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The gender dimension of foreign policy

Report[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
Rapporteur: Ms Petra STIENEN, Netherlands, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

Summary

Following decades of progress in the field of gender equality, the growing backlash against women's rights has triggered the launch by several countries of foreign policies promoting equality and inclusion grounded in intersectionality, and prioritising the protection of human rights, including women's rights. Sweden has paved the way with its feminist foreign policy, calling for global change and gender mainstreaming at every level.

Including a gender dimension in foreign policy is fundamental for inclusive policies and sends a strong message at national and international level that women's rights are human rights. It demonstrates political commitment to advancing gender equality and ending discrimination. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown that there can be no efficient response to ensuring that no-one is left behind without a co-ordinated international effort and the inclusion of a gender dimension.

Guaranteeing the participation and representation of women in all crisis response planning and decision-making; conducting gender impact assessments; applying gender budgeting; promoting the participation of women in diplomatic careers, peace operations and negotiations; and investing in the collection of gender-disaggregated data and related research are essential measures contributing to a strong and inclusive gender dimension of foreign policy.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 14627, Reference 4406 of 12 October 2018.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. In past decades, women's rights have been enshrined in legislation at national level and in international treaties. The political and economic participation of women has increased. Tangible progress has been made in various spheres and women's rights have been officially recognised as human rights. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, marked a turning point in the fight for gender equality. The year 2020 is also the 20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which became the normative framework for women, peace and the security agenda.

2. However, the Parliamentary Assembly regrets that full gender equality is not yet a reality. Throughout the world, violence against women, attacks on women's rights and gender inequalities are still rife. There is a revival of organised efforts and backlash against women's rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Assembly considers that stronger co-ordinated action at international level is needed to promote and protect women's rights, equality and non-discrimination.

3. In view of promoting inclusiveness, equality and non-discrimination and to counter the backlash against women's rights, several States have launched feminist foreign policies or included a strong gender dimension in their foreign policies. The Swedish feminist foreign policy inspired other countries to use their foreign policies as a political tool to promote women's rights, inclusion and non-discrimination. Political leadership plays an essential role to this end. Placing gender equality at the centre of foreign policy puts forward an inclusive vision of society and is consistent with and contributes to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which has gender equality as an overarching goal and a stand-alone goal.

4. The Covid-19 pandemic, which has affected countries all around the world, has further revealed existing and persisting inequalities. The Assembly considers that the pandemic and its social and economic consequences are having a disproportionately negative impact on women. In times of crisis, women's rights are often the first ones to be questioned or threatened. There was an alarming rise in domestic violence. The Assembly therefore believes that an inclusive, co-ordinated and gendered response to this crisis is essential to ensure that no one is left behind. Women's rights cannot be considered non-essential or secondary at any time. In this regard, the Assembly welcomes the joint statement on Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender Responsiveness in the Covid-19 crisis published by 59 States on 6 May 2020.

5. The response to the crisis can and should be used as an opportunity to build more resilient and equal societies, grounded in participatory and engaged democracy. The Assembly stresses that women should be an integral part of the response to the crisis and meaningfully involved in all decision-making processes to manage its aftermath and put in place strategies to tackle future crisis with an intersectional approach. Sustainable peace and development cannot be built without the participation of women. The inclusion of a gender and intersectional dimension in foreign policy can be beneficial for society as a whole. Participation, protection, inclusion and non-discrimination are guiding principles for a strong, inclusive gender dimension of foreign policy.

6. The Assembly recognises that men can play a crucial role in promoting women's rights and in advancing the gender equality agenda. Men in leadership positions in politics, business, media and civil society should actively advocate for a change of mindsets, challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures and at all levels.

7. In light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as those enjoying observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly, to:

7.1. engage in developing an inclusive gender dimension of their foreign policy;

7.2. promote women's rights and inclusion at national, bilateral and multilateral levels and prioritise gender equality and women's rights during presidencies of the United Nations Security Council, Council of Europe and Council of the European Union and presidencies of other international organisations;

7.3. actively promote and prioritise the equal participation of women and men in decision-making;

7.4. ensure diversity in panels of events;

7.5. make access to education for women and girls a priority;

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 24 June 2020.

7.6. promote the participation of women in peace operations, negotiations and crisis management and develop national action plans and budgets for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325;

7.7. promote, ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, “Istanbul Convention”);

7.8. provide political and financial support for programmes protecting women’s rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights;

7.9. use gender budgeting and gender impact assessments in the preparation and evaluation of legislative measures and policies as well as assistance and co-operation programmes;

7.10. invest in the collection of gender-disaggregated data and related research;

7.11. support civil society organisations promoting and protecting equality and women’s rights;

7.12. raise awareness on the benefits of an inclusive gender dimension of foreign policy.

8. As regards diplomatic careers, the Assembly calls on them to:

8.1. promote the participation of women in diplomatic careers, including at ambassador level, and support policy and legal measures allowing a work/life balance;

8.2. promote gender mainstreaming in the functioning of public administrations;

8.3. promote the participation of persons from multiple backgrounds in diplomatic careers;

8.4. provide training on gender equality, diversity and inclusion and on combating sexism in public administrations;

8.5. ensure the participation of women in trade missions.

9. As regards the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Assembly calls on them to:

9.1. guarantee the participation and representation of women in all crisis response planning and decision-making;

9.2. undertake gender impact assessments and ensure gender budgeting for all recovery measures and financial packages;

9.3. protect women and girls from gender-based violence;

9.4. hold public debates on the gender dimension of the Covid-19 pandemic and promote an intersectional approach to recovery plans.

10. The Assembly also calls on political leaders to take a strong stand to protect and promote women's rights at national and international level and to support a gendered and inclusive approach of foreign policy.

