understanding of what it means to conduct a FFP, there is broad agreement that feminism is compatible with increased military spending. There are few signs, however, of the EU FFP states having fully reflected on this ethical question, adhering to a rather hollow understanding of feminism and how to employ it across their foreign, security and defence policies.

While it is unlikely that the EU, at this stage, would adopt a fully-fledged FFP, feminism could still undergird its reasoning and deliberation on defence and security policies. Rather than emulating the member states' avoidance of difficult discussions on the reconcilability of FFP and defence, the military and security, the EU, that is, the member states and the EU institutions, should problematise this relationship, consulting both feminist scholars and civil society actors for this purpose, which is a recommendation I return to in the conclusions below. I now turn to the EU as a diplomatic and gender actor.

## THE EU – A GLOBAL DIPLOMATIC AND GENDER ACTOR

The EU has long sought to enhance its diplomatic status and visibility globally, most notably through the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010. It provides channels for the EU's external communication and public diplomacy, adding visibility and reach to the EU's diplomatic identity. The EEAS is also an important policy hub for dispersing the EU's ambitions as a global gender actor, not least in relation to the WPS agenda. However, the EEAS is bound by the lowest common denominator principle, affording the ultimate decision-making power to the member states/national governments. This means that it is difficult to include gender terms in official Council positions, with some states even objecting to the use of the term "men and women" in official Council positions.

## The EU's GAP

Informed by the WPS agenda, the EU recognises the importance of fully supporting "the rights, agency and protection of women and girls" and their "equal participation [...] in all institutions and processes of conflict prevention, peace-making, peacebuilding and post-conflict rehabilitation".<sup>27</sup> The EU GAPs are key to the Union's support for women and girls worldwide. They rest on the EU's commitment to the UN's sustainable development goals, in particular Goal 5, on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The European Commission bears the political responsibility for developing and implementing the Union's GAPs.

GAP III, the current action plan running between 2021 and 2027, mirrors many of the priorities of actual FFPs, with similar policy commitments and goals being emphasised throughout. At its roots, GAP III seeks to create a "gender equal world", where all forms of gender discrimination are rooted out. For this purpose, the EU supports a range of partner countries, providing financial assistance and knowhow. GAP III is methodologically rooted

in gender mainstreaming and an intersectional approach to gender analysis, though there is little reflection on what this actually means.<sup>28</sup> GAP III also commits the EU to the eradication of all forms of gender-based violence and women's reproductive health and their right to fully participate in all aspects of social, economic and political life.

In 2023, the European Commission launched a mid-term report on GAP III, summarising its goals and progress during the period 2021-2023. The progress report highlights GAP III's dialogical character, engagement in global partnerships, rootedness in a transformative gender and intersectional agenda, commitment to women's development, empowerment and entrepreneurship, as well as their reproductive rights. References are also made to the EU's efforts to add a gender perspective to all stages of the Union's CFSP civilian and military operations and employing gender advisors for this purpose.<sup>29</sup> This includes addressing the issue of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict through a gender lens and ensuring that the EU's work in this regard is consistent with the WPS agenda.

Thus, GAP III demonstrates some feminist credentials, not least sending a signal to the rest of the world that the EU is fully committed to gender equality worldwide. However, GAP III also inhabits shortcomings in relation to its treatment of gender and intersectionality. GAP III, though committed to intersectionality, that is, the recognition that there is a whole array of intersections of power relations and gender identities which affect people's lives in global politics, tends to equate gender with women and girls, without fully problematising the vulnerabilities of some men and boys. Nor does GAP III provide a fruitful analysis of the role of military masculinity in fostering war, conflict, gendered harms and inequalities – here, the EU could take its cues from both feminist scholarship and activists who have long pointed to this relationship.

A more sophisticated and developed approach to intersectionality would address some of the shortcomings of GAP III by recognising the historical, social, and institutional mechanisms and contexts that reproduce interlocking systems of subordination

and privilege, creating discrimination that impacts on the lives of women and other marginalised groups worldwide. This also involves staying attentive to the gendered and racialised harms of empire, colonialism and the uneven distribution of global income. Those harms are left out of GAP III and most other key EU documents pertaining to gender equality and justice. Next, I assess the contents and commitments of the EU's CSDP, recognising that some key initiatives are attentive to gender equality and mainstreaming, while others entirely lack such perspectives.

