

Feminist foreign policy in contested times:

French,
German, and
Franco-German
perspectives

*By Dr. Johanna Möhring,
with Jessica Pennetier*



WIS
Women In International Security France

HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
PARIS
France | Italie

Table of Contents

Background and acknowledgements	4
Executive summary	5
Introduction	7
What's in a name? German and French FFP approaches: Origins, meanings, ambitions, and resources	8
France	10
I. Origins of French feminist foreign policy: Mobilising and creating Republican traditions	10
II. A French concept of "state feminism": Universalist principles to deploy their (revolutionary) power	13
III. Focus of French FFP: From a limited transversal approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights, to climate and the digital realm	14
Germany	19
I. Origins of German FFP: A change of government, Swedish inspiration and German compatibility	19
II. A FFP with an intersectional vision and ambition confronts domestic and international constraints	19
III. Focus of German FFP: Not just a policy - a way of thinking and acting	21
IV. Institutional and financial resources: Training the "feminist" reflex, waiting for evaluation and reaching for gender budgeting	23
German and French FFP in comparison: Synergies, differences and potential for enhanced co-operation	26
Identifying possible Franco-German synergies	26
French and German FFP expressions briefly summed up	28
I. Conceptualising FFP	28
II. Scope of FFP	28
III. FFP resources	29
IV. FFP evaluation and feedback mechanisms	29
Working closely together to promote FFP	30
FFP challenges: Global backlash, institutional "side-streaming" and national "outphasing"	31
"Global Gender/ Rights backlash"	31
Gender "sidestreaming"	32
Feminist "outphasing"	32
Policy recommendations: Make FFP "stick", and more effective	34

Background and **acknowledgements**

Women In International Security (WIIS) France is a non-profit organisation founded in 2018, with the primary aim of promoting women's expertise in defence, security and, more broadly, international relations. The association is part of the international network Women In International Security (WIIS), founded in 1987 in the United States and present in nearly 50 countries across six continents. With over 15,000 members, WIIS aims to promote the leadership and professional development of women in international security.

Feminist foreign policy in contested times: French, German, and Franco-German perspectives is the fruit of an ongoing collaboration between the Paris office of the Heinrich-Böll- Foundation and WIIS France. In April 2023, they jointly convened an international conference, *Feminist foreign policy: From ambition to action with German and French high-level participants, among others*¹. While this comparative analysis has been generously supported by its France Italy branch, views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the Paris office of the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation.

In order to decrypt French and German feminist foreign policies, the insights and testimony of high-level officials, civil servants, academics and NGO representatives have proved invaluable. WIIS France wants to warmly thank the representatives of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Foreign Office, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Focus 2030 and the Institut du Genre en Géopolitique for having so generously given of their time.

¹. See "#Synthèse – La politique étrangère féministe, des ambitions aux actions," WIIS France (blog), 6 April 2024, <https://wiisfrance.org/2024/04/06/synthese-la-politique-etrangere-feministe-des-ambitions-aux-actions/>.

Executive summary

“We better think about the interaction between the domestic and the foreign, or we’ll never be able to sustain feminist foreign policy”²

Cynthia Enloe, 2023

Feminist foreign policies (FFPs) exist in a contested space: Progress towards reaching gender equality, a United Nations Sustainable Development goal has slowed. Nationally and internationally, there is a noticeable backlash against pro-gender norms and rights. What are feminist foreign policy objectives? Will FFPs be able to persist, and transform global politics?

To answer these questions, this report proposes a close comparative look at France’s feminist diplomacy and Germany’s feminist foreign policy, to be followed by a specific Franco-German FFP perspective. At the heart of French and German FFPs’ intrinsic potential and limitations lies each feminist foreign policy’s national roots. Scrutinizing its origins, its specific meanings, its ambitions and resources, the report highlights the intricate interaction between French and German foreign policy and feminist narratives, at home and abroad.

While *Feminist foreign policy in contested times: French, German, and Franco-German perspectives* documents singular national FFP paths, as well as room for closer collaboration among the two partners, comparing the two countries’ FFPs is not an exact science, not in the least because France and Germany’s FFPs have different timelines.

Like other FFPs, French feminist diplomacy and German feminist foreign policy pursue specific national foreign policy objectives to highlight France’s and Germany’s status as “mid- ranking” powers, with at least in the case of France the continued ambition of influencing, or shaping the international system. Both choose gender topics that fit their domestic and foreign political agenda, thereby “strategically strengthening their self-image internationally”.

French and German FFPs are exposed to the tension between the ethics of feminism(s) and foreign policy realism. Feminism(s)’s emancipatory, egalitarian, and internationalist outlook provides a vision of the future. In contrast, foreign policy realism tends to reproduce international gendered, racialized and colonial hierarchies. France’s and Germany’s FFPs both are proposing female empowerment through increased representation and participation, hoping to encourage civil society to operate truly transformative changes.

With regards to a specific Franco-German FFP perspective, France and Germany are longstanding privileged partners, shaping the European project through their bilateral bond and cooperating in a variety of international fora. Both depend on a norm-based multilateral order which is increasingly under attack. Especially since 1963, **Germany and France have built the most institutionalised bilateral relationship in the world. But the two countries significantly differ in the foreign policy domain, with often diverging strategic interests.** In the realm of FFP, informal exchanges are taking place at the ministe-

2. “Feminist Foreign Policy during War and Peace: Feminist Reflections with Prof. Cynthia Enloe and Dr. Soumita Basu, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, Regional Office New Delhi,” 2 December 2023, <https://in.boell.org/en/media/audio/feminist-foreign-policy-during-war-and-peace-feminist-reflections-prof-cynthia-enloe>.

rial level, among high-level foreign ministry civil servants. There are also ad-hoc collaborations among embassies on FFP topics on the ground. France and Germany also cooperate in the framework of the FFP+ Group.

France and Germany mobilise liberal feminist thinking, notably legal, rights-, and market- based approaches in their FFPs. These conceptual affinities lead to an overlap regarding subjects on which they could cooperate more intensively. One issue area would be for example sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), which includes combatting sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), highlighting systemic insecurities of female and marginalised bodies around the globe. Another area suitable for intensified co-operation would be economic empowerment and participation, together with education of women, girls and other marginalised groups. However, given the polarised nature of global politics, it is highly recommended to intensify informal bilateral co-operation and coordination, and to organise joint initiatives together with a group of partners, notably from the Global South.

Feminist foreign policy in contested times: French, German, and Franco-German perspectives concludes with a series of recommendations how to make FFP more effective and permanent, focusing on both its

internal and external dimension. Internally, sound institutional anchoring in terms of allocated human and financial resources, as well as training, evaluation and feedback mechanisms are key. Externally, with cleavages between North and South on many issues, combatting the impression that feminism and gender equality are Western concepts, rather than part of a universal struggle to achieve human rights for all requires tailor-made strategies, based on strong knowledge of context executed together with members of the FFP+ group, and/ or partnered with countries from the Global South.

These very real difficulties of international action points to a need to fundamentally rethink French and German approaches of international solidarity and development, especially with regards to the reaching of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 threshold.

In a geopolitical context marked by the rise of right-wing movements and an international gender backlash, we hope that this report will encourage reflection on potential avenues for enhanced Franco-German feminist foreign policy co-operation. The daily engagement and deep commitment of French and German policy practitioners, women and men within and without government to making feminist foreign a success serves as an inspiration to all of us.

Introduction

According to the 2024 Equal Measures Report³, which is tracking gender equality, number 5 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be reached by 2030, progress is alarmingly slow. Any country has yet to reach full gender equality. Between 2019 and 2022, nearly 40% of all countries have seen stagnation or decline, among them Germany and France⁴. At this pace, global gender equality, meaning both legal equality as well as a more equal distribution of political and economic power will be achieved only in the 22nd century.

In many national political contexts, pro-gender norms have become a polarizing force, actively contested by right-wing forces, and/or instrumentalised to stigmatise Muslim migrant and immigrant populations. Internationally, gender equality enshrined in international law as a human right over the last fifty years is contested in the name of protecting “traditional values,” or refusing external, “colonial”, meddling⁵. Attitudes on gender and sexuality, within and across countries mirror new fault lines of increasingly antagonistic global politics⁶.

Feminist foreign policies (FFPs) have stepped onto the international stage just as traditional power

politics are making a come-back, and the liberal world order with its multilateral institutions seems increasingly contested. Yet despite domestic and international backlash, FFP continue to elicit strong interest, a fact highlighted for example by the participation of more than 50 countries from the Global North and South at the third Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy in Mexico in July 2024⁷.