11. The Assembly encourages international organisations to promote the participation of women in higher management, mainstream gender throughout their activities and organise training on gender equality, diversity and inclusion, and on combating sexism.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Stienen, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. As long as women, 50% of the world population, have lesser access to education, health care, the labour market, property, financial means, the public and political arenas, policies focused on gender equality will be necessary. Following decades of progress, some political, economic and social rights, as well as the right to health, which were considered acquis, are being threatened. Ahead of International Women's Rights Day 2020, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja Mijatović stressed that "In some areas progress has stalled due to persistent structural obstacles and an increasing backlash, combined with the lack of a sufficient and robust State response".[3]

2. Persistent gender inequality and gender-based discrimination, violence against women and limited participation of women in decision-making in too many countries led Sweden to officially launch its feminist foreign policy[4] in 2014. By doing so, it made the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and girls a priority in actions to be undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and committed itself to implementing a foreign policy agenda with a gender perspective. "Gender equality is not a separate women's issue – it benefits everyone. Research shows that gender equal societies enjoy better health, stronger economic growth and higher security. It also shows that gender equality contributes to peace, and that peace negotiations in which women have taken part have a better chance of being sustainable" stated former Minister Margot Wallström,[5] whose strong leadership has been instrumental for the success of this policy. A growing body of research and evidence, not least as a result of the work of the United Nations on the link between women, peace and security shows that, in addition to gender equality being a fundamental human right, greater gender equality and pursuing a feminist foreign policy would make the world more sustainable, prosperous and safer.[6]

3. An increasing number of countries have integrated a gender perspective in their foreign policy with the understanding that a gender approach is beneficial for all citizens. Canada, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom have been pioneers in this regard. International organisations such as the Council of Europe, the European Union and the United Nations do the same in their respective co-operation policies and external actions. Notably, in the UN Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), gender equality is both a goal in its own right and an accelerator for the achievement of all other goals. Progress in achieving these goals is measured regularly.

4. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us once more that gender equality and women's rights must be an integral part of policy responses to crises. The Covid-19 has affected the whole society and has a different impact on women, minority groups and people with various socio-economic backgrounds. While, with this report, I advocate for a gender dimension specifically in foreign policy, we should, in my view, call for a gendered and inclusive[7] approach to trigger global sustainable change.

2. Scope of the report

5. The motion for a resolution which is at the origin of this report stresses that the Parliamentary Assembly should examine the different approaches through which the gender perspective in foreign policy can help promote gender equality and women's rights. I have therefore tried to analyse the place given to gender equality in foreign policies and collect experiences and good practices. I have examined the experiences of Canada, Finland, France, the Netherlands and Sweden.[8] Even though our focus is on gender dimensions of

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3. Let us all rise to the challenge of making a world where gender equality is a reality, Declaration by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, 5 March 2020.
4. "A feminist foreign policy is the policy of a state that defines its interactions with other states and movements in a manner that prioritises gender equality and enshrines the human rights of women and other traditionally marginalized groups, allocates significant resources to achieve that vision and seeks, through its implementation, to disrupt patriarchal and male dominated power structures across all of its levers of influence (aid, trade, defense and diplomacy), informed by the voices of feminist activists, groups and movements", Lyric Thompson and Rachel Clement, "Defining feminist foreign policy", International Center for Research on Women. The Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy has an even broader definition of feminist foreign policy.
5. Foreword by Margot Wallström, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ann Linde, Minister for European Union Affairs and Trade and Isabella Lövin, former Minister for International Development Cooperation and Climate, Feminist foreign policy handbook, Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018.
6. Reimagining peace-making: women's roles in peace processes, International Peace Institute, June 2015.
7. Why the COVID-19 Pandemic Needs an Intersectional Feminist Approach, Rosa Luxembourg Stiftung, 24 April 2020.

foreign policies, where possible, I have also looked into the challenges encountered in the implementation of these policies and the impact the promotion of gender equality and inclusion has had on diplomatic relations when other priorities are at stake such as foreign trade and security.[9] I have also looked into what has been done in this field by the Council of Europe, the European Union[10] and the United Nations.

6. In addition, it has been relevant to study the correlation between national and external policies on gender equality. We could, as an example, wonder if there is a gendered approach to intimate partner violence and if there is an inclusive approach to decisions taken with regard to healthcare, labour market and participation in the media. Looking at the nominations of ambassadors[11] or high-level positions in regional and international organisations can be very telling. Practicing what one preaches provides credibility.

7. Furthermore, research and a growing body of evidence have shown that women's participation in peacebuilding increases its chances of success. I have therefore also looked at the role that women can play in peacebuilding and how their participation in these processes can be encouraged by foreign policies promoting gender equality and the participation of women of different backgrounds and walks of life.

8. The scope of the report goes beyond what I had initially foreseen, since the Covid-19 pandemic makes us all reflect on the need to ensure a comprehensive response which would include a gender and inclusive dimension. A sustainable and long-term approach would be beneficial to all people in our member States and beyond.

3. Working methods

9. I would like first of all to thank all the persons who have contributed to the preparation of this report, by participating in hearings, allocating time to meet during fact-finding visits and other bilateral meetings, providing comments or helping with the organisation of meetings during visits. It has been a process which allowed me to discuss with a variety of interlocutors from several countries.

10. I started to work on this report by conducting desk research, collecting official information provided by ministries of foreign affairs, analysing data and reports available within the Council of Europe [12] and reports prepared by think tanks, academics and NGOs. My conception of the gender dimension of foreign policy is an inclusive one and also extends to including the promotion of the rights of LGBTI people.

11. The committee held a first hearing on 9 April 2019 in Strasbourg with H.E. Torbjörn Haak, former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sweden to the Council of Europe and Ms Laila Ait Baali, Political Coordinator of Wo=Men, which is a Gender Platform based in the Netherlands. The committee held another hearing on 1 October 2019 in Strasbourg, during which Ambassador Nina Nordström, Permanent Representative of Finland to the Council of Europe, presented the priorities of the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs as regards the gender dimension of foreign policy. The committee also discussed with Ms Marie-Cécile Naves, Director of the Observatory on Gender and Geopolitics at the Institute of International and Strategic Relations (Paris)[13] and with Ms Simone Filippini, who is the President of the Leadership4SDGs Foundation. She stressed how the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is closely linked to making the promotion of gender equality a priority in foreign policy. She also emphasised the importance of good leadership. In her view, leaders should educate themselves about the importance of gender equality in foreign policy. A third hearing was held on 4 December 2019 in Paris with the participation of: Ms Agnès Von der Mühl, Spokesperson of the Quai d'Orsay, Senior Official for equality of rights between women and men, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs; H.E. Isabelle Hudon, Ambassador of Canada to France; and Ms Jennifer Cassidy, Departmental Lecturer in Global Governance and Diplomacy, University of Oxford, who shared with us the results of her research on the gender of diplomacy.[14]

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8. This list is not exhaustive. The experiences of Albania, Luxembourg, Mexico and Spain, to mention a few, would also deserve attention.
9. Swedish Feminist Foreign Policy in the Making: Ethics, Politics, and Gender, Karin Aggestam and Annika Bergman-Rosamond, 12 September 2016, *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30, no 3, (2016), pp. 323-334, Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs.
10. The Council of European Union adopted the EU Human Rights Guidelines on Non-discrimination in External Action at its 3681st meeting held on 18 March 2019.
11. Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making – Analytical report – Third round of monitoring on the implementation of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, 2017, Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe, chapter on diplomatic services (page 75 onwards).
12. Ibid., page 41.
13. «Le genre demeure trop peu mobilisé en géopolitique», Marie-Cécile Naves, Le Monde, 23 August 2019.

