

Rekindling the Agenda on Women, Peace and Security: can the EU lead by example?

Jessica Almqvist | Professor of International Law and Human Rights, Lund University,
and Senior Research Fellow, Elcano Royal Institute | @Jessica66101611 

Theme

The terrain of war and peace is not gender neutral.

Summary

The terrain of war and peace is not gender neutral. This was recognised for the first time by the UN Security Council in its resolution 1325 (UNSC 1325) adopted on 31 October 2000. It is a historic decision for the global efforts to achieve the equality of women and girls in this terrain. For the first time, the principal organ with primary responsibility for international security acknowledged a longstanding neglect of women and girls in international responses to armed-conflict situations. It also set out a pathway for remedying this neglect.

Analysis

(1) Introduction

The terrain of war and peace is not gender neutral. This was recognised for the first time by the UN Security Council in its resolution 1325 (UNSC 1325) adopted on 31 October 2000. It is a historic decision for the global efforts to achieve the equality of women and girls in this terrain. For the first time, the principal organ with primary responsibility for international security acknowledged a longstanding neglect of women and girls in international responses to armed-conflict situations.¹ It also set out a pathway for remedying this neglect. Strikingly, the Council called for increased representation and participation of women in international, regional and national decision-making bodies in the area of conflict prevention, management and resolution. It further called for an expanded role and contribution of women in UN field-based operations and for the incorporation of a gender perspective into such operations. Finally, it demanded the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence and the end of impunity for such violence in conflict situations.

So far, the UNSC has approved a total of 10 resolutions that develop these demands further and constitute the core of the *Agenda on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)*. However, despite the apparent simplicity and reasonableness of the demands and their legal foundations, meeting them in practice has turned out to be a slow and difficult

¹ But note that UNSC resolution 1265 of 17 September 1999 recognises the impact of armed conflict on women. Also, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth Conference on Women in September 1995, recognises this impact (pages 87-100).

process.² While some progress has been made, the bulk of the demands directed towards the UN remain unmet.³ The multiple global crises have redirected the focus of political leaders to attend to what they perceive to be more urgent matters. The process also seems to have been hampered by a general resistance towards change in attitudes and practices. As a result, the WPS's demands have been relegated. In recent years, this marginalisation has been reinforced the rise of ideological opposition against these demands, including powerful states known as promoters of women's rights and with permanent seats at the UNSC, such as the US,⁴ although the situation can change as a result of the outcome of the US elections, given the commitment to gender equality of the incoming US President and Vice-President.

In this global scenario, the struggle to achieve the equality of women, including in conflict situations, has been at risk of stagnation and even of being pushed back. To change this, it becomes ever more important that more global actors beyond the UN and powerful states assume ownership and take responsibility for the full implementation of the WPS Agenda. Regional organisations with operational mandates in conflict situations are prominent candidates. One of these is the EU,⁵ whose military and civilian engagement in these kinds of situations has grown over time.⁶ At the moment it runs a total of 17 crisis management missions.⁷ Even if its international engagement in conflict situations is fairly modest, at least compared with other organisations, such as the UN and NATO,⁸ the EU stands out for its longstanding commitment to gender equality. Its commitment is not limited to internal relations but extends to external relations. Moreover, the EU's commitment does not reflect a mere political preference but is a self-assumed legal obligation.⁹

Recently, the EU has reinforced its commitment to promote gender equality in the terrain of war and peace, announcing that it has the ambition to play a 'leading role as a gender equality and catalyst' and to 'lead by example' in the global promotion of WPS goals in the years to come.¹⁰ This ambition, which is unprecedented, is expressed in the recent

² According to Article 1(3) of the UN Charter (1948), one of the major purposes of the UN is 'promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion'.

³ Since 2015, only two out of the 30 recommendations directed towards the UN have been fully implemented. As for the rest, some progress has been made (50%) or none at all (10%). See 'Women, Peace and Security', Report of the UN Secretary General (October 2019), para. 7.

⁴ María Solanas (2020), '(Sin) Mujeres, Paz y Seguridad', Blog Elcano, 30/X/2020.

⁵ Other regional organisations include NATO, OSCE and the African Union.