FFPs have become part of the foreign policy “arsenal”, studied and compared among others by international relations and foreign policy scholars and assessed by governmental and non-governmental actors for their impact. What will be their future? Much will depend on how FFP “adopters”, especially those carrying significant political and economic weight internationally such as France and Germany will pursue their feminist foreign policy objectives. Will “feminist” be more than just a label? Will both countries be able to craft alliances to overcome resistance to the promotion of gender equality internationally? Will they manage to firmly anchor their policies nationally? The following briefing will seek to shed light on French and German feminist foreign policies, on their particularities, as well as on possible Franco-German synergies and areas of co-operation, which could help French and German FFPs not only to survive, but also to thrive

3. “2024 SDG Gender Index - Equal Measures 2030,” September 3, 2024, <https://equalmeasures2030.org/2024-sdg-gender-index/>.

4. According to the 2024 Gender Index, Germany occupies the 11th place (85.1), with no progress from 2015-2019, some progress from 2019-2022, and with an outlook of “no progress” for the decade 2020-2030. France is placed 24th (80.4), showing no progress in the periods of 2015 to 2019, as well as 2019 to 2022. For the decade 2020- 2030, no progress on gender equality is expected. See also “Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2024,” UN Women – Headquarters, September 7, 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/resources/gender-snapshot>.

5. Marie-Cécile Naves, *Géopolitique des féminismes: 40 fiches illustrées pour comprendre le monde* (Paris: Editions Eyrolles, 2023).

6. Karin Aggestam and Jacqui True, “Gendering Foreign Policy: A Comparative Framework for Analysis,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 16, no. 2 (April 1, 2020): 143–62.

7. See: The Third Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy, 1-3 July 2024, Mexico City, <https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-presents-declaration-on-women-s-rights-at-the-3rd-ministerial-conference-on-feminist-foreign-policy?idiom=en>. The fourth Ministerial conference will take place in France in 2025.

What's in a name? German and French FFP approaches: Origins, meanings, ambitions, and resources

What's in a name? German and French FFP approaches: Origins, meanings, ambitions, and resources

Even though often (wrongly) perceived as predominantly European/Western, **the origins of feminist foreign policy can be found in more than a century of pluralist feminist thought and national, as well as transnational civil society mobilization in the Global North and South**, having shaped the peace movement, the anti-colonial movement, as well as the fight for racial equality⁸. These many strands of activism and diverse feminisms striving for a more peaceful and just planet gave rise eventually to gender initiatives at the United Nations starting in the 1970s, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which entered into force in 1981⁹, or more recently, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions pertaining to women and conflict, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, most famously the UNSCR 1325 of 2000¹⁰. Feminist foreign policies thus are “embedded in a web of international norms, institutions, agreements, as well as ‘soft regulation’ on women’s rights and gender equality¹¹”.

8. See for example Valentina I. Uspenskaya and Nataliya N. Kozlova, “Feminist Foreign Policy: Selected Issues of Conceptualization and Implementation,” *RUDN Journal of Political Science* 24, no. 1 (February 25, 2022): 25–41. While feminisms in the plural have been and continue to be a multi-faceted, diverse force and body of thought fighting inequality, war, colonialism, racism, as well as the destruction of the environment, feminist movements for example in the United States and in Europe have not been free of racist or colonialist thinking and attitudes. See for example Elsa Dorlin, “De l’usage épistémologique et politique des catégories de « sexe » et de « race » dans les études sur le genre,” *Cahiers du Genre* 39, no. 2 (2005): 83–105.

9. Today, 189 of the 193 UN member states have ratified the Convention, and 114 have ratified the Optional Protocol. The proposed amendment will enter into force once a two-thirds majority of States parties has accepted it. See www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/cedaw.

10. See for example, “Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, UN Women,” <https://wps.unwomen.org/index.html>.

FFPs emerged a decade ago not as the result of civil society grassroots movements or transnational coalitions, but rather at the behest of individual states, first among them Sweden in 2014¹². In FFPs' creation and institutionalisation, we find traces of "policy entrepreneurs", of trailblazing women such as Margot Wallström for example¹³. We can also detect the impact of advocacy of feminist groups, within and without government, as well as the result of multilateral activism¹⁴. And one can point to the instinct of political leaders to champion the cause of gender equality. International norms on gender equality, inspiration, civil society activism, peer pressure or institutional mimetism of what is deemed "appropriate" as modern, contemporary foreign policy – all help to swell the ranks of countries adopting feminist foreign policies. Once established, FFPs evolve within distinct domestic and global political contexts, which shape to a certain extent their durability and direction¹⁵.

What are FFPs meant to achieve? Do they aim above all to lend a positive image to their countries¹⁶? Do they want to reform existing institutions? Do they aim to revolutionise international relations?

Definitions of FFP vary, depending on whether they are drafted by governments or by civil society organisations. Feminist thinkers remind us that a public policy formulated and executed by a state apparatus invariably curtails feminism's transformative aspects. But at FFPs' core lies the promotion of gender justice, which together with the dismantling of interlocking hierarchies of among others gender and race is supposed to lead to more peaceful international relations.

The "feminism(s)" in FFPs means different things in different social and cultural contexts. They also resonate with specific national feminist and intersectionalist concerns. What kind of state is implementing a feminist foreign policy, its historic self-definition and foreign policy narratives, i.e., the selective canon of historical 'lessons'¹⁷ also plays an important role in the reach and ambition of FFP. Hence domestic mobilization, national conceptions of the state and of feminism(s), as well as foreign policy narratives are all shaping the formulation of national FFP, their objectives and their implementation¹⁸.

France and Germany have both opted for a feminist foreign policy, France in 2019 and Germany in 2021, respectively. Why and how have these policies been put in place? What conceptions of feminism, and of the state, including its traditional foreign policy orientation are shaping them? And what are their respective ambitions, as well as the means allotted to fulfill them?

11. See Marian Sawer, Lee Ann Banaszak, Jacqui True and Johanna Kantola, eds, *Handbook of feminist governance* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), page 4.

12. In 2024, FFPs hail from Europe (France, Germany, Slovenia, Spain), Africa (Liberia), North America (Canada), and Latin America (Chile, Colombia, Mexico). Timeline: Sweden (2014, abandoned in 2022), Canada (2017), Luxembourg (2018, abandoned 2023), France (2019), Mexico (2020), Spain (2021), Libya (2021 intention, likely abandoned), the Netherlands (2022, abandoned in 2023), Liberia (2022), Chile (2023), Argentina (2023, abandoned in 2023), Colombia (2023), Germany (2023), Slovenia (2023) and Mongolia (2023 intention). See <https://www.gendersecurityproject.com/feminist-foreign-policy-tracker>.

13. See for example Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1998). See also Myra Marx Ferree, ed., *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

14. See for example Gülay Çağlar et al., eds., *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*, Global Institutions Series 70 (London: Routledge, 2013).

15. After a change in government, in 2022, Sweden officially abandoned its FFP. Yet it appears that such policies are much "stickier" than expected. See for example Ann Towns, Katarzyna Jezierska, and Elin Bjarnegård, "Can a Feminist Foreign Policy Be Undone? Reflections from Sweden," *International Affairs* 100, no. 3 (7 May 2024): 1263–73.

16. See Ekatherina Zhukova, Malena Rosén Sundström, and Ole Elgström, "Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs) as Strategic Narratives: Norm Translation in Sweden, Canada, France, and Mexico," *Review of International Studies* 48, no. 1 (January 2022): 195–216.

17. See for example Beatrice Heuser, "Historical Lessons and Discourse on Defence in France and Germany, 1945–90," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice* 2, no. 2 (1998): 199–237.

18. See Dorothy E. McBride and Amy Mazur (eds.), *Comparative State Feminism* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2012).

France

I. Origins of French feminist foreign policy: Mobilising and creating Republican traditions



I. Origins of French feminist foreign policy: Mobilising and creating Republican traditions

French “feminist diplomacy” took shape in the context of the first presidency of Emmanuel Macron, who swept to victory in 2017 uprooting the traditional left/ right cleavage of the Vth Republic. President Macron positioned himself as a force of the centre at home, and as a French leader of Europe abroad. The president chose gender equality as the “great national cause” of the first “Quinquennat” (5-year presidential term) with the aim of defending women’s and girls’ rights, and in particular sexual and reproductive rights, just as these rights were being called into question internationally¹⁹.