12. Considering the commitment and leadership of Sweden on this topic and its willingness for its experience to be used as an example of good practice,[15] I carried out a fact-finding visit to Sweden on 10-11 October 2019, during which I met with government representatives, parliamentarians, representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks which have been working on this issue. I also carried out a fact-finding visit to The Hague on 5 February 2020, during which I met with representatives of the ministries of Defence, Foreign affairs, Finance, Education, Culture and Science, NGOs and civil society actors.

13. Since March 2020, work on the preparation of the report has taken into account developments, at policy and diplomatic level, related to the international response to the Covid-19 pandemic. I had planned to participate in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which was scheduled to take place in March in New York. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the 64th session of the commission (CSW 64) was shortened to a one-day event open only to national delegations to the UN. It adopted a political declaration which emphasises that gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and Targets of the 2030 Agenda.[16]

14. The year 2020 is the 25th anniversary of the Beijing declaration as well as the 20th anniversary of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The two Generation Equality Forum events, which were scheduled to be hosted by Mexico (May 2020) and Paris (July 2020) have been postponed to 2021. The current crisis has seen conferences and events going online and thus allowing for exchanges of information and expertise during webinars, Zoom or BlueJeans events, to mention just a few. They have continued to provide a platform for interesting and valuable discussions with experts and representatives of high-level government, regional and international organisations or civil society and academia. I myself attended the webinar on “Covid-19: A Gender Perspective on the Growing Humanitarian Crisis” organised by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security on 8 April 2020[17]. I also followed the webinar organised by the committee on “Covid-19 and violence against women: a holistic response based on the standards of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence”, held on 5 May 2020. In addition, the committee held a webinar on “Covid-19 and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Challenges and Opportunities” on 19 May 2020. The webinar on the gender dimension of foreign policy in the response to Covid-19, which took place on 11 June 2020, provided an opportunity to exchange with key experts on the importance of a gender dimension of foreign policy, including in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic.[18]

4. Making women’s rights a priority in foreign policy: country examples

4.1. Sweden

15. In 2014, under the leadership of Margot Wallström, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sweden launched its pioneering foreign feminist policy following years of a long-standing priority and commitment to supporting programmes which promote gender equality throughout the world. Ms Wallström stated that she used to quote Gandhi, who said, “First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, and then you win”.[19] The Swedish feminist foreign policy has indeed been an inspiration for other countries.

16. Since the 1970s, successive Swedish governments have made gender equality a priority (for example, through introducing parental leave, affordable childcare and separate taxation for spouses). Launching a feminist foreign policy was not perceived as a surprise but as a logical consequence of the priority given to gender equality policies at national and international levels over many years. Long before 2014, countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands have systematically included significant gender components in their support to other countries, by providing funding to women's rights organisations, promoting gender equality and funding programmes to prevent and combat gender-based violence.

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14. Ms Cassidy defines the gender of diplomacy as “the masculine norms and values which have sculpted and shaped diplomacy”.
15. Feminist foreign policy handbook published by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
16. Political declaration on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Commission on the Status of Women, 64th Session, 9-20 March 2020, (E/CN.6/2020/L.1).
17. COVID-19: A Gender Perspective on the Growing Humanitarian Crisis, 8 April 2020.
18. The recordings of the webinars are available on the Facebook page of the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence.
19. Toward a More Feminist Foreign Policy, Podcast, Foreign Policy, 8 March 2019.

17. Mr Torbjörn Haak, former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sweden to the Council of Europe, described this policy as "systematically including a gender dimension in policy-making and using gender-mainstreaming as a working method". The Swedish feminist foreign policy aims at applying a gender equality perspective and is based on the three Rs: rights, representation and resources.[20] A fourth pillar called "reality" was added to stress that tools and pragmatism were needed.[21] The promotion of equal rights, support for the adoption of measures towards a higher participation of women in economic and political life and the allocation of sufficient resources to programmes supporting women's rights have been the pillars of this foreign policy. Its objective is to ensure the full enjoyment of the human rights of women and girls through specific actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and targeted development aid.

18. During my fact-finding visit, I had meetings with Ms Ann Bernes, Ambassador for feminist foreign policy at the MFA, who pointed out that the policy had become one of the most well-known Swedish policies to date, not least thanks to the powerful leadership of Ms Wallström. Ms Bernes pointed out that the word "feminist" was used as a label with a view to giving the policy more visibility, and therefore more power to it. This choice moved the focus from a traditional policy to a more progressive one that was "easy to do and hard to avoid". The feminist foreign policy was launched with the objective of triggering a real policy transformation that went further than activities simply promoting gender equality.

19. The policy was developed in consultation with the entire Swedish Foreign Service. Staff were encouraged to play an active role and submit suggestions and ideas to the team preparing the policy. This inclusive approach was welcomed by staff and made them take ownership for the final result. Their close association and contribution throughout the process has been very important for its successful implementation. Within the ministry, staff took part in seminars and internal guidelines were modified to reflect the goals of this policy. Strong emphasis was placed on internal communication to present and explain the policy. Focal points for the feminist foreign policy have been appointed in every department of the Foreign Service and every mission abroad. Ms Bernes stressed the need to "vaccinate the system" to ensure institutional ownership of the policy. I was also told that there is a sense of pride among the MFA officials who present and explain the policy in universities, at conferences and other events at a national and international level. All Swedish ambassadors are required to promote, and regularly report on, the implementation of the policy. The feminist foreign policy handbook highlights the importance of taking a leadership role; continuously recommending the policy in speeches, articles and social media posts; giving priority to feminist foreign policy during official visits and contacts; and delivering frequent messages and proposals on the development and implementation of the policy. Political leadership, therefore, has been instrumental in making this policy a reality. This policy received the support of the whole government.

20. Promoting gender equality in recruitment and appointments is an important dimension of the policy. Parity has been reached regarding managerial positions and around 40% of Sweden's ambassadors are women. The appointment of the Swedish Ambassador for Gender Equality, who is also the official Coordinator of Feminist Foreign Policy, shows that the implementation of the policy is a priority at the highest government and political level. A feminist foreign trade policy was launched during the summer of 2019.

21. Women's participation in peace processes and combating sexual violence in conflict were the areas selected as initial priorities and specific programmes were launched in these fields. The gender coach programme and training for commanders are organised by the Swedish Agency for Peace, Security and Development. Gender coaches prepare persons appointed to participate in peace missions. More than half of secondments to international organisations are women.