⁶ For an overview of the EU crisis management missions, see [here](#). Since 2003 when the EU sent its first missions to Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as to Northern Macedonia, it has deployed a total of 36 operations and missions on three continents.

⁷ The EU's 17 ongoing missions and operations have around 5,000 staff. Eleven of those missions are civilian and six are military. The EU's Common Defence and Security Policy (CDSP) provides the organisation with operational capacity to deploy missions and operations that rely on military and civilian assets from EU member states (Article 42 of the EU Treaty).

⁸ For example, NATO has a total of 36 missions with 20,000 staff and the UN has 13 missions with a total of 110,000.

⁹ According to the EU Treaty, the Union's international action shall be guided by the principles that inspired its own creation, among them, human rights, rule of law and equality. These principles must be respected when pursuing key objectives, such as the preservation of peace, conflict prevention and the strengthening of international security (Article 21), including in the areas of peacekeeping, peace-making and post-conflict stabilisation (Article 43).

¹⁰ EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024, Brussels, 5/VII/2019, p. 5.

EU Action Plan on Gender, Peace and Security (WPS) (2019-24) and the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III. That the EU will intend to assume global leadership is pushed forward by the European Parliament in its resolution on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy, adopted at the end of October 2020. The EU is building momentum to rekindle the WPS Agenda not only by meeting the WPS demands in its own actions but also globally by showing others what to do. This is undoubtedly a welcome development.

(2) Thinking, planning and strategising

The EU is by no means a newcomer to the WPS context. Since the time of the adoption of UNSC 1325, the EU has produced several instruments that manifests what appears to be a genuine readiness to integrate the WPS demands into its own legal and policy framework for external action. A key result was achieved in 2008 when it presented a Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on WPS.¹¹ In it, the EU endorsed both resolutions and upheld the goal of achieving equality of women and men working in the area of peace and security. However, it fell short of providing a pathway for achieving such equality in practice, even if desperately needed.¹² Furthermore, it planned to incorporate a gender perspective in all its activities. Nevertheless, the text was drafted in general terms. It thus failed to detail what exactly was meant by a gender perspective, how it should be accomplished and who would be responsible for its implementation. The general language has remained a defining feature of EU instruments on WPS for more than a decade.

Thus, the first EU Gender Action Plan (2010-15, GAP I) reaffirms the need to strengthen the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence as well as to increase women's participation in peace efforts. The EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2012) reiterates the need to strengthen the protection of women against gender-violence in external action. The second Gender Action Plan (2016-20, GAP II) recalls the same commitment and stresses the importance of equal participation of women in mediation, negotiation and peacebuilding activities. The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, adopted in 2016, meant some further progress, at least rhetorically speaking.¹³ Besides its reiteration of the importance of implementing UNSC 1325 in conflict settlements,¹⁴ it also emphasised specifically the need to strengthen women's participation in foreign policy-making, and to mainstreaming gender issues in all EU activities.¹⁵ Finally, the European Consensus on Development (2017) fostered an image of women as empowered people: women should not be seen

¹¹ But also see Council Conclusions on promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in crisis management. 2760th General Affairs Council meeting in Brussels, 13/XI/2006.

¹² Around the time only 10% of the total number of staff in EU crisis missions were women. See Report on the EU indicators for the Comprehensive Approach to the EU implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women, peace and security. Council of the European Union, Brussels (2011), p. 33.

¹³ According to the Global Strategy, the EU will pursue an integrated approach to external conflict situations, which will be multidimensional (covering 'all available policies and instruments aimed at conflict prevention, management and resolution'); multi-phased ('acting at all stages of the conflict cycle'); multi-level ('acting at the local, national, regional and global levels'); and multi-lateral ('engaging all those players present in a conflict').