19. This “cause” remains in President Macron’s second term. In September 2023, a report of the Cour des Comptes criticized a consistent gap between announcements of principles and poorly identified needs, as well as a lack of a roadmap with measurable indicators allowing to monitor progress (see “La politique d’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes menée par l’État, Cour des comptes,” September 14, 2023, <https://www.ccomptes.fr/fr/publications/la-politique-degalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes-menee-par-letat>). Despite an increase in budget by 95 percent in comparison to 2017 devoted to gender equality, according to the Court of Auditors, the second governmental plan to promote gender equality 2023-2027 will have to ensure scrutiny at the highest level and to shift from short-term to sustainable engagement (see “Grande cause du quinquennat, Budget consacré à l’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes | Égalité-femmes-hommes,” September 27, 2022, <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/grande-cause-du-quinquennat-budget-consacre-egalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes>).

Timeline

Such a symbolic choice meant claiming French political leadership. At home, it reaffirmed French modernity, a modernity rooted in Republican universalist traditions, which under President Macron has actively subsumed past, present and future Feminist struggles, culminating in a sense with the inscription of the right to abortion in the French constitution in March 2024²⁰. Abroad, with a FFP, France highlights its historic image as “patrie des droits de l’homme” (“fatherland of human rights”), stressing its role as an agent for progressive change, rather than a mere “status quo power”, permanent member of the UN Security Council. **French foreign policy is rooted in a historic vision bestowing a special vocation on France, of playing a leading role internationally²¹. In this sense, a “diplomatie féministe” represents a continuity mobilizing certain strands of the French foreign policy narrative.**

French FFP was also shaped by the personal style of Emmanuel Macron’s policy making, with its belief in ideas as independent force for change, using programmatic speeches and events to encourage action²². The label of “Feminist diplomacy” marked Emmanuel Macron’s presidency both as transformative and in line with tradition: an “en même temps” (“at the same time”) characteristic of President Macron’s attempts to reconcile diametral opposites²³.

FFP originated at the highest level of French political power of a presidential system, in which the French president possesses strong customary prerogatives in the do-



20. See for example “Chronologie Des Droits Des Femmes, Vie-Publique.Fr,” <https://www.vie-publique.fr/eclairage/19590-chronologie-des-droits-des-femmes>.
 21. See for example Maurice Vaisse, *Puissance ou l’influence ? La France dans le monde depuis 1958* (Fayard, 2009).
 22. See for example Joseph de Weck, Emmanuel Macron: Der revolutionäre Präsident (Weltkiosk, 2021).
 23. His method is supposed to be inspired by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, for whom Emmanuel Macron had worked as an assistant. See for example François Dosse, *Le philosophe et le président* (Stock, 2017).
 24. Certain national policy sectors, notably national defence and foreign policy are “domaines réservés”, “reserved areas” in which custom, rather than the Constitution itself, recognises the pre-eminence of the French President. See for example “Qu’est-ce que le domaine réservé au président de la République ? vie-publique.fr,” March 3, 2024, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/fiches/19418-quest-ce-que-le-domaine-reserve-au-president-de-la-republique>. Parliamentary elections in 2017 and 2022 resulted in presidential governing majorities, those of 2024 did not.

main of defence and foreign policy²⁴. In spring 2018, two MPs, Mireille Clapot (La République en Marche, Emmanuel Macron's party) and Laurence Dumont (Nouvelle Gauche) published an information report on the place of women's rights in French diplomacy²⁵, which served as a basis for France's International Strategy for Gender Equality (2018-2022)²⁶ before the French feminist diplomacy "coming out" on 8 March 2019²⁷. The decision to introduce a dedicated FFP could have been inspired by the Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's initiative to focus the June 2018 G7 summit on gender equality, having announced a Canadian feminist international assistance policy in 2017.

French international feminist ambitions are a continuation of foreign and development policies already pursued by French government structures.

They were welcomed by actors, such as the staff association "Femmes et Diplomatie" ("Women and Diplomacy") within the French Ministry for Europe and for Foreign Affairs, who had been pushing for improved gender equality with regards to career progression, a better work/ life balance and for combatting sexist behaviour, at a work place deemed one of the more conservative ministries of the French government²⁸. The fact that feminist diplomacy would operate both externally, as part of France's foreign policy, as well as internally, to improve occupational equality within the Ministry was interpreted as an additional lever to make the institution comply with already existing French law on gender parity in the public sector²⁹.

FFP was also seen as a positive indicator by other reformist and women associative networks within and beyond the French public administration promoting gender equality, as a possible sign that gender could be integrated as a key variable to drive ongoing public sector reform and modernisation³⁰.

25. See "Rapport d'information, n° 844," https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/15/rapports/cion_afetr/115b0844_rapport-information.

26. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "France's International Strategy for Gender Equality (2018- 2022)," France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/human-rights/women-s-rights/france-s-international-strategy-for-gender-equality-2018-2022/>.

27. See the joint press release of Marlène Schiappa, Secretary of State for Equality between Women and Men and the Fight against Discrimination, and Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, March 8, 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/270525-jean-yves-le-drian-08032019-diplomatie-feministe>.

28. Together with the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs forms part of the "ministères régaliens" which have particular difficulties in achieving gender parity within their ranks. See WIS France Gender Score Card 2024, "Gender Score Card 2024 : où sont les femmes ?," WIS France (blog), July 4, 2024, <https://wisfrance.org/2024/07/04/gender-score-card-2024-ou-sont-les-femmes/>.

29. See Sauvadet Act of 2012, guaranteeing since 2017 that 40 percent of all first nominations to senior and executive management posts in the state, local authorities and hospital civil service should be women. More than a decade after its introduction, progress continues to be very gradual. See "Dix ans de la loi Sauvadet," Sénat, <https://www.senat.fr/travaux-parlementaires/office-et-delegations/delegation-aux-droits-des-femmes-et-a-legalite-des-chances/archives-1/missions/dix-ans-de-la-loi-sauvadet.html>.

30. Law No. 2019-828 of 6 August 2019, on transforming the civil service, obliges all public employers to set up a multiannual action plan for professional equality. But gender has not been chosen as a central structuring variable to public sector reform and/ or management of public finances, as for example climate change (as of 2020, France has introduced environmental budgeting, see: "Le Budget Vert : Un Outil de Transparence Au Service de La Transition Écologique, Budget.Gouv.Fr."

II. A French concept of “state feminism”:

II. A French concept of “state feminism”: Universalist principles to deploy their (revolutionary) power

Feminist foreign policy is defined by the degree of feminism it dares to think and implement. Where the feminist dial is put – on merely reformative, or in the direction of transformative – is conditioned by what kind of government, in which kind of state is preparing a FFP. Next to individual political agendas, prior feminist “weight” in national politics, as well as the conceptualisation (or its absence) of interlocking discriminations based on gender, sexual orientation, race and class help explain a large variance in the form and content of feminist foreign policies.

In contrast to other countries, until its International feminist diplomacy strategy (2024-2028)³¹, France did not publish a conceptual framework for its “feminist diplomacy” preferring a “pragmatic and evolving approach” building on prior external action devoted to women and girls instead³². This has meant that its “feminist diplomacy” did not define how feminist it was or what it exactly understands by feminism. Even though France prides itself of its feminist thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir, of its towering woman politicians such as Simone Veil who incarnated the fight to legalise abortion, or its feminist activists such as Gisèle Halimi³³, “feminism” has rather remained a French four-letter word³⁴.

While the agenda of feminism(s), the abolition of patriarchal rule questions the foundational princi-

ple of the overwhelming majority of all organized communities around the world, it poses a specific challenge to the identity of the French state. As heritage of the French revolution and in the spirit of fostering unity, France has crafted a unique political consensus based on the unseeing of all differences in the public realm. The combat for gender rights, but also for racial justice sits uneasily with a Republican universalist ideal guaranteeing equal treatment irrespective of gender, race, religion, or any other distinctive markers. Gender and racial discriminations deemed to be systemic in European societies are not systematically measured in France³⁵. The French colonial and post-colonial heritage, and what it could mean for domestic and foreign policy remains a topic barely discussed, and creates a certain cognitive dissonance in the formulation of external feminist action. Voluntarist policies to remediate gender or racial inequalities, for example the establishment of quota or fast-track promotion schemes have been resisted as going against the Republican ideal of meritocracy. They remain controversial, at least in the public sector, even though mentalities seem to be evolving.

French feminist diplomacy highlights the “universalist” character of gender rights as human rights, a narrative that can be tied to its revolutionary heritage, as well as to past French struggles to promote human rights in the international realm³⁶. Appearing reformist rather than transformative, its initial

31. “Stratégie internationale de la France pour une diplomatie féministe (2024-2028),” <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/diplomatie-feministe/>.