22. The feminist foreign policy has made a positive difference by sending a clear message about Sweden's political commitment in this regard. By way of example, 22% of the programmes of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) are allocated to gender equality, compared to 17% before the launch of the feminist foreign policy. Furthermore, SIDA received a special allocation of SEK 200 million from the government for gender-related programmes following the launch of the policy. This approach has inspired other countries to follow suit in their agenda for Gender and Foreign Policy.[22]

23. While Swedish feminist foreign policy has been widely welcomed and praised, most of the actions foreseen within the policy concern women and girls. A common criticism of the feminist foreign policy is that men, and their role, are not sufficiently addressed. For this policy to be both complete and successful, it is essential to engage men at every level. Ms Elin Bjarnegård, Associate Professor at Uppsala University

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20. Feminist foreign policy handbook published by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
21. The making of feminist foreign policy, International Politics and Society, Jesper Bengtsson, 12 September 2019.
22. A lack of knowledge the greatest obstacle to gender equality, Folke Bernadotte Academy – Swedish agency for peace, security and development, 17 April 2020.

stressed during our meeting in Stockholm that having male allies was crucial for the success of the feminist foreign policy. In addition, it is important to look at the role of men as potential perpetrators of violence against women. Bert Koenders, former Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, stressed during the webinar held on 11 June that domestic violence was definitely an issue that men and male leaders had to address.

24. Research has shown that looking at values will give insights into what direction countries are moving. Feminist values can be considered inclusive values whereas patriarchal values promote a hierarchy in society. Including some women in the army does not mean that the attitudes and the functioning of the army have changed. Promoting feminist values in every administration and every forum; changing mindsets; promoting overall gender equality policies and legislation; proactively engaging all men and boys in the transformative processes; and working closely with male role models could all contribute to making a difference and ensuring the policy's successful implementation.

25. During the meetings and exchanges, there was a perceptible general concern relating to a possible change in priorities. In an ever-changing national and international context, in the future more attention could be given to territorial defence, cybersecurity or migration policies, to the detriment of the feminist foreign policy.

26. To conclude, the feminist foreign policy has paved the way for dialogue and created a political platform to promote gender equality and women's rights at both national and international levels. One obvious result of the feminist policy has been the ability of Sweden to raise the question of gender equality and women's rights in international fora in a systematic way. Its interlocutors must be prepared to reply on these issues, thus drawing attention to and generating debates and discussions around them and influencing decision making and decision taking processes. In addition, a pledge was made not to participate in panels where only one gender is represented (parity panel pledge).

27. Political will and real action are essential when it comes to the promotion and protection of gender equality and framing it in a concrete, workable policy. Going beyond slogans is crucial – simply stating "more women, more peace" is not enough. If there had been only media announcements and no concrete actions following the launch of the feminist foreign policy, the policy would not have known the success it enjoys today. The gender dimension of foreign policy is not only a vision but a framework for tangible and well-focused activities. Overall, this policy has been evaluated positively by the Swedish MFA: "More than five years of the policy have shown that it produces tangible results, inspires others to follow, contributes to alliance building and is seen as a hope-inspiring force".[23] The policy continues being a priority and a follow-up plan was published.[24]

4.2. Canada

28. Canada launched its Feminist International Assistance Policy in 2017. Its core areas include gender equality and the empowerment of girls, human dignity, growth that works for everyone, environment and climate action, inclusive governance, peace and security. Foreign trade is another area guided by an inclusive approach. All free trade agreements negotiated or agreed in the past two years include measures to help women. The Canadian Ambassador stressed in her presentation to the committee that within the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), a co-operation mechanism on gender equality has been set up.

29. With regard to peace and security, Canada rapidly deploys experts to investigate alleged human rights violations, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It supported the deployment of experts to Burma to investigate sexual and gender-based crimes against Rohingyas. It launched the Elsie initiative for the participation of women in peace operations in 2017 (presented in the chapter on women, peace and security) and works closely with UN Women to accelerate the deployment of women to UN peace operations.

30. In addition, Canada made gender equality a priority on the political agenda of the G7 when it held the presidency in 2018. In April 2018, over 60 feminist activists gathered in Ottawa to build a feminist vision for the G7. "All issues are feminist issues" was an over-arching theme. "Participants urged G7 leaders to invest in gender equality and women's rights. They also encouraged leaders to engage with women from marginalised communities and incorporate feminist approaches into all their policies and investments".[25] In its report "Make gender inequality history", the Gender Equality Advisory Council, appointed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,

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23. The Swedish Foreign Service action plan for feminist foreign policy 2019–2022, including direction and measures for 2020.
24. Idem.
25. Canada's feminist vision for the G7 and beyond, Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 18 February 2019.

makes a series of recommendations to the leaders of the G7, including to "commit to instituting a G7 Gender Equality Advisory Council, and to track and report on G7 performance on gender equality actions and commitments, as well as achieving gender parity in G7 country, ministerial, and sherpa delegations by 2025".[26]

31. Ms Jacqueline O'Neill was appointed as Canada's first Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security in July 2019 to incarnate the Canadian feminist diplomacy. "When women play an active role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and when their rights are respected, we are better able to achieve long-term, sustainable peace", stressed Prime Minister Justin Trudeau upon her appointment. She currently leads the country's efforts to support women and to prevent and end conflict.

32. In her address to the committee on 4 December 2019, Ambassador Hudon pointed out that political leadership at national level was at the heart of efforts to promote women's rights. Mechanisms are in place to ensure that each policy is reviewed through a comparative gender analysis. Since 2015, the number of Canadian women diplomats has risen from 29% to 50%, pushed by a strong willingness from top leadership. Women diplomats have been appointed to the highest positions in Paris, London, Rome and the consulate in New York.

33. Canada allocates USD 1,4 billion of funding per year to promote women and girls' health and rights and it has committed to continue doing so over a period of 10 years. In 2019, Canada hosted the Women Deliver Conference on Women's Health and Rights in Vancouver, an event which brought together more than 8 000 participants from 160 countries. An additional 100 000 people followed the event online, thus raising the visibility of these issues and promoting concrete initiatives to uphold women's and girls' health rights.

4.3. Finland

34. Finland is a pioneer of promoting and implementing gender mainstreaming in all policies and areas and its foreign policy is no exception. During the hearing with our committee on 1 October 2019, Ambassador Nordström stressed that equality in all forms made economic and political sense and highlighted the importance of coherence between domestic and foreign policies.