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 11, 48 and 51.

mainly as victims of sexual violence, but also as 'positive agents' capable of contributing to conflict prevention, resolution, relief and recovery, and sustainable peace.¹⁶

The time and effort dedicated to the production of plans, strategies and approaches should be contrasted with the modest number of concrete initiatives that has been undertaken by the EU to mobilise human resources dedicated to WPS. In 2009, an Informal Taskforce on UNSCR 1325 to promote gender-oriented initiatives was created. In 2015 the EU High Representative in charge of the European External Action Service (EEAS) appointed a Gender Advisor (Mara Marinaki) to support EU coordination with international and national actors on gender policies as well as to coordinate internal EU gender-related initiatives by EU crisis management missions and EU delegations.¹⁷ Lastly, since 2009 there has been an increase of gender advisor and gender focal points in EU crisis missions, including more opportunities for training. However, none of these initiatives have been able to mobilise the forces required to meet the WPS demands in its own actions.

(3) From general rhetoric to result-oriented strategies

In 2017 the EU's apparent lack of willingness or capabilities to move on from talking about gender equality became the object of a well-deserved critique in a study commissioned by the European Parliament. The study pointed to the continued under-representation of women, including in leadership positions within the EEAS and in the field, as well as within the highest decision bodies of the EU. The study also insisted that the incorporation of a gender perspective into the activities of the CDSP missions required more resources beyond the mere appointments of gender advisors who seemed to be working without any budgets. Finally, it presented a complaint about the lack of transparency of what was actually being done by the missions.

This critique prompted the EU Foreign Affairs Council to draft a set of General Conclusions on WPS. The Conclusions, which were adopted in December 2018, set out an EU Strategic Approach to WPS,¹⁸ which was complemented with the EU Action Plan on WPS launched in July 2019. For the EU, the texts are unique. The approach identifies the following key priority areas: (a) prevention; (b) protection; (c) relief and recovery. In addition, it specifies three overarching principles: (a) participation; (b) gender mainstreaming; and (d) leading by example. The plan attempts to give concrete indications about how to achieve each of these goals and who is responsible for achieving them. Finally, it specifically mentions the problem of financing by pleading that the EU should work to include gender equality and WPS in EU external action financing instruments. It should further consider a budget for gender expertise and/or advisors in

¹⁶ European Consensus on Development (2017), p. 35.

¹⁷ At the time of the appointment of a first EEAS Principal Gender Advisor her functions remained rather undefined. See *Parliamentary Question and the Answer given in 2019*. Since 2016, the EEAS Principal Gender Advisor receives support from a Swedish National Seconded. See *Women in CDSP missions*. Directorate-General for External Policies. Policy Department (2017), p. 8. Since 2016, the EEAS Principal Gender Advisor receives support from a Swedish National Seconded. See *Women in CDSP missions*. Directorate-General for External Policies. Policy Department (2017), p. 8.

¹⁸ The EU Strategic Approach to WPS (2018) replaced the 2008 Comprehensive Approach to EU implementation of UNSC resolutions 1325 and 1820 (2008).

all EU crisis management missions as well as in EU delegations as well as to make gender training targeted and mandatory.¹⁹

The two initiatives have been reinforced by the recently adopted EU Action Plan on Gender III for the period 2021-25. The plan reaffirms targets that had been agreed in the Action Plan on WPS, among them: working towards reaching at least 33% of women participating in all EU activities and projects related to peace processes; and to provide mandatory training on mainstreaming gender perspectives for all staff in Brussels and missions; etc. It further announced that by 2025, 85% all of its external actions should contribute to gender mainstreaming.²⁰

(4) Assessing the current situation

The recent developments seem to set the stage for a rekindling of the WPS Agenda and the EU implementation of its principal demands. That the EU meets these demands in its own organisation seems an essential step towards assuming global leadership. A second step would be to show others how it managed to do it. Indeed, this seems to be what is needed to live up to its own ambition to lead by example, that is, 'to act in a way that shows others how to act'.²¹ Nevertheless, a closer look at the current situation indicates that progress is needed both when it comes to achieving equality of women in recruitment and promotion as well as gender mainstreaming of programmes and other activities. Moreover, the external communication strategies of results must be improved.

