

STUDY

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Executive summary of the study

Promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy

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Executive summary

Research topic and objectives

This study carries out an in-depth analysis of the manner in which the European Parliament (EP) promotes gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy, and of the lessons which can be learnt from other parliaments and International Parliamentary Institutions (IPIs) for effectively engaging on gender issues in international relations.

The European Union's (EU) and the EP's push towards greater mainstreaming of gender in external relations is evident from two important documents which form the policy basis for this study. The first one is the Commission's and the EU High Representative's Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Action 2021–2025 (GAP III), which highlights the insufficiencies stemming from women's under-representation across parliamentary processes, ranging from elections to legislative and budgetary processes to peace negotiations. The second is the EP Resolution of October 2020 on gender equality in the EU's foreign and security policy, which specifically calls for gender equality to be pursued in the Parliament's relations with third countries, and which supports the appointment of gender focal points in each delegation.

This study examines these policy commitments through an extensive analysis of the formal legal and policy frameworks applicable to the activities of the following EP bodies: (a) committees and subcommittees responsible for gender equality and external relations: the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), the Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI), the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE), the Committee on Development (DEVE) and the Committee on International Trade (INTA); (b) the Democracy Support and Election Coordination Group (DEG); and (c) interparliamentary delegations. This encompasses an examination of the Rules of Procedures (RoP), Conference of Presidents' Decisions, and, to the extent that their contents are publicly available, the EP's Gender Action Plan and the accompanying Roadmap.

The study also investigates the current practices of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy, with a view to identifying the bottlenecks hampering its effectiveness and assessing how they could be overcome. It covers the 8th and partly the 9th legislature, and focuses on the interparliamentary delegations, where the establishment of gender focal points is a more recent development.

Another goal of this study is to assess the EP's frameworks and practices from the perspective of the international benchmarks on gender-responsive parliaments set by international organisations, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Organisation for Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). The study furthermore maps good practices and tools used by other parliaments and parliamentary institutions for the promotion of gender equality in parliamentary diplomacy, and assesses their relevance for the EP's future engagement.

The specific objectives of the study are therefore threefold. The *descriptive objective* is to determine the current practice of the EP when it comes to the use of parliamentary diplomacy for promoting gender equality. The *analytical objective* aims to answer whether the current practice is delivering on the gender equality commitments. The *evaluative/normative objective* is to place the EP's efforts in the broader context of the practices of other national parliaments and IPIs.

Relevance

This study makes an important contribution to the existing literature on parliamentary diplomacy and gender equality as one of the first systematic studies on the use of parliamentary diplomacy for promoting

the EU founding value of equality between women and men, laid down in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU).

The existing literature has valuably addressed a variety of topics related to gender in the context of parliaments as well as the political, economic and social empowerment of women in general. Scholarship has also analysed parliamentary diplomacy as a phenomenon which has three key dimensions: (a) parliamentary scrutiny of foreign affairs, which is not considered parliamentary diplomacy as such, but which is essential to parliamentary diplomacy; (b) the conduct of autonomous diplomatic relations by parliaments; and (c) the establishment of parliamentary organs of regional and global organisations. The study encompasses all three dimensions of parliamentary diplomacy. The first dimension is covered by examining the above-mentioned committees' and subcommittees' initiatives for the adoption of EP resolutions on EU external relations, and by determining the substantive gender equality claims made in these resolutions. The second dimension is incorporated by providing a detailed presentation of the different parliamentary diplomacy actions of delegations, committees and subcommittees and the DEG. The third dimension is covered through the inclusion of a multilateral assembly as one of the case studies, and through an assessment of the gender equality practices of selected IPIs. By doing this, the study sheds light on the processes, channels and instruments through which gender issues find their way into interparliamentary relations between the EP and partner countries or regions.

Methodology

The study applies a range of methodological approaches to collect data and provide a holistic empirical insight into the way the EP promotes gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy.