35. The priorities of Finland's feminist foreign policy include sexual and reproductive health and rights; supporting the 2030 Sustainable development agenda; the fight against gender-based violence and the protection of women's rights defenders. As an example, during its presidency of the European Union, Finland encouraged all EU Member States to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention"). In addition, in 2017, Finland created an International Gender Equality Prize, which is awarded every other year to a person or an organisation that has advanced gender equality.

4.4. France

36. Considering that women's participation in peace processes is essential, and that full and equal participation of women in all walks of life leads to building a society which is fairer for all, France has actively engaged in a feminist diplomacy which includes, among other priorities, combating sexual violence and sexual harassment, supporting women's empowerment and promoting the presence of women in peace-keeping operations. French feminist diplomacy is built around two pillars: the internal pillar aims to integrate the gender perspective into the functioning of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the external pillar aims to extend it to the whole French foreign policy.[27]

37. The French feminist diplomacy has received attention and support at the highest political level. In September 2018, Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, called for equality between women and men to become a great global cause: "It is time for our world to stop seeing women as victims and to give them the place they deserve, they can also be leaders! We should guarantee access to education, health, employment, economic and political decision-making and combat all forms of violence against women."[28]

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26. Make Gender Inequality History, Recommendations from the Gender Equality Advisory Council for Canada's G7 Presidency, 4 June 2018.
27. France's international strategy for gender equality (2018-2022), Directorate-General for Global Affairs, Culture, Education and International Development, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.
28. Seventy-third United Nations General Assembly – Speech by President of the Republic Emmanuel Macron, quoted by Ms Agnès von der Mühl, Spokesperson of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hearing on 4 December 2019, Paris.

38. Following on the work carried out by Canada, France extended and renewed the Gender Equality Advisory Council established under the Canadian presidency of the G7. The 35 members of the Council prepared recommendations for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women for the G7 at its summit in Biarritz on 24-26 August 2019. It stressed that "girls and women are powerful agents of change but cannot realise their full potential due to the discrimination and violence they face worldwide".[29]The Council called "on G7 States to establish a feminist foreign policy and make gender equality a priority of their foreign policy and official development assistance". The members of the Council also reiterated the call to allocate 0.7% of gross national income to development assistance. The Advisory Council presented 79 legislative measures from around the world which support the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, and which are considered as good practices and concrete, inspirational examples for change at legislative and policy level. It encouraged the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.[30]

39. The G7 leaders adopted a statement on gender equality and women's empowerment on 26 August 2019, in which they stated that "gender equality is essential to the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and to the achievement of lasting development and peace" and stressed the importance of supporting victims of sexual violence in time of conflict, and making the education and training of women and girls a priority.[31] This statement is the founding element of the Biarritz partnership for gender equality.[32] Several countries, namely Australia, Chile, India and Senegal have joined the Biarritz partnership since that date. Ukraine also announced its intention to join.[33]

40. In 2019, the French Agency for Development created a grant budget of €120 million to support programmes promoting and protecting women's rights.[34] The amount allocated to these grants is expected to increase over the coming years. "France has announced that 50% of French official development assistance must be allocated to measures supporting gender equality by 2022".[35] The objective is to reach a total of €700 million for projects promoting gender equality.

41. During the Commission on the Status of Women in 2019, Ms Marlène Schiappa, the State Secretary for equality between women and men and the fight against discrimination actively promoted making universal the Istanbul Convention and showed unequivocal support for programmes promoting and protecting sexual and reproductive rights. The priorities of the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe included gender equality and promoting the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention.

42. Measures were also taken within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote gender equality. "In the past five years, the number of female French ambassadors has doubled, with 52 of them now representing France abroad".[36] I was informed that in Croatia, a couple has shared the function of ambassador of France, with one spouse having the functions of ambassador the first 6 months of the year and the other spouse appointed ambassador for the last 6 months of the year. Women are actively encouraged to apply for leadership positions. In 2018, 39% of appointments for the highest positions (ambassador, director) were women (compared to 30% in 2017). In addition, a network of equality correspondents was created to ensure the inclusion of a gender perspective in the actions of the ministry at central level and abroad.

43. France has also engaged in a feminist diplomacy to structure a progressive response to the threat and the backlash against women's rights and action to establish links between women's rights and climate change. As part of the French feminist diplomacy, Ms Schiappa has warned against the multiple threats Covid-19 presents for women's rights worldwide[37] and called for a comprehensive response.

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29. Biarritz Partnership for Gender Equality, G7, Recommendations of the Gender Equality Advisory Council for advancing gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women and Call to Action, 20 August 2019.
30. Idem.
31. Declaration on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, G7, 26 August 2019.
32. The Biarritz partnership for gender equality, France Diplomacy, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.
33. The Government supported Olena Zelenska's initiative on Ukraine's accession to the Biarritz Partnership, President of Ukraine – Official Website, 7 May 2020.
34. The full participation of women will help build a more just and equal society, Security Council Arria-formula meeting on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda focusing on inequality in women's participation in peace and political processes, Speech by Marlène Schiappa, Minister of State for Gender Equality and the Fight against Discrimination, attached to the Prime Minister, 13 March 2019.
35. Make gender equality a global cause, G7, 1 January 2019.
36. "Feminist foreign policy", Op-Ed by Jean-Yves Le Drian and Marlène Schiappa (8 March 2019), "France aims to support the empowerment of women around the world through combatting sexual and gender-based violence, fighting for occupational equality and fighting for the education of girls", France Diplomacy, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, published in Libération (8 March 2019). See also Diplomatie: trois quarts des ambassadeurs sont des hommes, Le Monde, 15 March 2019.

4.5. The Netherlands

44. On 5 February 2020, I carried out a fact-finding visit to The Hague, during which I had the opportunity to discuss the gender dimension of Dutch foreign policy with a variety of interlocutors. In the past 25 years, the Netherlands has been actively promoting women's rights and sexual and reproductive health and rights at international level. The Netherlands are particularly active at the United Nations in combating gender-based discrimination and have been a pioneer in the field of women, peace and security, including with regard to the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, as well as in the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights[38]. Dutch diplomats regularly advocate equal rights for women and girls and ask for their inclusion on the agendas of international organisations. In addition, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs provides financial support to a number of international programmes promoting gender equality and women's rights. As an example, it supports the SDG 5 fund, providing funding to women's rights organisations. Communication and co-operation with civil society are to be commended.