## **THE EU'S CSDP, GENDER AND THE QUESTION OF FEMINISM**

The EU has adopted several security and defence initiatives specifically designed to strengthen its CSDP, most recently, in response to the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and the uncertainties that surround the future funding of NATO, the backbone of Europe's security structure. Most notably, the EU member states urgently need to consider the consequences of Donald Trump's electoral victory, not least his pre-election promise to cut funding to NATO and military assistance to Ukraine. The EU then might have to shoulder more of the responsibility for Europe's security post-2024, with the risk of militarised responses sidelining gender-equality initiatives. Here, I explore the character and gender sensitivity of four EU security and defence initiatives, all introduced to scale up the EU's civilian and military capacity.

### **The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS)**

In 2016, the former High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, presented the EUGS to the European Council. The strategy rests on five prioritised areas: (1) enhancing the security of the EU and its citizens, protecting them from terrorism, hybrid threats, economic and climate crises, and doing so in partnership with NATO; (2) increasing the societal resilience of states in Asia and Africa and the EU's near-abroad regions;



(3) developing an integrated approach to armed conflict based on human security and peacebuilding; (4) supporting regional governance in Europe and beyond; and (5) promoting global governance, human rights and international humanitarian law worldwide.

The strategy has, over the years, developed a more pronounced gender perspective, committing the EU to the WPS agenda.<sup>30</sup> Instructive here is the evaluative report “European Union’s global strategy three years on, looking forward” published by the Commission in 2019, which highlights the EU’s efforts to promote women’s role in peace mediation, peacebuilding and decision-making processes, in line with the EU’s WPS agenda.<sup>31</sup> It also stresses the importance of the EU working in partnership with the UN and the African Union in eradicating violence against women. However, the text lacks attentiveness to gender justice and equality, as well as intersectionality, with gender being entirely left out of the document. Nor is there any specific reflection on conflict-related sexual violence in the document.

Additionally, military security and defence are prioritised over human security – for example, the European Defence Fund, adopted in 2017, is upheld as a successful and fruitful framework for furthering military interoperability and cooperation across the member states and EU-based defence companies. However, these militarised commitments are not underpinned by considerations of what this might mean for human security, not least the human security of women and other marginalised groups. Nor does the strategy consider the gendered impacts of prioritising defence expenditure over other policy areas, including women’s development and reproductive health, despite GAP III committing the EU to a gender-sensitive budget approach.

## The EU’s Strategic Compass for Security and Defence

The EU adopted a Strategic Compass for Security and Defence in March 2022, a month after the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Its main goals are to strengthen the EU’s CSDP, advance a European strategic culture, and protect EU citizens from crisis and conflict, while staying attentive to multilateralism and a rule-based international order. Underpinning the compass is a desire for the EU to be able to rapidly respond to crises in Europe and beyond, for example, through its civilian CSDP operations.<sup>32</sup> Relatedly, the compass commits the Union to the development of an EU-wide rapid deployment capacity, facilitating the EU’s command structures and joint military exercises. Furthermore, the compass supports innovative European security and defence technologies through EU investment, EU-wide intelligence capabilities, and strategic and military interoperability.

Though the compass is noticeably militaristic in its approach to global crises and armed conflict, it recognises the importance of adding a gender and human rights perspective to “all civilian and military CSDP planning” and ensuring that women fully participate in all functions of the EU’s military and civilian missions. There is also reflection on the significance of fully integrating the WPS agenda into EU-led conflict resolution and seeking to eradicate conflict-related sexual violence globally. Moreover, there is some emphasis on gender analysis as a methodological approach to CSDP planning and actions, but quite how this analysis is conducted is less clear.