(4.1) Recruitment and promotion

As it is now, with a few exceptions, there is a significant gender imbalance among EU staff working in this area. Women also remain underrepresented as leaders of external action of the EU in the area of international security.²²

Over the past years, there has been an upward trend of women staff in different categories and grades within the EEAS. At the end of 2019, women represented almost half of the EEAS workforce (headquarters and EU delegations, 47.7%). The increase of women has been aided by the EEAS Secretary General's launch in 2017 of two task forces on 'Career development' and 'Gender and equal opportunities'.²³ When it comes to management positions, however, the situation is different. At the moment, women only hold 25% of the total number of middle management positions and only 13% of the senior

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ GAP III, p. 2.

²¹ See definition of 'lead by example' provided by Merriam-Webster online dictionary.

²² Even if the operational paragraphs of UNSC 1325 only require 'increased' participation and representation of women, its preamble stresses the 'importance of their *equal* participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security'. Emphasis added.

²³ EEAS Human Resources Report 2019, p. 17 and 39. However, due to a lack of disaggregated data it is not possible to know whether women who do not hold leadership positions occupy positions which are stereotypically feminine such as assistants, interpreters, etc, or whether they are equally represented across the organisation and whether the organisation itself is using their talent to maximise its impact. See Women in CSDP missions (2017), p. 27. The EU Gender Equality Institute provides disaggregated statistics for the European Commission. See <https://eige.europa.eu>. EP suggests that it could provide data for CSDP. See Women in CSDP Missions (2017), p. 28.

management posts within the EEAS.²⁴ Even if the High Representative is committed to reaching the target of 40% of management positions being held by women at the end of his mandate, his most recent appointments resulted in an EEAS structure with only male Deputy Secretary-Generals.²⁵

The gender imbalance in EU crisis management missions is worse. From 2007 to 2016 there was an increase in the proportion of women participating in civilian missions from 20% to slightly over 29%.²⁶ However, since then the overall proportion of women in these missions seems to have diminished to around 25%.²⁷ With respect to military operations, the proportion of women participating in EU military operations remains extremely low. While exact data is limited, partly because the turnover of personnel is significant, it is estimated that the proportion of women taking part in these missions is 7%. This figure has been stable since 2007.²⁸ Even more striking is that there is no woman leading any of the current 17 EU crisis management missions, whether civilian or military.²⁹ Only three of the current missions (all of them civilian) have a woman as deputy head.³⁰

The continued gender imbalances in external action of the EU in conflict situations, especially when it comes to leadership positions, mirrors the composition of the highest levels of decision-making bodies of the EU in this area. Currently, out of the 27 members of the Foreign Affairs Council, only three are female. The Council of Defence comprises six female Ministers of Defence, the rest being male. The Council of the EU comprises three Prime Ministers or Heads of State, as well as Ursula von der Leyen (President of the Commission), the rest being male.³¹ Lastly, the High Representative, who heads the EEAS and also acts as Vice-President of the Commission as well as President of the Foreign Affairs Council is male.³²

²⁴ This situation should be compared to 40% at the level of management in the Commission. The *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2024* has set the objective of reaching a gender balance of 50% at all levels of the Commission's management by the end of 2024.

²⁵ Preamble Q of the European Parliament resolution of 23 October 2020 on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy.

²⁶ *Women in CSDP missions*. Directorate-General for External Policies. Policy Department (2017), p. 8. See also Michaela Šimáková (2017), 'Women in Peacebuilding: The EU and others', *Issue Alert*, European Institute for Security Studies, p. 2.

²⁷ See EU #Women4Security – building a secure world for all, EU External Action Service, 31/X/2020, affirming 24%. See also Patricia Kruse & Tobias Pietz (2020), 'Opinion: why so few women in EU missions?', *EU Observer*, 3/VII/2020 ([here](#)), affirming 25%.

²⁸ *Women in CSDP missions*. Directorate-General for External Policies. Policy Department (2017), p. 8; and EU #Women4Security – building a secure world for all, EU External Action Service, 31 October 2020. Also, see Michaela Šimáková (2017), *Women in Peacebuilding: The EU and others*, *Issue Alert*, European Institute for Security Studies, p. 2.

²⁹ The current military operations are EUFOR Althea in Bosnia and Herzegovina; EUNAVFOR MED IRINI (Libya); EU Training Mission in Mali; EU Training Mission in the Central African Republic; EU Training Mission in Somalia; and EUNAVFOR, also in Somalia.