45. Dutch foreign policy pursues four main goals: “prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls, a fair share in political and decision-making power, economic empowerment and self-reliance and a fair share in conflict-resolution, peacebuilding and reconstruction”.[39] The Minister of Foreign Trade and International Co-operation Sigrid Kaag who has had a long career within the UN system, often speaks out on the importance of including gender and attention for sexual and reproductive health and rights in international relations.[40]

46. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, dialogue is facilitated through weekly meetings of the Women's Rights and Gender Equality Task Force (established in 2014) with representatives of the departments for social development, human rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights and humanitarian aid of the MFA. Current priorities of the Task force are gender diplomacy (there can be no effective and inclusive diplomacy if there is no participation of women); gender specific programmes; and gender mainstreaming. 30% of Dutch ambassadors and 40% of directors at the MFA are women. Online training on gender is available for ministry staff members (gender and crisis, gender and sustainable development). There is an understanding that gender literacy should be part of the profession. In addition, an unconscious bias training is recommended for top level management. A diversity and inclusion network monitors the nomination of ambassadors.

47. The ministry of Defence provides gender training to staff members, works on integrating gender into the organisation and on raising awareness on diversity inclusion within staff. The number of women participating in operations has been growing slowly over the past years. Overall, the ministry has 10% of women staff members and all positions are open for women. Recently, a decision was taken to promote mixed crews on submarines.

48. A concrete example of the Dutch commitment is the Shedecides initiative,[41] created as a response to President Trump's reinstatement of the Global Gag Rule in 2017. Liliane Ploumen, who was then Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and International Development, decided to launch Shedecides, together with government representatives from Belgium, Denmark and Sweden, to defend reproductive health and rights worldwide.

49. According to Ms Laila Ait Baali, who represents the Wo=Men initiative based in the Netherlands, “in order to pursue a feminist foreign policy, States should implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and promote sustainable economic growth”. She also stressed that the participation of women in peace-keeping operations should be increased and warned that governments should not allow other interests to override women’s rights. One could regret that women’s rights and gender were often kept separately in foreign policy and not treated as a cross-cutting issue.

50. The Netherlands has an active civil society that advocates for more gender equality nationally and internationally. Even though they often receive funding from the Dutch Government, civil society organisations are financially sustainable and independent and are able to maintain an autonomous position. During my visit I had some very informative and inspirational meetings with civil society representatives. While they recognise

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37. Threats on women all around the world – A Covid-19 impact analysis, Marlène Schiappa, Fondation Jean Jaurès, 27 April 2020
38. The Netherlands is one of the 83 countries that has established a National Action Plan for the implementation of Resolution 1325 of the United Nations Security Council.
39. Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Policy departments.
40. See for example the speech Minister Kaag gave at the International Conference on Population and Developement (ICPD) summit in Nairobi on 12 November 2019.
41. www.shedecides.com.

significant progress made, they also believe there is scope for a more ambitious feminist agenda both at home and in the foreign policy. Overall, NGOs evaluated positively their co-operation with the MFA on gender issues.

51. Engaging men in promoting women's rights is essential to achieving tangible change. The "Orange the World" Campaign originated in the Netherlands and is a good practice. In addition, care activities should be re-evaluated. As an example, if a higher value were placed on childcare, then perhaps more men would be prepared to do it.

5. Women's participation in peace operations

52. Promoting the participation of women in peace operations is an important part of foreign policies which make gender equality a priority. Women's participation in peace processes has been recognised as having a positive impact in respect to outreach, ensuring diversity and inclusiveness, seeking and adopting less confrontational approaches and contributing to the sustainability of peace. However, it is important to bear in mind that women's role in peace processes should not be based on the traditional expected roles frequently constructed around pre-conceived ideas, expectations and stereotypes. Women should claim their place in peace operations and negotiations not only because they are mothers and/or sisters, nurtures of peace, the ones that are best placed to discuss women's issues etc. but because they represent half of the population. Women often have better access and understanding of the impact of conflicts at community level. They should be able to include these insights into policies and solutions that are often designed at a higher level far away from daily reality. On 11 April 2019, during a UN Security Council meeting dedicated to the participation of women in peace operations, the former German Federal Minister of Defence, Ms Ursula von der Leyen (now heading the European Commission), stated that "[w]omen always broaden the missions' skillsets. They are no better peacekeepers than men, but they are different. And this diversity is a strength".[42]

53. At the same meeting, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stressed that "women's rights, voices and participation must be at the centre of peacekeeping decision-making". Nineteen years after the unanimous adoption by the UN Security Council of its Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the UN Secretary General reiterated that the participation of women in peacebuilding and peace-keeping operations must become a priority. He launched the "Action for Peacekeeping" initiative, through which member States[43] which endorse the initiative commit to "implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda and its priorities by ensuring full, equal and meaningful participation of women in all stages of the peace process and by systematically integrating a gender perspective into all stages of analysis, planning, implementation and reporting".[44] They also commit to "increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions". The UN Secretary General presented himself from the beginning of his mandate as a proud feminist and took measures to reach full parity in senior management within the UN.[45]

54. This call for action is essential since there has been little progress in past years with regard to the participation of women in peace operations. Men still represent 95% of the uniformed personnel in peace keeping operations. With the support of Canada, Finland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, UN Women together with the office of the UN Secretary-General, the UN Development Programme's Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office and the UN Department of Peace Operations, launched the "Elsie Initiative Fund for uniformed women in Peace operations (Elsie Initiative) to increase meaningful participation of uniformed women in UN peacekeeping operations" in March 2019.[46]

55. The Council of Europe has actively promoted the participation of women in peace operations. Already in 2010, the Committee of Ministers adopted a Recommendation on the role of women and men in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace building[47] in which it recommended to member States to acknowledge that "strengthening the role of women in society and making full use of their knowledge and expertise promote

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42. Women must be at 'centre of peacekeeping decision-making', UN chief tells Security Council, 11 April 2019. See also Ursula von der Leyen on United Nations peacekeeping operations: Women in Peacekeeping – Security Council, 8508th meeting, 11 April 2019.
43. 152 UN member States have endorsed this initiative to date.
44. Secretary-General's Initiative on Action for Peacekeeping. See also the Declaration of Shared commitments on UN Peacekeeping Operations.
45. For the First Time in History, There is Full Gender Parity in the Top Leadership of the United Nations, UN Dispatch, 17 January 2018.
46. The Elsie Initiative Fund launched to increase uniformed women in UN peacekeeping, UN Women, 29 March 2019.
47. CM/Rec(2010)10.

peace and are a prerequisite for conflict prevention and resolution and peace building". The Committee of Ministers also recommended to "integrate a gender perspective into conflict prevention and resolution and peace building activities" and to "ensure a balanced participation of women and men at all levels of decision making in local, regional, national and international institutions, and mechanisms for conflict prevention and resolution, including peace negotiations and the democratisation of societies after conflicts". In its resolution 2120 (2016) "Women in the armed forces: promoting equality, putting an end to gender-based violence", the Assembly called on member States to "work actively to promote the assignment of women to overseas deployments, including in operational roles; include gender advisors in each overseas deployment by an armed force, at all stages of preparation and deployment".[48]

56. Furthermore, back in 2004, the Assembly adopted a resolution on "Conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women"[49] which presented concrete measures which may inspire positive action even 15 years later. The Assembly regretted that "Europe had so far failed to ensure women's full participation on an equal footing with men in conflict prevention, peace operations and post-conflict peace-building". It may be interesting to carry out an analysis of the role of women in conflict prevention in Europe since the adoption of this resolution 15 years ago.