32. See the 2023 evaluation of the Haut Conseil of five years of feminist diplomacy: “Rapport - Diplomatie Féministe : Passer Aux Actes - Haut Conseil à l'Égalité Entre Les Femmes et Les Hommes,” 3 July 2023, <https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/diplomatie-feministe-enjeux-europeens-et-internationaux/travaux-du-hce/article/rapport-diplomatie-feministe-passer-aux-actes>.

33. See for example the entry of Simone Veil (interestingly, together with her husband) into the Panthéon on 1 July 2018, as well as the ongoing debate regarding the “Panthéonisation” of a truly intersectionalist Gisèle Halimi, who as a lawyer advocated for victims of rape and the legalization of abortion, while also having defended Algerian independence activists.

34. See public opinion surveys in France and Germany which point to large support for policies promoting gender equality in both countries, while shying away from the etiquette “feminism”. “Survey - Gender inequality, abortion in the constitution, feminist foreign policy: which opinions in France, Germany and Italy?,” Focus 2030, <https://focus2030.org/Survey-Gender-inequality-abortion-in-the-constitution-feminist-foreign-policy>.

35. See for example a report from the Observatoire des Inégalités of November 2023, “L'essentiel sur les discriminations en France,” Observatoire des inégalités, <https://www.inegalites.fr/L-essentiel-sur-les-discriminations-en-France>.

36. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948. The Frenchman René Cassin, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1968, was the main drafter, along with Eleanor Roosevelt and Charles Malik.

feminist inspiration seemed to be a French version of liberal feminist thinking, often provocatively summed up as “add women and stir”³⁷. Centering its feminist foreign policy actions on sexual and reproductive health, and integrating marginalised groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersexual or queer+ (LGBTIQ+) communities has broadened the feminist focus making it more inclusive³⁸.

A significant obstacle not only for France to a more comprehensive, transformative feminist foreign policy in general lies in the nature of global politics. Promoting feminist peace is challenging when

confronted with countries violating international law and international human rights, seemingly understanding only the language of violence. As one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council possessing nuclear weapons, France is a pillar of the contemporary international order, which is based on hierarchy and status closely associated with the ability to use military force. Even though the current system is not producing collective security, from a traditional foreign policy standpoint, the fact that its active transformation could weaken France’s position is acting as a disincentive.

III. Focus of French FFP: From a limited transversal approach to sexual and reproductive health and rights, to climate and the digital realm

Despite its global ambitions, the scope of French feminist diplomacy has appeared to be relatively narrow. It has centred mostly on diplomatic advocacy and development aid, earmarking education, health, humanitarian assistance, climate, food security as topics to be seen through a feminist lens. From 2023 to 2027, French feminist foreign policy is focusing on sexual and reproductive health and rights³⁹. The new international feminist diplomacy strategy (2024-2028) is expected to add the digital domain as well as the climate crisis as additional focus areas.

France so far has refrained from extending the remit of feminist diplomacy to other foreign policy areas such as trade or defence. It has also resisted introducing the variable of “gender” or “gender equality” as a general parameter for foreign policy-making. Thus, feminist diplomacy so far remains a

policy, rather than a way of seeing and doing foreign policy.

France’s 3rd International Strategy for Gender Equality (2018-2022)⁴⁰ even though dating back to “non-feminist” times marked the official start of French feminist diplomacy. It presented five axes, Be exemplary (“in terms of gender equality at home”), Strengthen political support for gender equality (“by bringing gender to a number of policy areas”), Better finance the promotion of gender equality (“by earmarking specific funds”), Make the fight for equality more visible (“for example through gender mindful ministerial communication”) and Support civil society mutualising results (“by increasing exchange with NGOs, academia and the private sector”). It followed sectoral priorities of the 2030 SDG agenda, of the EU Gender Action Plan and ministerial strategies with regards to educa-

37. See for example Sahana Dharmapuri, «Just Add Women and Stir?», Parameters 41, no. 1 (2011):59-79. 38 Please note that France is sticking to the acronym LGBT+ to refer to all relevant communities.

38. Please note that France is sticking to the acronym LGBT+ to refer to all relevant communities.

39. See Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “L’action de la France pour les droits et santé sexuels et reproductifs,” France Diplomatie - Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/diplomatie-feministe/l-action-de-la-france-pour-les-droits-et-sante-sexuels-et-reproductifs/>.

40. See “The 3rd International Strategy for Gender Equality (2018-2022),” <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/human-rights/women-s-rights/france-s-international-strategy-for-gender-equality-2018-2022/>

tion, training, as well as sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The strategy was proposing concrete steps internally to promote gender equality, enshrined via a “Plan d’action en faveur de l’égalité 2021-2023” (Action plan for equality 2021-2023):⁴¹ firstly, a human resources approach fostering “occupational equality” investing in improved working conditions. Secondly, a proactive policy with regards to promotion and fostering of a supportive work environment to improve ministerial gender balance, especially concerning managerial, cabinet or ambassadorial positions. Thirdly, the strategy foresaw the systemic gender equality training for all staff, especially those sent out to diplomatic postings. And lastly, an emphasis was put on strengthening gender equality expertise, within the MEFA and within its network abroad. Its successor “Professional Equality Plan 2023-2027”⁴² is organised around six axes, the last one “For a more ambitious governance” presenting transformative potential, as it aims to anchor (measurable) equality objectives at all levels and in all relevant governance processes, in order to establish a lasting culture of equality.

Since championing sexual and reproductive rights at the Forum Génération Egalité in 2021, starting in 2023, France has put sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), positioned at the interstice of human rights and individual freedoms, gender equality and sustainable development at the heart of its feminist diplomacy (“International Strategy for SRHR 2023-2027”)⁴³. In addition to its international strategy fostering gender equality, France also promotes (LGBTIQ+) rights. Next to financing projects through bilateral, European, multilateral, as well as civil society partnerships, it engages in political advocacy in European and international negotiations, it fosters dialogue with civil society organisations to co-construct strategy, and it aims to ensure that its operators and network deploy the

strategy, in conjunction with France’s international development, health, education, food security, and humanitarian policies.

Several FFP actions were announced for 2024-25, such as participating in a global campaign for women’s voting rights, as well as for female sexual and reproductive rights (She decides)⁴⁴. In addition, the Laboratory for Women’s Rights Online, a multi-stakeholder exchange platform bringing together states, international organisations, tech platforms, researchers and NGOs to better prevent and combat sexist and sexual cyber-violence was launched in March 2024⁴⁵. In October 2024, France and Québec announced a Francophone feminist alliance⁴⁶.

France’s International feminist diplomacy strategy (2024-2028) has benefited from extensive consultations with more than 200 governmental and non-governmental actors, including more than 10 ministries (among them the Ministry of the Interior, Defence, Health, Ecological transition, labour...), all operators of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and of course with civil society.

Since its inception in 2019, French FFP has been able to innovate, for example by conceptualising a specific, internationally unique fund for the support of feminist organisations at home and abroad in 2019, the “Fonds de soutien aux organisations féministes (FSOF), Special fund for the support of feminist NGOs, lighthouse project of French feminist diplomacy”⁴⁷. Its budget has increased significantly, allocating 250 million EUR for the period of 2023-2027. Since 2020, 1000 NGOs in 73 countries have benefited from 134 million EUR⁴⁸. The Laboratory for Women’s Rights Online is also able to finance pertinent projects: a first project call ending in September 2024 netted 140 project proposals, with all continents represented.

41. Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “Diplomatie féministe - Plan d’action égalité entre les femmes et les hommes (11.09.24),” France Diplomatie - Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/diplomatie-feministe/actualites-et-evenements/article/diplomatie-feministe-plan-d-action-egalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes-11-09>.

42. “Toutes et tous égaux - Plan interministériel pour l’égalité entre les femmes et les hommes 2023-2027 | Égalité- femmes-hommes,” November 24, 2023, <https://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/toutes-et-tous-egaux-plan-interministeriel-pour-egalite-entre-les-femmes-et-les-hommes-2023-2027>.

43. “La stratégie internationale de la France en matière de droits et santé sexuels et reproductifs 2023-2027,” https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/17x24_strategie-dssr_v2-2_cle48af48.pdf.

44. See <https://www.shedecideds.com/>. Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development is also taking part in this initiative.

45. Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “The Laboratory for Women’s Rights Online,” France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/feminist-diplomacy/the-laboratory-for-women-s-rights-online/>.

46. “La France et le Québec annoncent la création d’un Réseau francophone pour l’égalité et les droits des femmes,” Consulat général de France à Québec, <https://quebec.consulfrance.org/La-France-et-le-Quebec-annoncent-la-creation-d-un-Reseau-francophone-pour-l-egalite-et-les-droits-des-femmes>.