The compass though ambitious, underscoring the importance of integrating gender equality and analysis into the EU’s external actions, does not amount to a transformative feminist project or an intersectional agenda. In contrast to GAP III, the compass entirely lacks sensitivity to intersectionality as a concept and as a mode of power analysis. This absence reduces the possibility of using the compass as a platform for transformative intersectional change.<sup>33</sup> Here, it is insightful to observe that the 2024 annual progress report on the Implementation

of the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence does not make any reference to gender analysis; gender equality or, for that matter, intersectionality, reflecting the EU's current focus on enhancing its military capability to address unravelling security challenges in Europe and beyond. This, however, takes place at the expense of furthering the EU's transformative gender project and commitment to the UN WPS agenda.<sup>34</sup>

### The Civilian CSDP Compact

The Civilian CSDP Compact has recently been envisaged as a central component of the EU's efforts to mitigate the negative effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as other global insecurities. Within the CSDP framework, the EU has laid the foundations for a European-wide operational headquarters for civilian missions and highlighted the importance of adding more flexibility and rapidity to its civilian missions. There is also attentiveness to the importance of developing the EU's civilian crisis-management capability in partnership with local actors to ensure local ownership. Moreover, the compact rests on a strong commitment to human rights law, peaceful conflict prevention and resolution, as well as mediation. It understands security in broad terms; including organised crime, terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism, as well as the trafficking of human beings.<sup>35</sup>

While the civilian compact is not designed to address issues of gender inequality and discrimination, there is attentiveness to women's substantive participation in all aspects of civilian conflict management. This involves promoting the eradication of conflict-related sexual violence, employing gender mainstreaming and ensuring that gender parity prevails in civilian missions. Moreover, the compact reiterates the importance of EU missions being rooted in gender analysis; however, there is no real effort to explain what this entails. For example, should such analysis be limited to women's substantive representation on missions, or should it also include an assessment of the gendered root causes of conflict and war?

Nor does the compact employ an intersectional perspective and, as such, does not offer a framework for the analysis of the intersecting harms, inequalities and injustice that produce war and conflict in the first place. Relatedly, the compact lacks a set of meaningful reflections on the role of gender advisors on civilian missions.<sup>36</sup> Though the compact commits the EU to non-militaristic approaches to crisis management and conflict resolution (alongside military ones), this commitment does not amount to a feminist agenda, not least by lacking in intersectional awareness and analysis.

### The EPF

In March 2021, the EPF funding scheme was launched to support military and defence within the wider CSDP framework. The facility funds military operations and provides financial, technical and material support to third countries or regional and international organisations. The Council is in charge of the allocation of such funding, with Ukraine being a prioritised recipient country. Though primarily a budgetary mechanism, the EPF is also envisaged as a peace-building and conflict-prevention framework. As such, it is rooted in the Union's support for human rights and humanitarian law, through which the EU can support international and regional security. The EPF funds both EU military missions and the security and defence capacities of its partners.<sup>37</sup>

Recently, the EPF has supported the Ukrainian Armed Forces through the provision of lethal and non-lethal military material. Thus, the EPF is explicitly militaristic in its functions and ambitions, supplying foreign national armed forces with weapons, including the supply of small arms. Several civil society actors have questioned the militarised underpinnings of the EPF initiative, pointing to the prospect of it fuelling war rather than preventing it.<sup>38</sup> This risks turning the EU "into a more militarised, muscular, and masculine security actor, normalising militarism as a response to war and conflict",<sup>39</sup> not least by entirely omitting gender equality and analysis from its underpinning logic.

## Shortcomings of the EU's CSDP initiatives

In this brief overview, I have accounted for four recent initiatives, all aiming to strengthen the Union's CSDP. While three of the initiatives display a commitment to gender equality and justice, broadly defined, the EPF entirely lacks such an initiative. There is also an apparent lack of intersectional analysis across the CSDP initiatives, reducing the transformative potential of the EU's credentials as a global gender actor. Additionally, there is little effort to assess the gendered root causes of armed conflict, pointing to the lack of feminist insights prevailing in the EU's thinking on CSDP.

In the next section, I offer some conclusions and policy recommendations, addressing the future possibility of the EU approaching defence and military matters through an explicitly feminist lens and identifying the obstacles to such a move.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil society actors tend to warn against the positioning of defence and military policy within feminist frameworks, while EU FFP states see no real contradiction in such an approach. Common to all EU initiatives, whether military-orientated or not, and actual FFP strategies in EU member states, is a tendency to avoid the feminist question of whether militarism and feminism can be fruitfully combined and for what purpose.