³⁰ The first woman to head a civilian mission was appointed in 2015 (Pia Stjernvall for EUPOL Afghanistan). Out of all the civilian missions conducted only six have been headed by a woman. EU Capacity Building Sahel Niger, European Union Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories and the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia. For a comment, see Patricia Kruse & Tobias Pietz (2020), 'Opinion: why so few women in EU missions?', *EU Observer*, 3/VII/2020.

³¹ Preamble of the European Parliament resolution of 23 October on gender equality in foreign and security policy.

³² Note, however, that out of the four High Representatives so far two have been women: Javier Solana (1999-2009); Catherine Ashton (2009-2014); Federica Mogherini (2014-2019); and Josep Borrell (2019-).

(4.2) Programmes and training

In all its WPS-related instruments, the EU reiterates continuously that it is committed to ensure gender mainstreaming of all its programmes and activities. The definition of gender mainstreaming used by the EU does not clear up what this means in practice, though. According to its general definition, the expression means the '(re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making'.³³ More recently, the EU has explained that the immediate purpose of gender mainstreaming is to ensure that 'boys/men, girls/women are not discriminated against and will benefit equally from policies and actions...'. Moreover, it adds that 'the long-term objective for gender mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality'.³⁴

This general and somewhat ambiguous language seems to obfuscate what the more exact goals of gender mainstreaming are. Is it reduced to making sure that women and, indeed, girls, boys and men, are not discriminated against or does it require positive action to achieve substantive or real equality? If the latter is the goal, what does substantive equality mean? Does it simply mean that women, girls, boys and men must always be treated equally? Does it instead require equal respect for all? The latter points to the need to recognise that women/girls, men/boys have different needs and interests that must be given equal attention in law and policy. As of now, this question remains unclear. Yet, the lack of clear and transparent language undermines the task of meeting the WPS demands in practice.

Be that as it may, the strategy of adding women to existing institutional structures does not guarantee gender mainstreaming in the sense of transforming prevailing power structures of organisations to make them more conducive to gender-sensitive programmes ('add women and stir' principle).³⁵ Indeed, according to some commentators, a masculine culture seems to prevail within the EEAS and the missions in spite of the increased representation and participation of women within these bodies.³⁶ Thus, EU's commitment to actively promote 'the protection and safeguarding of women's and girls' rights' and to 'increase women and girls' access to justice at local, national, regional and international levels through special emphasis on restorative justice and the rights of survivors and victims' will not happen simply because more women get involved. Rather, how to prevent and respond to violations of the rights of women and girls, including failures to provide access to justice, require tailored attention and expertise.³⁷ For this, there must be know-how about how to assist women and girls in conflict situations in a meaningful and effective way. This could be achieved through targeted

³³ See 2008 Comprehensive Approach to EU implementation of UNSC resolutions 1325 and 1820 (2008).

³⁴ The Civilian Operations Commander Operational Guidelines for Mission Management and Staff on Gender Mainstreaming, Brussels, 8/X/2018, p. 5.

³⁵ Chappell & Guerrina (2020), 'Understanding the gender regime in the European External Action Service', *Cooperation and Conflict*, vol. 55, nr 2, p. 261-280, at 279.

³⁶ Maria-Adriana Deiana & Kenneth McDonagh (2018), 'Translating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda into EU Common Security and Defence Policy: Reflections from EU Peacebuilding', *Global Society*, vol. 32, nr 4, p. 415-435 at 433.

³⁷ See EU Civilian Operations Commander Operational Guidelines for Mission Management and Staff on Gender Mainstreaming (2018), p. 6.

and mandatory training as well as through guidelines that explain how to incorporate a gender perspective.