47. See Support Fund for Feminist Organisations, <https://www.afd.fr/fr/fonds-de-soutien-aux-organisations-feministes-fsof>. Jointly steered by the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and the AFD, it earmarked €120 million for the period of 2020-2022 to finance the activities of feminist organizations worldwide.

48. See Rapport de mise en œuvre par la France de la Déclaration et du Programme d’action de Beijing (Beijing + 30), UNECE, June 2024, page 8, https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/France-Report_fr.pdf.

France has also learned to adapt to a challenging political climate with sometimes strong anti-French and anti-Western feelings “on the ground”, which do not reward local NGOs for visible links to Western diplomatic action and development support. While often highlighting its support for visible flagship programmes such as the Fund for the survivors of sexual violence linked to conflict, founded by Doctor Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad⁴⁹, France has allowed for the flexible disbursement of project funds to specific NGOs cutting down bureaucratic hurdles.

Since the beginnings of French feminist diplomacy, one can observe that feminist (good) practices

are being put into place. In 2023, the Quai d’Orsay received the Label AFNOR “Professional equality between women and men” and “Diversity” label⁵⁰. According to the Quai d’Orsay, in 2024, for the first time, more than 45% of the Ambassadors appointed will be women. This figure has more than doubled in 10 years (14% in 2012, 25% in 2017, 30% in 2022). A similar trend can be seen in the posts of consuls general, where more than 40% of newly appointed consuls general are women. This compares with 16% in 2012 and 17% in 2017. At senior management level in the central administration, women account for 45% (in the posts of secretary general, directors general and directors of central administration)⁵¹.

IV. Institutional and financial resources:

IV. Institutional and financial resources: A continued need for greater organisational visibility, for sound evaluation and for perennial funding

In France, governance for gender equality and for feminist foreign policy is happening at various levels, which makes it a bit difficult to discern responsibilities and prerogatives. This can be explained by the fact that when feminist diplomacy was first introduced, organisational underpinnings had to be invented from scratch.

First, there exists a Minister of State (“Secrétaire d’état”) for Gender Equality and the Fight against Discrimination attached to the Ministry of Solidarities, Autonomy and Equality between Women and Men, with responsibility for equality between women and men, diversity and equal opportunities. The Minister of State participates in some aspects of

feminist foreign policy, such as for example carrying some international initiatives, but FFP human and financial resources reside with the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE). Within the MEAE, feminist diplomacy is anchored below the cabinet level, currently with the State secretariat for Francophonie and International Partnership. For the first time since 2019, it nominally appears in the ministerial organigramme, disposing of an 8-people strong Sub-directorate, “Feminist diplomacy and education” (“Mission diplomatie féministe et éducation”) within the Directorate “Global affairs, culture, education and international development” (“Direction Générale de la mondialisation, de la culture, de l’enseignement et du développement international”).

49. Up until 2022, France had supported the fund with 14,2 million EUR.

50. The AFNOR label has since become the inspiration for a voluntary non certifiable international standard (ISO 53800) on how to implement gender equality in organisations. See Sébastien Baudet, “Égalité femmes-hommes : une grande cause nationale donne naissance à une norme internationale,” Groupe AFNOR (blog), May 17, 2024, <https://www.afnor.org/actualites/egalite-femmes-hommes-une-grande-cause-nationale-donne-naissance-a-une-norme-internationale/>.

51. See Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “L’égalité femmes - hommes au ministère,” France Diplomatie - Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/le-ministere-et-son-reseau/l-egalite-femmes-hommes-au-ministere/>.

An ambassador-at-large, Delphine O, is representing French feminist diplomacy. She is also Secretary General of the Forum Génération Égalité. Together with two other senior officials, one treating human rights and one responsible specifically for LGBTIQ+ rights, this ambassadorial trio is comprehensively covering human rights together. Unfortunately, French FFP and French promotion of LGBTIQ+ rights still miss the opportunity of reinforcing each other.

Everyday FFP is piloted from within the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, liaising with the Elysée Palace, especially with regards to highly visible international conferences or initiatives, to have the feminist foreign policy angle represented.

There exist possibilities for feedback, but a sound FFP evaluation format with precise assessment criteria is absent, apart from some indicators to monitor its internal dimension. Twice a year, the secretary general of the Ministry (a post currently, and for the first time occupied by a woman, ambassador Anne-Marie Descôtes) summons all services for a meeting to discuss the state of feminist foreign policy, as well as individual services' implication in French feminist diplomacy. Following the preparation of France's new International feminist diplomacy strategy (2024-2028) which has benefited from an extensive collaborative consultation process, an interministerial monitoring committee ("Comité de suivi") of the strategy will be kept, possibly also including civil society actors.

Within the MEAE, there is a designated ministerial post of "haut fonctionnaire à l'égalité femmes-hommes", equality of women and men, which follows the internal aspects of France's feminist diplomacy. According to the November 2024 organigram of the MEFA, this post is currently vacant⁵². A special programme, "Tremplin" ("Trampoline") launched in 2023 wants to expand the pool of women in senior positions by accompanying 20 women each year into senior management positions⁵³.

In addition, there are equality correspondents ("référénts/ référentes d'égalité") in all ministerial departments and diplomatic posts, as well as in all French development operators (some thirty public bodies under the supervision or joint supervision of the Quai d'Orsay, including, for example, the French Development Agency, France Volontaires, or Expertise France)⁵⁴. They survey compliance with the internal and external goals of feminist foreign policy.

With regards to civil society collaborations at home and abroad, there has been a strong motivation to learn from societal and academic actors in order to roll out successful levers of French feminist diplomacy. The MEAE has also managed to diversify its civil society interlocutors abroad.

Given the hostility of a large number of countries trying to prevent UN institutions from further promoting gender equality and gender justice, states having adopted FFPs, as well as partnering organisations in the UN family have had to invent alternative fora to congregate and carry these policies further. An example is the Forum Génération Égalité/ Generation Equality, co-chaired by France and Mexico, as well as by UN Women in conjunction with civil society in 2021. The Generation Equality Forum was the world's largest feminist gathering more than 25 years after the last UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. After being launched in Mexico City in March 2021, the Generation Equality Forum was held in Paris from 30 June to 2 July 2021 bringing together heads of state and government, leaders of international organisations and representatives of civil society, young people and the private sector. The objective was to pledge measurable commitments, together with matching funding needed to attain them. The Forum launched a "global acceleration plan" for equality based on a series of actions locking in financial commitments totaling 40 billion USD/ 38 billion EUR. But there has been little follow-up, possibly missing the opportunity to keep countries sufficiently engaged and focused.

52. See the organigramme of the MEAE, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/06-11-2024_organigramme_meae_cle8e7184.pdf.

53. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "L'égalité femmes - hommes au ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères," France Diplomatie - Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/politique-etrangere-de-la-france/diplomatie-feministe/l-egalite-femmes-hommes-au-ministere-de-l-europe-et-des-affaires-etrangeres/>.

54. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "France Diplomatie," France Diplomatie - Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/le-ministere-et-son-reseau/les-operateurs-sous-la-tutelle-du-ministere/>.

In 2020, the “Haut Conseil à l’Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes” (HCE, “High Council on Equality between women and men”) assessing French FFP noted that France’s level of gendered official development assistance (ODA) remained significantly below the average for OECD Development Assistance Committee countries (26% for France compared with 42% for the OECD) and recommended raising the level of commitment by setting a gendered ODA target of 85%, in line with the European objective⁵⁵. According to the Programming Law on Inclusive Development and the Fight against Global Inequalities of 2021, gender equality is now a transversal policy objective: 75% of all disbursed ODA should have gender equality as principal or significant objective, and 20% as its primary objective. This would allocate 3.3 billion EUR of ODA to the promotion of gender equality in 2025, four times the amount disbursed for this objective in 2021⁵⁶. In addition, France has earmarked 400 million EUR to promote sexual and reproductive rights in the period from 2021 to 2025. It has increased its voluntary contributions to UN Women by a factor of three (currently standing at 11 million USD/ 10.5 million EUR) and to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) by a factor of four (to almost 28 million USD/ 26.7 million EUR).

In terms of financing FFP, France still prefers the use of special project-based funds for various gender-related topics rather than specifically and perennially budgeting for feminist diplomacy. In recent years, there has been an improvement in overall financing pertaining to official development assistance and various special funds. But there is a need to make funding more permanent, and to clearly provide for French feminist foreign policy via the budget of the Ministry for Europe and For-

eign Affairs⁵⁷. FFP budgeting is resisted with the argument that many parts of the Ministry already contribute to FFP and that it would be too complicated and costly to account for these contributions.