The first method was *documentary analysis* and was performed through desk research of key EP instruments for external action (e.g. resolutions, statements, mission reports, activity reports, studies, and public events) as well as through analysis of the tools and practices of other parliaments and parliamentary bodies (e.g. parliaments' replies to the ECPRD Request No. 4607 on Gender Equality in Parliamentary Diplomacy, documents and information published by parliaments in the countries identified as leaders in feminist foreign policy, and international organisations' publications addressing parliamentary diplomacy and gender mainstreaming in external relations). The second method was *qualitative analysis* through semi-structured interviews held with members, staff of the EP, and representatives from parliaments, international organisations and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) external to the EP. The third method was *quantitative and qualitative analysis* and had two components. One component was a statistical analysis of the minutes of all EP delegation meetings and interparliamentary meetings covered by the case studies in the period 2014-2020. The other component was an online survey widely distributed among Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and administrative staff from delegations, and an analysis of a dataset on the participation of members in the meetings of EP delegations, committees and subcommittees.

Three case studies were selected in order to delve deeper into the concrete practical application of the instruments and tools of parliamentary diplomacy and determine how and to what extent they are used for gender equality promotion in the EP's partner countries and regions. The case studies examine Saudi Arabia, Serbia and the Euro-Latin American Parliamentary Assembly (EuroLat). The case studies were chosen to provide an illustrative sample of diverse EP experiences of gender equality promotion through parliamentary diplomacy, taking into account the following criteria: (a) geographical coverage of different regions; (b) the countries' gender equality ranking in the Global Gender Gap Report for 2021 (in the case of EuroLat member countries); (c) the frequency of references to gender equality and/or women's rights in EP delegation meetings; and (d) the relevance of the DEG activities to gender equality promotion. While the case studies primarily focus on the gender equality promotion activities of inter-parliamentary delegations, the relevant work of selected committees, subcommittees and the DEG is also presented in order to show the extent to which EP bodies work in a complementary manner and in line with the criterion

of joint venture. With respect to committee missions and activities, those by AFET and DROI were the most relevant ones for the case studies of Saudi Arabia and Serbia (human rights being the key consideration in the former case and enlargement in the latter), while focus was on INTA and DROI in the case study of EuroLat (where human rights and trade links are particularly salient). While the study examines the committees' and subcommittees' statements and public hearings addressing gender equality, it is important to note that many of their mission reports are not publicly available (partly for security and confidentiality reasons), while their activity reports (covering the duration of an entire legislature) may not always make the gender-oriented work visible. These limitations are reflected in the conclusions of the study.

Key conclusions

The main conclusion of the study is that the EP is already highly sophisticated when it comes to gender mainstreaming in external relations. Based on international organisations' gender equality benchmarks, practices of selected non-EU parliaments and IPLs, and interviews, the criteria used in this study show that the EP is a strong performer in gender equality promotion abroad. These criteria are: (a) authenticity in the Parliament's own actions; (b) co-creation of policies with all relevant stakeholders; (c) contextualisation of parliamentary action so as to take account of the specific socio-cultural circumstances in the partner country or region; (d) pragmatism in understanding and addressing the Parliament's own limitations; and (e) joint venture as a means of creating a commitment to gender equality promotion within all relevant EP bodies. The lessons learnt from other parliaments and inter-parliamentary institutions show that diplomatic action around gender equality requires involvement with local stakeholders and CSOs to ensure that the tools and practices are addressing actual problems in the third country or region. Additionally, the Gender Transformative Approach aimed at challenging the current gender dynamics in the society turned out to be a powerful framework for diplomatic action. Understanding how foreign policy affects the equality between women and men is crucial for achieving success in promoting gender equality through parliamentary diplomacy. Another important lesson learnt from the parliaments and interparliamentary organisations analysed for the purpose of this study is that without being gender sensitive as an institution, the parliament cannot effectively promote gender equality outside.