In this regard, the EU has made some progress. First, it has produced guidelines, namely *Civilian Operations Commander Operational Guidelines for Mission Management and Staff on Gender Mainstreaming*. Moreover, according to the EU Action Plan, it has introduced mandatory targeted training in gender mainstreaming for personnel of crisis management missions.³⁸ In addition, to lead by example in this context it is essential to create a public record of results, including achievements and setbacks. As for now, except for occasional academic studies, information on these matters remains largely hidden from the public purview.³⁹ One of the concrete goals must reasonably be to find ways to give women a more decisive role in establishing lasting peace and indicate to others how it may be done. At the moment, women have no such role at the global level. As the European Parliament stresses, they make up only 13% of negotiators in the major peace processes from 1992 to 2018, only 4% of signatories and only 3% of mediators.⁴⁰

(5) Minding the obstacles to progress

The EU's ability to make progress on the implementation of WPS demands must be assessed in light of the impediments that seem to keep it from implementing them thus far. According to experts, when it comes to WPS demands, 'EU policy falters because it relies on socialisation, or soft incentives'.⁴¹ As indicated in the EU Strategic Approach to WPS, its implementation 'should be achieved through diplomatic and political engagement of EU leadership'.⁴² Indeed, due to its intergovernmental nature, EU foreign and security policy has no hard incentives to compel relevant actors to fulfil the WPS demands.⁴³ Notably, there are no EU mechanisms in place to monitor progress or setbacks on the ground.

A second obstacle concerns the degree of willingness of different EU actors meant to implement the WPS demands to do so. Several actors are responsible for meeting the demands, including the EEAS with its Principal Gender Advisor as well as the missions. However, the EU member states have a decisive role.⁴⁴ All actors involved must ideally contribute. In particular, EU's ability to make progress, whether it is to increase the participation of women in the armed forces and to integrate a gender perspective into the activities of EU crisis management mission, depends on the degree of commitment to gender equality of EU states. When it comes to recruitment for civilian missions, EU

³⁸ EU Gender Action Plan III (2021-2025), p. 2.

³⁹ Maria-Adriana Deiana & Kenneth McDonagh (2018), 'Translating the Women, Peace and Security Agenda into EU Common Security and Defence Policy: Reflections from EU Peacebuilding', *Global Society*, vol. 32, nr 4, p. 415-435.

⁴⁰ Preamble F of the European Parliament resolution of 23 October 2020 on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy.

⁴¹ Stephanie B. Anderson (2020), 'Gender mainstreaming and CSDP crisis management missions: too much talk, not enough action', in Federica Bindo (Ed.), *Women's Leadership in Foreign Policy – A Transatlantic Transition*, Brookings, Washington DC.

⁴² EU Strategic Approach to WPS (2018), para. 5.

⁴³ Stephanie B. Anderson (2020), 'Gender mainstreaming and CSDP Crisis Management Missions: too much talk, not enough action', in Federica Bindi (Ed.), *Women's leadership in Foreign Policy – A transatlantic transition*, Brookings, Washington DC.

⁴⁴ EU Strategic Approach to WPS (2018), para. 7.

states nominate candidates while the missions select them for the posts. This has been used by the civilian missions to proactively recruit women. This is not the case with recruitment of personnel to military missions and headquarters which is in the hands of the EU states.⁴⁵

By now, most EU states have adopted National Action Plans on the implementation of UNSC 1325.⁴⁶ However, the contents and ambitions of these plans differ. Several EU states are well-known as gender equality promoters. Sweden has adopted feminist foreign policies,⁴⁷ and France, Luxembourg and Spain have expressed their intention to adopt such policies.⁴⁸ Among EU states that are 'well-known as gender equality promoters', we should include Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands.⁴⁹ At the same time, being known as gender promoters is no guarantee that these states are the most active in terms of strengthening gender-sensitive international actions of the EU. A case in point is Denmark, which was the first EU state to have a National Action Plan. Even so, Denmark was visibly absent from meetings and did not make a significant contribution to the Strategic Approach to WPS.⁵⁰ Another problem in Denmark is the discrepancy between the active support for women's participation in the police at the ministerial level in Copenhagen, and the support for women's participation in structured policing roles in the field.⁵¹ What these narratives show is that also EU states with a strong commitment to gender equality may fall short of achieving it in practice. For example, Sweden has never had a female Prime Minister.