Abroad, France can count on the support of the FFP+ group founded in 2021/22 at the behest of Spain and Sweden. Operating mainly in New York in conjunction with the UN and civil society organisations, it includes countries which might not have their own FFP, but who pledge to act like allies in the framework of the 2030 agenda⁵⁸. In 2024, the FFP+ group included 18 countries: Albania, Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, France, Germany, Israel, Liberia, Luxembourg, Mexico, Mongolia, the Netherlands, Rwanda, Spain and Tunisia. FFP+ as a forum is particularly useful, as it not only includes countries from the Global South, it is also systematically featuring a North/ South co-presidency. France has also signed feminist diplomacy memoranda of understanding with Chile in 2023 and with Columbia in 2024, to cooperate on a series of actions and to carry them jointly within multilateral fora.

In conjunction with the Netherlands, every two years, France is tabling a resolution at the United Nations General Assembly on the elimination of violence against women and girls, targeting its many aspects (in 2024, it concerned the digital realm)⁵⁹. In autumn 2024, the creation of a dedicated francophone feminist foreign policy network was announced (see section iii). France and Germany can both count on an efficient informal system of collegial coordination among key feminist foreign policy personnel of FFP countries.

55. See “La diplomatie féministe. D’un slogan mobilisateur à une véritable dynamique de changement ?”, Rapport n°2020-09-22, Haut Conseil à l’Égalité Entre Les Femmes et Les Hommes, 4 November 2020, https://haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/rapport-diplomatie_feministe-v4-2.pdf.

56. “The French international solidarity policy,” Focus 2030, <https://focus2030.org/the-french-international-solidarity-policy>.

57. See “Rapport - Diplomatie Féministe : Passer Aux Actes”, Haut Conseil à l’Égalité Entre Les Femmes et Les Hommes, 3 July 2023, <https://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/diplomatie-feministe-enjeux-europeens-et-internationaux/travaux-du-hce/article/rapport-diplomatie-feministe-passer-aux-actes>.

58. See for example “Spain Assumes Co-Presidency of UN Feminist Foreign Policy Group,” Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 17 February 2024, https://www.exteriores.gob.es/en/Comunicacion/NotasPrensa/Paginas/2024_NOTAS_P/20240217_NOTA009.a.spx.

59. See Ministère de l’Europe et des Affaires étrangères, “Women’s Rights – Adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Resolution Put Forward by France and the Netherlands on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls in the Digital Environment (14 November 2024),” France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/feminist-diplomacy/news/article/women-s-rights-adoption-by-the-united-nations-general-assembly-of-the>.

Germany

I. Origins of German FFP: A change of government, Swedish inspiration and German compatibility



I. Origins of German FFP: A change of government, Swedish inspiration and German compatibility

The genesis of the German feminist foreign policy also has its roots in an election, in the German case the parliamentary elections of September 2021, which ended the “Merkel era”, a period from 2005 to 2021 of mostly “grand coalition” governments of the Christian and the Social democrats, under the first female chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany: by many accounts, then the most powerful woman in Europe. Just as in the French case, FFP symbolically marked the beginning of a new political era to German citizens and the world, but building on a strong German foreign policy consensus.

The decision to introduce FFP was part of a two-month-long negotiation for a “Traffic light” coalition of the social democrats (SPD), Alliance 90/The Greens and the free democrats (FDP). The term

“feminist foreign policy” appeared as the only term in English, cursively written in the text of the December 2021 coalition agreement.

The Green party, second-strongest force in the emerging government tasked the “Auswärtige Amt” (Federal Foreign Office) to develop a dedicated approach. **Sweden’s “Three Rs” appear to have been an inspiration:** “Together with our partners, we want to strengthen the rights, resources and representation of women and girls worldwide and promote social diversity in the spirit of a feminist foreign policy”⁶⁰. In addition, the social democrat Svenja Schulze nominated to lead the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development announced her intention to pursue a feminist development policy (FeDP)⁶¹.

60. See for example “The ‘Traffic Light’ Coalition Contract explained”, Fondation Robert Schuman, 24 November 2021.

61. See “Feminist Development Policy. For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide”, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/153806/bmz-strategy-feminist-development-policy.pdf>.

Annalena Baerbock, Germany's first ever female head of the Federal Foreign Office used the coming months to advocate for a German FFP at home and abroad as a policy that had not only German values, but also German interests at its heart. 24.02.2022, Russia's open armed attack on Ukraine proved to be a watershed moment, anchoring FFP and confirming its relevance by linking it to the ongoing war.

Given German rather traditionalist political culture, introducing a FFP and a FeDP might at first glance appear puzzling. But if one takes into account Germany's self-image as "Zivilmacht", as a civilian power having transcended power politics, the appeal of a feminist foreign policy as a human rights-based peace policy is more intuitive⁶². In addition to lessons from its past, German FFP is shaped by foreign policy making in a federal representative parliamentary system, which foresees a (occasionally difficult) sharing of the foreign policy domain. While command of the "Auswärtige Amt" (Federal Foreign Office) is in the hands of the foreign minister, according to Art. 65 of the German constitution, the chancellor, who might or might not be from the same political party retains "Richtlinienkompetenz", the directive authority to define overall political guidelines of his or her government.

Germany's FFP benefited from a one-year preparation period from March 2022 to its publication in March 2023⁶³. During that time, more than 100 workshops, consultations and dialogues were held with actors from civil society, think tanks, academia, with experts from the Bundestag, as well as with members from all walks/ all personnel categories of the Federal Foreign Office⁶⁴. Externally, the resulting 52 page-long FFP guidelines target six foreign policy areas: Peace and security policy, humanitarian aid and crisis management, human rights policy, climate and energy foreign policy, foreign economic policy and foreign cultural and education policy. Internally, FFP is supposed to modify ministry and diplomatic service working

Timeline

Decembre 2021

"Traffic Light" Coalition agreement announces German FFP

Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development confirms intention to pursue a German feminist development policy (FeDP)

January 2022

FFP and FeDP preparation period involving intensive interministerial and civil society consultations

**March 2022-
March 2023**

First Ministerial Conference on Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) held in Germany

2022

01 March 2023

Joint presentation of Germany's FFP and FeDP strategies

methods and structures making them more diverse and inclusive, which translated among others into a significant increase of women in ministerial leadership positions. The drafters of the policy guidelines stressed that FFP was no panacea, that it was very much "work in progress", which would benefit from continuous review and adaptation.

Just as in France, a staff association, "frauen@diplo" promoting occupational equality welcomed the arrival of an FFP.

62. Concept initially coined by François Duchêne to describe the European Communities, and Hanns Maull adapted it to Germany. See Sebastian Harnisch and Hanns Maull, *Germany as a Civilian Power?: The Foreign Policy of the Berlin Republic* (Manchester University Press, 2001).

63. See „Shaping Feminist Foreign Policy“, Federal Foreign Office Guidelines“, 1 March 2023, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/themen/ffp-guidelines/2585074>.

64. In parallel, a similar extensive consultation process took place to prepare a FeDP, in consultation with the Federal Foreign Office preparing its FFP. The Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development consulted approximately 400 development actors worldwide for their recommendations. See <https://www.bmz.de/resource/blob/146190/230301-faq-strategie-feministischen-entwicklungspolitik.pdf>.

II. A FFP with an intersectional vision and ambition confronts domestic and international constraints

What feminist ideas, and ideals are represented in the guidelines of Germany's feminist foreign policy? **German FFP wants to focus not only on women and girls, but on all groups marginalised on the basis of gender identity, origin, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or other reasons.** The guidelines specifically mention the need to transform existing hierarchies of the international system through critical self-reflection, learning from others and facing up to its colonial past. This feminist foreign policy has reflexive, inclusive and intersectional ambitions. Yet it is taking place within a domestic and international context in which even liberal feminist approaches are increasingly contested.

At home, despite having had a Christian democrat female chancellor for 16 years, Germany can hardly be portrayed as a trailblazer when it comes to gender equality. Despite wide-ranging Merkel era reforms concerning schooling and day-care, societal organisation still relies on women to take on the majority of care work within families, leaving them struggling to reconcile private and professional life⁶⁵. As of 2024, abortion remains criminalised, despite a coalition promise and legislation in the works to promote its legalisation. Women are underrepresented in leadership positions in both the public and the private sector. To remediate this situation, the "Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz"⁶⁶ promoting occupational equality in federal administrative structures was introduced in 2015, complemented by the „Erstes Führungspositionen-Gesetz“⁶⁷, amended in 2021 by the "Zweites Führungspositionen-Gesetz"⁶⁸, both targeting high-level positions in the public sector and company boards. Progress is visible, but gradual, especially in traditional economic and political bastions of power.