Against the absence of such debates, it is hard to see that a progressive feminist approach to defence, the military and war is on the horizon for the EU. The broad CSDP policy framework lacks meaningful sensitivity to gender and gender equality, rather prioritising militarised responses to war and armed conflict, which does not bode well for a future feminist redirection of EU security and defence policy. This militarised tendency is likely to become more pronounced, given the ongoing wars in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon and on the African continent, demanding of the EU to enhance its defence and civilian crisis management strategies

and capabilities, rather than move towards demilitarisation. That pressure will increase with the electoral victory of Donald Trump, in particular the real risk of his administration cutting back on US funding of NATO and Ukraine's war efforts.

Against the backdrop of such geopolitical developments, the EU's existing gender initiatives are being downgraded, in direct contradiction with the feminist ideal of peaceful conflict resolution. The same can be observed at the national level, with several EU member states increasing their military spending at the expense of their development policies, despite the latter being more conducive to peaceful and gender-informed conflict resolution.

The recommendations below are a continuation of these arguments, designed to provoke debates across national and institutional settings on the pros and cons of the EU adopting a feminist platform for its CSDP and its broader external relations.

(1) **Find a common understanding on FFP and security and defence.** Admittedly, the EU is not on the brink of adopting a feminist stance on military policy, defence and war. However, if the member states were to decide to do so, they would need to ponder on what feminist principles they should adhere to. Should they opt for a feminist platform that sees no contradiction in furthering overtly militarised policies or a feminism that leans towards pacifism and non-use of force? What can be learnt from already existing FFPs across the member states in this regard given their tendency to assume that there is no such inconsistency?

(2) **Reflect on the EU's role in the world.** Any attempt to advance a feminist stance on the EU's external relations, including military and defence policies, should be defined by open and frank dialogue on what this means for the Union at large and the rest of the world. Thus, it is important to involve multiple stakeholders in such conversations, including feminist and LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups, as well as the UN, NATO and international partners.

(3) **Listen to local voices.** Relatedly, a feminist approach to security, defence and the military would need to very closely consider the distinct needs and wants of local stakeholders; what feminist measures would benefit their sense of security and well-being? This involves working towards sustainable and gender-sensitive peace agreements and forms of conflict resolution.

(4) **Careful use of terms** The EU institutions should, if possible, avoid using concepts such as gender analysis, gender advisor, gender mainstreaming and intersectional analysis in key documents without accounting for their distinct meanings and how they are employed in relation to EU external relations, not least in the context of security and defence. A progressive feminist approach to security and defence cannot rest on “fluffy” uses of key feminist concepts, since this risks hollowing out the transformative potential of new policy initiatives.

(5) **Consider all aspects of structural inequalities.** All CFSP and CSDP initiatives should be undergirded by sensitivity to intersectionality, that is, the interlocking power relations that prevail in global politics. GAP III is undergirded by such ambition and could provide a starting point for a more ambitious approach to the implementation of intersectionality across the full spectrum of the EU’s external relations, including security, defence and the military.

(6) **Learn from feminist transformative strategies.** The EU institutions and the member states could make more productive use of progressive feminist insights, derived from feminist movements and scholarship, to address the root causes and gendered drivers that underpin global crises and armed conflict, as well as the gendered harms emerging from them, so as to ensure that the Union’s military and civilian crisis management capacities evolve in line with long-standing feminist knowledge.



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**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 'normalised' 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. And 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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**POLICY BRIEF**  
October 2024

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

**FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EU AND LATIN AMERICA**

**BUILDING BRIDGES AND SHARING LESSONS LEARNED**

**ABSTRACT**

Feminist foreign policies (FFPs) are no longer exclusive to Global North countries. The adherence of Mexico (2020), Chile (2022) and Colombia (2024) to this project illustrates that Latin America is a leading region in developing FFPs and opens new opportunities for collaboration with the EU. FFPs originating from both regions exhibit many common themes and priorities, but the Latin American FFPs also contribute new perspectives from the Global South based on their own history, interpretation of feminism, and tradition of feminist activism in domestic and foreign policy. In addition, taking stock of the development of FFPs in Latin America offers best practices and lessons learned, such as applying an intersectional perspective to global power dynamics and greater collaboration with local civil society.