When it comes to the EP's internal and external engagement on gender equality, the *committees and subcommittees* have been the key engines for gender mainstreaming in EP external action, consistently referencing gender issues across security, trade, development, enlargement and environmental protection policies. Their key drawback concerns the need for better coordination and visibility of the outcomes of their missions abroad. The DEG's capacity-building work, spearheaded by its Simone Veil programme, is an essential component of the EP's parliamentary diplomacy efforts in promoting gender equality. However, its mediation initiatives – exemplified by Jean Monnet dialogues, which focus on party political consensus building – are an under-utilised tool for gender equality promotion. Although their pronouncements are not legally binding, *delegations* are critical to parliamentary diplomacy due to their being uniquely placed to interact with parliamentarians, government officials and representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the EP's partner countries or regions. Thanks to delegations' 'soft influence' in such interactions, they are able to contribute to awareness raising and peer-to-peer dialogue on gender equality. Advocacy for policy change at high political levels, (co-)drafting of resolutions and reports in bilateral and multilateral interparliamentary forums, the issuance of press releases announcing political positions, and the (confidential) sharing of the conclusions reached abroad with other EP bodies and EU institutions are all examples of the influence that parliamentary diplomacy can generate in the area of gender equality promotion. The influence of delegations could be enhanced by refining and fine-tuning their procedures and practices. Below we summarise our core policy recommendations.

Key policy recommendations

Our policy recommendations are divided into two parts: one addressing the internal dimension of parliamentary diplomacy, and the other addressing its external dimension. The external dimension is subdivided so as to provide advice regarding the work of committees/subcommittees, the DEG, and delegations.

The most important *internally-oriented recommendations* concern the need for clearer referencing of gender equality in formal governing documents of the EP (e.g. Conference of Presidents' Decisions); broader and more centralised access to gender-specific information drawn from international organisations, EU member states and third countries; greater gender mainstreaming at the level of EP political groups and MEPs' assistants; and stronger focus on external relations within the Gender Mainstreaming Network (GMN).

Among the *externally-oriented recommendations*, those addressed at *committees/subcommittees* advise creating an impact assessment questionnaire for scrutinising the gender impacts of EU international agreements; enhancing the mechanisms of oversight over the implementation of the committees'/subcommittees' gender action plans and over the financing of EU external action; and improving the effectiveness of committee missions abroad through greater follow-up with counterparts, governmental and non-governmental actors abroad, as well as through more consistent and visible ex post reporting.

The recommendations concerning *the DEG* activities suggest refining the Sakharov Prize selection procedure to place greater emphasis on gender equality, the enrichment of the Simone Veil programmes by including more training on international relations and diplomacy, and greater use of Jean Monnet dialogues for gender equality promotion.

The recommendations for the work of *delegations* are the most numerous and include stronger institutionalisation of delegations in formal EP documents or delegations' own terms of reference; the empowerment of delegations to adopt documents beyond communiqués; the introduction of annual reports of delegation with sections on gender equality promotion; ensuring gender balance in the composition of delegations sent abroad; offering greater opportunities for gender equality training to MEPs and staff involved in parliamentary diplomacy activities; and stronger recognition for gender equality achievements within and beyond the EU, through several categories of gender equality awards.

Specifically relating to interparliamentary meetings, the recommendations include stronger institutionalisation of links with IPIs; the promotion of women's parliamentary forums and caucuses; closer relations between MEPs sent abroad and women parliamentarians from the partner country or region; insistence on a guaranteed agenda point on gender equality; the creation of 'mentoring' or 'pairing-up' programmes; and greater awareness of the importance of symbols while on missions abroad (e.g. clothing, seating arrangements, rules of procedure of the meeting).

Of particular importance for delegations are also links with CSOs, stakeholders and external experts. We recommend drawing up lists of organisations with which regular cooperation can be agreed (e.g. in the context of interparliamentary meetings or public events); ensuring greater follow-up with them; publishing extensive summaries of discussions; and referring to the outcomes of these discussions in formal EP documents (e.g. a committee report).

We also recommend greater mainstreaming of gender in the studies commissioned by the EP and in delegation communiqués. Delegations should furthermore exploit the advantages of social media (e.g. by maintaining Twitter accounts).

Finally, the role played by gender focal points should be clarified. Their tasks could include information gathering (e.g. on international developments in gender equality); liaising with foreign actors (e.g. civil society abroad) so as to increase delegations' interactions with partner countries or regions; monitoring the inclusion of gender in proposed annual reports of delegations; and assisting with the maintenance of a centralised EP database on gender equality.

This executive summary will be available in the following languages: English, French, German, Polish and Spanish. The study, which is available in English, and the summaries can be downloaded at: [ThinkTank](#)

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