65. A focus of the traffic light coalition has been to expand the offer of childcare numerically and quantitatively. See 'Beijing+30' – Report 2024. Report of the Federal Government of Germany on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), August 2024, page 6 f., <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-08/Germany-Report.pdf>.

66. Its precursors date back to 2001 and 1994, respectively. See "BGleIG - Gesetz Für Die Gleichstellung von Frauen Und Männern in Der Bundesverwaltung Und in Den Gerichten Des Bundes," https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgleig_2015/BJNR064300015.html.

67. „Erstes Führungspositionen-Gesetz“ (FüPoG I), http://www.bgbl.de/xaver/bgbl/start.xav?startbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgbl115s0642.pdf.

68. „Zweites Führungspositionen-Gesetz“ (FüPoG II), <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/service/gesetze/zweites-fuehrungspositionengesetz-fuepog-2-164226>.

In 2022, the proportion of women on the management boards of the 183 largest German companies was 15.3 per cent, and 34.9 per cent on supervisory boards, well below the German 30 per cent goal, and significantly below the EU target of 40 per cent⁶⁹. The female share of leadership positions in the German Foreign Ministry for example increased from 23.5 per cent in 2015 to 35 per cent in 2023⁷⁰. In the Federal Ministry for Development, the percentage of women in managerial positions increased from 47.14% in 2018 to 50.78% in 2022⁷¹. In the consensus-oriented German political system, power lies in the ability to form alliances, to be able to mobilise networks, which still tend to be male-dominated. Polling shows anti-feminist attitudes, despite supporting gender equality in principle to be wide-spread in German society⁷². Germany also struggles to take stock of its own diversity: as a country of immigration, as a formerly divided country and as a country with a colonial heritage.

Abroad, **feminist foreign policy, with its emphasis on peace and human rights connects with dominant strands of German foreign policy narratives, but it also has to confront, and compose with harsh realities of contemporary global politics.** Until reunification and beyond, the role of West German then German foreign policy had chiefly been to reassure allies and partners that Germany had broken with past nefarious “Sonderwege” (“special paths”)⁷³. Hence, the Federal Republic of Germany had to show above all that it was predictable and dependable. On the right of the political spectrum, this mainly meant

pursuing Western integration and strengthening the European project as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (“Never alone again”). On the left, this was interpreted for Germany as having to refrain from any use of power, particularly military power (“Never again war”). These two West German foreign policy strands converged to produce a new historical mission for Germany: the promotion of peace⁷⁴. On the other side of the Iron curtain, despite the militarisation of its society, the German Democratic Republic presented a foreign policy centred around “anti-fascism” and “peace”.

The realities of global politics have not allowed a unified Germany to focus exclusively on rule-based multilateralism and multilateral integration, and on peaceful ways of conflict resolution. Over the course of the last three decades, Germany has realised that value-based foreign policy had to sometimes be defended by the force of arms. Increasingly, it has had to accept the necessity to think and act in terms of power, also in terms of military power, to shoulder a “new kind of responsibility” in line with its economic and political weight⁷⁵. If the “Zeitenwende” (“Turning point”) speech after the beginning of the open Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 marks indeed an epochal change, rewiring German foreign policy to less military restraint and “civilian power” remains an ongoing process⁷⁶. How to combine Germany's new role as “security guarantor” for Europe with its FFP is an intriguing question. Similarly challenging is how Germany can counter accusations of double standards, for example with regard to the war and the humanitarian crises in Gaza and Lebanon.

69. See for example “Privatwirtschaft,” BMFSFJ, <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/gleichstellung/frauen-und-arbeitswelt/frauen-in-fuehrungspositionen/privatwirtschaft>. The European Union (EU) Leadership Directive sponsored by France which entered into force in December 2022 is imposing binding standards in all member states regarding representation of women and men in management positions. The aim is to achieve the target of 40 per cent women on supervisory boards or a total of 33 per cent on supervisory boards and management boards combined.

70. See for example “Öffentlicher Dienst,” BMFSFJ, <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/gleichstellung/frauen-und-arbeitswelt/frauen-in-fuehrungspositionen/oeffentlicher-dienst>.

71. See “Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023–27),” page 25.

72. See for example “Survey - Gender inequality, abortion in the constitution, feminist foreign policy: which opinions in France, Germany and Italy?”, Focus 2030, 5 March 2024, <https://focus2030.org/Survey-Gender-inequality-abortion-in-the-constitution-feminist-foreign-policy>.

73. Such “special paths”, notably extreme nationalism, as well as impromptu alliances with Russia/ the Soviet Union were credited with having led Germany, and the world to disaster twice.

74. On the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany, see Helga Haftendorn, *Deutsche Aussenpolitik zwischen Selbstbeschränkung und Selbstbehauptung 1945-2000* (Stuttgart : Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001).

75. Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP)/German Marshall Fund of the United States, “Neue Macht, Neue Verantwortung. Elemente Einer Deutschen Außen- Und Sicherheitspolitik Für Eine Welt Im Umbruch,” 2013.

76. See for example the dossier of the German Council on Foreign Relations, “Zeitenwende, DGAP,” <https://dgap.org/en/research/expertise/zeitenwende>.

III. Focus of German FFP: Not just a policy - a way of thinking and acting

Germany's feminist foreign policy identifies ten priority areas for which it formulates guidelines and actions, six for external, and four for internal action. Externally, guidelines center on Peace and security policy ("implementation of the Women Peace and Security Agenda", "arms control and a world without atomic weapons"), humanitarian aid and crisis management ("crisis management as a tool for gender justice and the protection of marginalised populations"), human rights policy ("sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual self-determination and overcoming female genital mutilation", "fight violence against and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ people"), climate and energy foreign policy ("help mediate unequal impact of climate change on women and marginalised groups"), foreign economic policy ("increase integration of women/ marginalised populations in international economic processes") and foreign cultural and education policy ("increase visibility and participation of women and marginalised groups in art and culture, research and science, education and media").

Internally, FFP guidelines aim for Equality, diversity and inclusion in the Foreign Service ("increase proportion of women in management positions", "respect individual biographies"), Equal opportunities and a non-discriminatory working environment ("flexible working hours", "Zero tolerance for sexual harassment and sexism"), Diversity ("increase gender and diversity competence through education and training") and Exchange and networking ("continue to develop FFP in dialogue with civil society, citizens and international partners").

Beyond these external and internal priority areas, gender mainstreaming⁷⁷ is supposed to shape all areas of German foreign policy making, in the European Union and in international forums. The aim is to develop a "feminist reflex" in thinking and acting. FFP is closely linked to the strategy for a feminist development policy drafted by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

German FFP does not exactly spell out how it will disrupt the male-dominated (post)colonial power structures of the international system. Nor does it reveal how it decides in case of conflicting foreign policy priorities, opposing for example geostrategic and value-based objectives. While Russia's open attack on Ukraine confirmed the need for a feminist foreign policy outlook, it also exemplifies such conflicting aims. Russia's aggression and the subsequently revealed systemic use of sexual violence as a strategic part of Russian warfare in Ukraine drove home the link between security and peace, and the absence of violence against women: "Because only where women and marginalised groups are safe, everyone is safe."⁷⁸ The foreign minister has stressed that FFP did not equal pacifism, that it was humanitarian in nature protecting human lives, if need be, also by military means, while being committed to peace and arms control⁷⁹. Yet the parameters on when and how to switch gear to demilitarisation, multilateralism, and diplomatic engagement, or on which conflict to focus on is not made clear.

77. The UN Economic and Social Council agreed conclusions 1997/2 define gender mainstreaming as: "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."

78. See Introduction, «Feministische Außenpolitik gestalten», Leitlinien des Auswärtigen Amtes, 2023.

79. Annalena Baerbock has become one of the strongest champions for providing arms to Ukraine to defend itself.

IV. Institutional and financial resources:

IV. Institutional and financial resources:

Training the “feminist” reflex, waiting for evaluation and reaching for gender budgeting

Since 2023, the Federal Foreign Office has an ambassador for feminist foreign policy to give direction, advice, as well as to engage in networking, assisted by a FFP team. This Special Envoy is also the Director for Human Rights of the Ministry. A dedicated FFP personnel officer is responsible for human resources questions pertaining to diversity, working on its many dimensions activating a multitude of levers to foster it⁸⁰. This HR referent is also responsible for handling cases of sexist and sexual violence within the ministry.

While there is no “whole of government approach”, there is collegial collaboration with other ministries, notably with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, but also with the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Protection, or the Federal Ministry of Defence. Depending on the task at hand, co-operation with other ministries is ruled by the principle of “Federführung” (“lead management”) – the ministry which takes the lead is supposed to coordinate with all other departments/ministries working on the topic.