This policy brief provides an overview of existing Latin American FFPs, including analysing innovative approaches and the main lessons from their development. It then focuses on identifying opportunities for partnership with the EU, including through working to create more feminist economic systems that involve incorporating gender perspectives into trade agreements and emphasising the care economy. This area offers many opportunities for strategic political collaboration with the EU and helps ensure greater alignment between internal and external policy.

By focusing on some of the critical considerations that Latin American FFPs are bringing to the multilateral stage, this policy brief asks the following questions: What are some of the best practices that can be shared between Latin America and the EU about the different approaches to developing FFPs? What opportunities are there for jointly advancing feminist principles in different policy areas? Therefore, rather than assuming a universal formula for designing FFPs, this policy brief analyses opportunities for trans-regional knowledge sharing.

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**POLICY BRIEF**  
June 2024

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES

**EMBRACING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY WITHIN EU STRATEGIC FORESIGHT CAPABILITIES**

**BRINGING FEMINIST FUTURES INTO REALITY**

**ABSTRACT**

Crises have consistently served as transformative catalysts for the European Union (EU), propelling its integration and global standing, uniting diverse voices in coordinated responses and choices. However, as the EU increasingly embraces a narrative of 'polycrisis', we must question whether this crisis-focused mindset traps the EU in the present and limits its ability to address broader issues. The pandemic, economic crises, conflicts and climate disasters uncovered deep-seated systemic issues that require comprehensive and long-term solutions. Reactive policymaking has hindered the EU's ability to proactively shape long-term transformations and tackle the underlying causes of crises, including widespread inequality in rights, opportunities and resources.

Feminist foreign policy (FFP) provides a powerful framework for action and is embraced by a growing number of countries. It calls for actively dismantling entrenched power dynamics and embracing gender equality as a guiding principle in foreign policy, inspiring transformative progress on a global scale. While some EU member states are leading the way on FFP discussions at the EU level often lack a true feminist perspective, treating gender mainstreaming as a mere technocratic formality.

This policy brief calls for integrating FFP into EU foresight practices to prioritise equity, sustainability and resilience in global engagements. By leveraging its capacity for future planning, the EU can make inclusive and purpose-driven foreign policy decisions, building on existing efforts. Inclusivity and diversity should be the cornerstone of this approach, creating the conditions for women and traditionally marginalised groups to actively participate and lead in shaping our future and co-create solutions for systemic challenges and structural inequalities.

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**A New Gender Equality Contract for Europe**

**Feminism and Progressive Politics**

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**POLICY BRIEF**  
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**FROM TALKING TO WALKING**

**USING FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY TO FUND FEMINIST ORGANISING**

**ABSTRACT**

Feminist movements play a critical role in protecting and strengthening democracies. Funding them with long-term and flexible funding becomes an indispensable condition, particularly in the context of growing attacks on women's and LGBTQIA rights worldwide, risking undoing decades of progress. Yet, despite strong government commitments to sustainable development goals, data show that less than 1% of gender equality official development assistance goes to support women's rights organisations and feminist movements.

By showcasing two innovative feminist funding mechanisms supported by the Dutch and French governments, two countries with a feminist foreign policy in place, this brief explores what can be learned about how official development assistance (ODA) can support feminist organising. Through a comparative analysis of the two mechanisms, we can distil critical commonalities. We conclude with three funding recommendations for EU and government donors, including significantly increasing the bilateral allocable ODA dedicated to women's rights organisations and feminist movements to at least 10%. Key advocacy opportunities to make this happen are the Financing for Development process (FSD) to be held in Spain in July 2025, and the negotiations for the next multi-annual financial framework to start in 2025.

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**Transformative Change for Gender Equality**

**Learning from Feminist Strategies**

Rowan Harvey and Chloe Saifer

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