6. Challenges

57. In her research paper prepared for the work of our committee on the gender dimension of foreign policy, Ms Cassidy quoted Ms Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland, who stated that: "Diplomacy serves as the heartbeat of international relations, yet the social inequalities with which women struggle in day to day life are mirrored in the instruments of international negotiations. Careful analysis of the current state of diplomacy is required to disentangle the ubiquitous gender dimension present in diplomatic roles in order to advance the participation of women in governance and policy making". The gender dimension of foreign policy is indeed a question of power. Giving priority to the promotion of equality and inclusion and ensuring a diverse participation in decision-making depend on political will and courage.

58. There are undeniably challenges to the inclusion of a gender dimension in foreign policy and ensuring that the participation of women is not limited to ticking a box. It is not about excluding men or playing a blame game against men. It is about creating space for equity and equality and sharing responsibilities, influence and decision-making power. In its report on the "Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making" published in 2016, the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe stressed that the number of countries having reached the 40% minimum target of women in the diplomatic service was still very low and that "the average percentage of women ambassadors was as low as 13%. These data clearly demonstrate the existence of a glass ceiling in the diplomatic sector".[50] While the number of women diplomats has increased over past years, they still remain at the lower echelons and rarely make it to the top ranks of the diplomatic service. Compared to men, women are rarely appointed to war torn or conflict areas and this may constitute an obstacle if serving in such posts is considered essential to progressing in diplomatic careers.

59. During her exchange with the committee, Ms Cassidy pointed out that "characteristics associated with masculinity (strength, objectivity, power and autonomy, independence, rationality) were the ones that were primarily exalted and promoted in the diplomatic sphere". She also stressed that masculine norms and values had sculpted and shaped diplomacy, which affected decisions as to who was appointed, for example, as an ambassador. One can consider that the conception of diplomacy, as the one of politics in general, has been androcentric.[51]

60. Our work and efforts to ensure a gender dimension of foreign policy must be undertaken in parallel with, and paying due attention to, the inclusive and intersectional dimension of foreign policy. The diplomatic world should not and must not be accessible only to the "boys' clubs" or only to white women from middle to high income families and with access to political and diplomatic networks. Promoting the participation of persons from multiple backgrounds, in all the sectors of foreign policy, including in the diplomatic service, should be at the core of the gender dimension of foreign policy. As Samira Rafaela, member of the European Parliament, stressed during the Webinar on the gender dimension of foreign policy in response to Covid-19: "Women are

48. Assembly Resolution 2120 (2016) "Women in the armed forces: promoting equality, putting an end to gender-based violence".
49. Assembly Resolution 1385 (2004) "Conflict prevention and resolution: the role of women".
50. Balanced participation of women and men in decision-making – Analytical report – 2016 data, Gender Equality Commission (GEC), September 2017.
51. Placing a masculine point of view at its centre.

different. There is not one group of women. Women are facing different challenges because of who they are and where they come from. Intersectionality in our policies, proposals and legislation is extremely important, so that we leave no one behind".

61. There is also some scepticism with regard to the intentions behind the promotion of women's rights and gender equality in foreign policy. Ms Lyric Thompson for example, mentions that "[s]ome question whether feminist foreign policies are just the latest postcolonial export of northern countries, well-intentioned perhaps but ultimately equally uninformed by the perspectives of those on the receiving end and removed even from the realities of their own domestic policies."[52]

62. The possible instrumentalisation of gender by some political parties is another challenge. Ms Marie Cécile Naves warned against efforts, at both national and international levels, to stigmatise one religion or another under the pretext of defending women's rights.

63. There may be differences between preaching and practicing the promotion of gender equality for any given country. A country whose track record on gender equality has been successful and delivered positive results is more credible in its efforts to promote women's rights and equality at international level.

7. Making gender and inclusion priorities in response to international crises

64. The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced another dimension to this report which is the importance of the inclusion of a gender dimension into the present international crisis response. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, articles are published daily on the disproportionately negative impact of Covid-19 on women, not simply as the majority of care givers and health workers but also with regard to health and economic well-being, safety and security. Violence against women and domestic violence have reportedly increased in several countries during, and as a result of, the application of justified lockdown and confinement measures. So have restrictions with regard to access to sexual and reproductive health and rights in some countries. There is also often a decrease in health service utilisation and an increased economical vulnerability.[53]

65. Ms Anita Bhatia, Assistant-Secretary-General and Deputy Executive Director of UN Women, regrets the lack of progress on women's empowerment in past years and the impact of Covid-19 on women.[54] She fears the *acquis* might be at risk. She has called domestic violence "a shadow pandemic, in the current pandemic", and made an appeal to prioritise actions to support victims and end violence. In the report on "Covid-19 and human rights: we are all in this together" (23 April 2020), the UN recommends to "mitigate the impact of the crisis on women and girls, including on their access to sexual and reproductive health/rights, and protection from domestic and other forms of gender-based violence and ensure their full and equal representation in all decision-making on short-term mitigation and long-term recovery".[55]

66. Ms Béatrice Fresko-Rolfo (Monaco, ALDE), general rapporteur of the Assembly on violence against women, called on national authorities to take adequate measures to prevent violence, protect victims and prosecute perpetrators, in view of the alarming trend observed in the past few weeks, with a spike in cases of violence against women and their difficulties in accessing services and remedies.[56] Concern with regard to violence against women increasing during confinement has also been expressed by GREVIO, UN Women, EIGE and many NGOs.

67. Bringing women's voices and different fields of expertise into decision-making will lead to better policy outcomes. However, I note with concern the persistence of prevalence of almost all male expert panels and government task forces responsible for containing the pandemic and putting in place the recovery response, and this despite the over-representation of women in the healthcare sector and the impact of the crisis in their lives. Which brings us back to the very basic and legitimate questions: "Where are the women? Where is the pluriformity of expertise and representation?"