More strikingly, however, some EU states are increasingly hostile towards certain gender equality issues. As an illustration, Poland has a [National Action Plan](#) according to which its government will increase the number of women in the UN and EU, CDSP, NATO and OSCE missions and operations. At the same time, however, the Polish Constitutional Court recently invalidated the constitutionality of access to abortion on the ground of 'severe and irreversible foetal defect or incurable illness that threatens the foetus's life', pointing to a national deterioration of the rights of women and girls.⁵² These developments undoubtedly reflect a deterioration of women's rights in Poland that will affect its foreign policy on gender equality. Another case in point is Hungary. Hungary is one of the few EU states that have no National Action Plan and among those that have not ratified the [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#).⁵³ In principle this situation could simply be the

⁴⁵ Women in CDSP Missions. Study of the European Parliament (2017), p. 10.

⁴⁶ For National Action Plans, see [Peace Women](#). As of 7 January 2021, EU states that still have no national action plans are Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Malta.

⁴⁷ For information about Sweden see [Feminist foreign policy](#). For an explanation of what constitutes a feminist foreign policy see [Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy](#).

⁴⁸ For information about France see 'Feminist foreign policy', Op-Ed by Jean-Yves Le Drian and Marlène Schiappa; for Luxembourg, see [Foreign Policy Address](#), by Jean Asselborn; and for Spain see 'Exteriores impulsa la centralidad de España en la UE, el multilateralismo y una política exterior feminista en 2020'.

⁴⁹ See Preamble C of the European Parliament Preamble F of the European Parliament resolution of 23 October 2020 on Gender Equality in EU's foreign and security policy.

⁵⁰ Annex H. Case study of Danish contribution to the European Union on 1325 Evaluation of the Danish National Action Plans for the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (October 2019), p. 7.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² See Amnesty International, [Polish Constitutional Tribunal Rolls Back Reproductive Rights](#), 22/X/2020.

⁵³ Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic (cont.)

result of fatigue on the part of the Hungarian government. However, this is not the case. According to Hungarian politicians, the convention promotes 'gender ideology', a notion used to argue that gender equality undermines 'traditional family values' and encourages homosexuality. They also think that the convention's consideration of migrant and refugee women conflicts with Hungary's efforts to crack down on irregular immigration.⁵⁴

Even if the EU is able to hide, at least to some extent, differing degrees of willingness to implement the WPS demands as well as the ideological opposition of some EU states, through the use of a general and ambiguous language in policy documents on WPS goals, these realities are present and affect the capacities of the EU to mobilise all the forces required to change attitudes and practices that reproduce a longstanding ignorance of women in international affairs and conflict situations. All EU states must take responsibility for harmonising political views on gender equality in the area of external action of the EU. Indeed, this is a matter of living up to a self-assumed legal obligation and a strong political commitment.⁵⁵

Conclusions

If the EU is to lead by example it must demonstrate that it is making real progress in the implementation of the WPS goals in its own actions. Prevailing gender imbalances in the recruitment and promotion to management position within the EEAS and within EU crisis management missions themselves as well as within the highest EU decision-making bodies are inconsistent with WPS demands. These realities harm the image of the EU as a global gender actor and undermine its credibility to be a global leader on gender equality. Furthermore, as pointed out, to lead by example in the WPS context means showing other actors how to improve and ensure equality of women in conflict situations. For this, the EU must make a genuine and systematic effort to strengthen the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence as well as their rights to justice and participation in all those situations in which it is engaged. It must also increase the participation of women as peacemakers in the situations in which it is engaged. It must furthermore construct a public record of results, including achievements and setbacks, in this process. To lead by example is to acknowledge and report on the difficulties involved without letting those difficulties become an excuse for reproducing a historic ignorance of the suffering of women and girls in conflicts and of the equal worth of their capacities, skills and views. Achieving change in this area, however, requires that all relevant actors and, above all, EU states to step up and provide real support to the EU's political ambition founded in law to become that global actor on gender equality it aspires to be.

violence, adopted in Istanbul on 1 August 2014, and ratified by the EU on 13/V/2017. As of 21/X/2020, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia are EU states that have not ratified the convention.

⁵⁴ Hillary Margolis (2020), 'Hungary Rejects Opportunity to Protect Women from Violence', Human Rights Watch, 8/V/2020.

⁵⁵ See the introduction to this ARI.