68. On 6 May 2020, under the leadership of Sweden, a joint press statement was issued on behalf of the people and governments of 59 countries in Europe and beyond on "Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender-responsiveness in the Covid-19 crisis". The statement drew

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52. Defining feminist foreign policy, Lyric Thompson and Rachel Clement, International Center for Research on Women, 2019.
53. David Milliband, COVID-19: A Gender Perspective on the Growing Humanitarian Crisis, webinar, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), 8 April 2020.
54. Anita Bhatia, idem.
55. COVID 19 and human Rights: We are all in this together, United Nations, April 2020.
56. COVID-19: 'Put safety of women at the heart of all measures to tackle coronavirus' says Rapporteur, 23 March 2020.

attention to the gender dimension of the pandemic. It pointed out that: “Covid-19 affects women and men differently. The pandemic makes existing inequalities for women and girls, as well as discrimination of other marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities and those in extreme poverty worse and risk impeding the realization of human rights for women and girls. Participation, protection and potential of all women and girls must be at the centre of response efforts. These efforts must be gender-responsive and consider different impacts surrounding detection, diagnosis and access to treatment for all women and men”.[57] The statement also stressed the importance of the participation of women in decision-making: “We support the active participation and leadership of women and girls at all levels of decision-making, including at community level, through their networks and organizations, to ensure efforts and response are gender-responsive and will not further discriminate and exclude those most at risk”.

8. Good practices and recommendations

69. The gender dimension of foreign policy relates intrinsically to the role and representation of women in decision-making. Furthermore, speaking out for women’s rights, denouncing the backlash on progress made, initiating and/or supporting actions at international level are diplomatic means which prove useful in our efforts to uphold and protect women’s rights. The open provision of support for programmes protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights, for example, is a strong statement in itself and an indicator of political leadership and commitment to women’s rights.[58] The promotion of the ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention should be an integral part of inclusive foreign policies. Integrating a gender dimension in foreign policy provides the framework for a coherent approach to guaranteeing women’s rights. As Delphine O, Secretary General of the Generation Equality Forum, stressed at the webinar on 11 June: “Gender should be enshrined in the functioning of the system”.

70. A variety of methods can be used to ensure a gender dimension in foreign policy. The targeted allocation of resources, gender budgeting,[59] ensuring diversity in panels, providing trainings on gender equality, diversity and inclusion, institutionalising gender mainstreaming, ensuring the equal participation of women and men in diplomatic service and trade missions and promoting networking and mentoring between women leaders and politicians (including young women in politics and leadership) combined with policy and legal measures to support a work/life balance and to promote balanced participation in political and public decision making (including in the diplomatic service), are some of the measures which bring results. Gender impact assessment can be a useful tool to evaluate progress.

71. In addition, applying a gender dimension in all levels of foreign policy (including international co-operation, foreign trade and defence) contributes undoubtedly to more gender equality and equity. The 2030 Agenda could be used as the overall framework to create an intersectional foreign policy.

72. A gender dimension of foreign policy needs to be understood and supported by the persons who have to implement it. The success of the Swedish feminist foreign policy lies in the fact that leadership has been combined with collective commitment from the government, a corporate commitment from the whole ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government agencies to its implementation and a welcoming attitude from civil society, which understood that such a policy could be helpful in amplifying calls for gender equality and the protection of women’s rights. It paved the way for dialogue and created a political platform to promote gender equality and women’s rights. Practical tools such as the handbook on the policy and targeted training provided the staff members of the ministry of Foreign Affairs with the necessary tools to promote and implement the policy. Structures, such as a specific taskforce in charge of gender equality, monitoring and adequate funding, are crucial for the successful inclusion of a gender dimension in foreign policy. The effectiveness of a gendered and inclusive foreign policy also depends on the receptiveness of partner countries. International allies are indeed crucial for such policy to work.

73. There is not one single feminism. Feminism is multifaceted and needs to be intersectional to be really inclusive. When discussing women’s participation, for example in peace negotiations, the profile of the women participating is also relevant. Inclusion does not simply mean ticking a box but ensuring relevant representation.

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57. Joint press statement “Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender-responsiveness in the COVID-19 crisis”, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, 6 May 2020.

58. In terms of funding, data shows that in 2016, donors spent only 4% of their total bilateral official development assistance on projects whose principal focus was gender equality, Aid in Support of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment – Donor Charts, OECD, March 2019.

59. Gender budgeting is included in the Austrian Constitution, Austria: Gender budgeting, United Nations and the Rule of Law.

74. Research as well as the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data is also very important to inform policies and measures to ensure a gender dimension of foreign policy, as is co-operation with civil society organisations working in this field, at both national and international levels.

75. In my view, the gender dimension of foreign policy is not limited to programmes targeting women and girls. I have therefore tried to initiate discussions about the specific policies targeting boys and men. Working on this topic led me to exchange on norms of masculinity, a topic I would recommend the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination to explore further. The gender dimension of climate change is another topic which in my view would deserve further attention by the committee.

9. Conclusions

76. There should be a gender dimension of foreign policy not simply because it makes sense to use diplomatic skills to promote equality but also because the promotion and protection of women's rights, equality and non-discrimination are key elements of sustainable development. Speaking out in international fora can encourage positive change at both national and international levels. Supporting civil society organisations, which are drivers of change, is also essential.

77. An inclusive foreign policy is not immune to risks, including instrumentalisation and double standards, but in my view the current global backlash against women's rights has brought a new dimension of urgency to promoting a gendered dimension and a feminist approach to foreign policy.[60]

78. Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic demands an inclusive and co-ordinated international response and highlights the need to reaffirm the importance of women's rights as human rights. Times of crisis often lead to questioning the acquis with regard to women's rights and we need to be both vigilant and active in our response. As an example, challenges in accessing contraception are exacerbated in this time of crisis. I look forward to our committee's participation and contribution to the Generation Equality Forum next year with a view to discuss, reflect and find ways forward to integrate and strengthen the gender dimensions of policies at global level.

79. The gender dimension of the health and economic crises, at both international and national levels and the disproportionate impact they have on women, as well as the importance of including a gender dimension in all recovery measures, should be discussed and debated in our national parliaments and brought to the attention of relevant ministries. The inclusion of a gender dimension in all policies at all levels, is a condition *sine qua non* for their efficiency and sustainability. A gender dimension to foreign policy, therefore, can no longer be seen as optional or a welcomed addition but should be considered as essential.

60. Over 50 groups launch vision for a U.S. feminist foreign policy, International Center for Research on Women, 21 May 2020.