Interestingly, the chancellery’s role is not mentioned in the FFP guidelines, which raises the question as to how and whether Germany’s feminist agenda is being followed at the highest level of government. However, **feminist foreign policy has been integrated into Germany’s security strategy**⁸¹.

Another significant resource for German FFP is the fact that Germany does not only have a feminist foreign policy, but also a designated feminist development policy (FeDP)⁸². The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has been pursuing gender equality within the framework of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals since 2016. It is currently following its Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023-27)⁸³. In the past, a designated officer, first responsible for human rights in general, then for gender justice followed the matter. While the 2021 coalition agreement did not mention a feminist development policy, the incoming social democrat minister Svenja Schulze designated it as a guiding priority (“Leitungsschwerpunkt”) beginning of 2022. Now a 6-7 person-strong special department is following all internal and external aspects of Germany’s feminist development policy, while SRHR is being followed by the Ministry’s health department. Through the German Development Cooperation (GIZ), the Ministry disposes of a strong anchoring in the countries in which it is active. These contact points can tap into local knowledge reporting back policy successes and failures. They can request help from the ministry to adapt FeDP to specific contexts.

80. HR policy includes combating the persistent underrepresentation of East Germans in ministerial ranks. Creativity is needed to achieve diversity in hiring, as from a legal point of view, information on certain variables cannot be requested.

81. See “Nationale Sicherheitsstrategie,” <https://www.bmvg.de/nationale-sicherheitsstrategie>.

82. See “Feminist Development Policy for Sustainable Development,” Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, <https://www.bmz.de/en/issues/feminist-development-policy>. In France, the “Direction Générale du Trésor (DGT, General Directorate of the Treasury)” of the Ministry of the Economy, and the “Direction Générale de la Mondialisation” (DGM) of the Foreign Ministry jointly steer France’s development aid. They also co-supervise the French Development Agency (AFD) and Expertise France.

83. See Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, “Third Development Policy Action Plan on Gender Equality (2023–27),” n.d.

Both Germany's FFP and FeDP are expressly a “work in progress”, to be constantly assessed, revised and updated in the light of experiences made and “best practices” discovered. However, a formal evaluation framework for both policies is still missing.

Once a month, a Federal Foreign Office working meeting takes place on the internal aspects of FFP. Twice a month, contact persons for feminist foreign policy of all ministerial departments and at the German embassies and diplomatic missions abroad discuss external aspects of FFP. A high-level steering committee at the Federal Foreign Office is supporting the implementation of the FFP guidelines, in consultation with representatives of civil society.

Introductory training on FFP (and on FeDP in the Federal Ministry for Economic Co-operation and Development) is mandatory for incoming personnel, and for those leaving to stations abroad. Ministerial training departments are also offering more specialized FFP and FeDP training courses. Both ministries provide “feminist” resources (toolkit) on their intranet. In addition to offering feminist development policy “Lunch talks” upon demand for its staff, the BMZ's FeDP special department is sending out a monthly FeDP newsletter.

As a way to anchor FFP as a transpartisan issue, a “Parlamentskreis Feministische Außenpolitik” (“Parliamentary circle for FFP”), was created in January 2023⁸⁴.

Another institutional resource for Germany's FFP are partner countries explicitly named in its FFP guidelines, including Chile, France, Canada, Luxembourg, Mexico, the Netherlands and Spain, which either have a FFP or support its goals. Like France, Germany can count on the support of the FFP+ group. A GIZ representative also takes part in these meetings.

What concerns financing, starting in 2023, OECD gender categories were applied to the budget of the Federal Foreign Office, scrutinising all project funds – 5.5 billion EUR in 2023 out of a total budget of 7.5 billion EUR – on a mandatory basis to tailor budget decisions to gender equality. This also applied to over 60% of those funds of the Federal Foreign Office, which are part of the Federal Government's Official Development Assistance (ODA). In 2023, Germany was the second largest provider of development aid globally behind the United States, spending USD 36.7 billion (34.7 billion EUR)⁸⁵. Due to ongoing budgetary pressures, this represented a more than 5% cut in comparison to 2022.

Germany plans to gradually extend gender budgeting to the entire budget of the Foreign Office. Specifically, 85% of project funds should be spent in a gender-sensitive way and 8% in a gender-transformative way by 2025. The aim also is to implement German humanitarian aid in a way that is at least 100% gender-sensitive and, wherever appropriate, gender-targeted.

84. Parliamentary circles are informal committees founded by members of parliament, whose sessions and participation are not public.

85. Development Co-Operation Profiles (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019).

German and French FFP in comparison: Synergies, differences and potential for enhanced co-operation

France and Germany are long-standing privileged partners, shaping the European project through their bilateral relationship and cooperating in a variety of international fora. Both depend on a norm-based multilateral order which is increasingly contested. Especially since 1963, Germany and France have built the most institutionalised bilateral relationship in the world. But the two countries significantly differ in the foreign policy domain, with often diverging strategic interests.

Comparing France's and Germany's FFP will shed light on similarities and variations in gender norms among two closely cooperating countries, and whether investing in a specific "Franco- German" FFP track could be a productive approach.

Identifying possible Franco-German synergies

Both French and German FFPs are exposed to the tension between the ethics of feminism(s) and foreign policy realism. Feminism(s)'s emancipatory, egalitarian, and internationalist outlook provides a vision of the future. In contrast, foreign policy realism tends to reproduce international gendered, racialized and colonial hierarchies. **Both FFPs remain mostly silent on French and German histories of colonialism, slavery and empire, and how they have contributed to shaping global politics today. There is also a difficulty to acknowledge and address how intersecting inequalities beyond gender produce and reproduce power.** FFP is proposing female empowerment through increased representation and participation, hoping to encourage civil society to operate truly transformative changes.

Like other FFPs, French feminist diplomacy and German feminist foreign policy pursue specific national foreign policy objectives to highlight France's and Germany's status as "mid- ranking" powers, with at least in the case of France the continued ambition of influencing, or shaping the international system. Both choose gender topics that fit their domestic and foreign political agenda, thereby "strategically strengthening their self-image internationally"⁸⁶.

France's and Germany's FFPs tend to focus on existing multilateral mechanisms to remediate the effects the climate crisis, migration or conflict have on women and other marginalised groups. As this stops short of tackling root causes, such an approach could be cynically interpreted as making refugee camps, borders, climate change and war safer for women.

86. See Zhukova, Rosén Sundström, and Elgström, "Feminist Foreign Policies (FFPs) as Strategic Narratives," op. cit., Page 3.

France and Germany stress liberal feminist thinking, notably legal, rights-, and market-based approaches in their FFP.

These conceptual affinities lead to an overlap regarding subjects on which they could cooperate more intensively. One issue area is sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), which includes combatting sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), highlighting systemic insecurities of female and marginalised bodies around the globe. The other area suitable for intensified co-operation is economic empowerment and participation, together with education of women, girls and other marginalised groups.

What concerns SRHR, currently the most identifiable focus of French feminist diplomacy, France is stressing the need to protect access to abortion world-wide, having publicly supported the fight against female genital mutilation especially in African countries already for a number of years. As for Germany, this issue area appears under Guideline Number 3, "Human rights policy" in its feminist foreign policy, which opposes an anti-feminist push-back regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights, sexual self-determination, stressing the need to continue the fight against female genital mutilation, and highlighting violence and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ persons.

The 1994 Cairo International conference on population and development enshrined SRHR as a mainstream topic of international development. Yet in recent years, those rights have come under increased attack globally and locally by populist right wing forces, with international efforts suffering especially from lack of funding. "The global gag rule" first instituted by the second Reagan administration in 1985 bans the transfer of US foreign aid to nongovernmental healthcare organisations that discuss abortion, advocate for abortion rights, or provide abortions. Political pressure put an end to US financial contributions to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA). While Democrat US administrations (Clinton, Obama, Biden) have rescinded the policy, Republican ones (George W. Bush, Trump) have reinstated and expanded it. Yet despite having identified it as a priority, in 2022, France and Germany were still only spending 2.75 and 1.68 percent respectively of their ODA on this critically important FFP focus⁸⁷. A new approach is needed, perhaps linking the topic to human security rather than to human rights. Such an approach would ideally allow addressing taboos surrounding female bodies and the bodies of gender minorities, taking into account local specificities, and sensitivities.

The second area of potential closer co-operation would be the area of economic development. France has tied gender equality with the objective of sustainable development, linking access to education and female participation in the labour market with economic growth. Germany's 5th foreign policy guideline concerns "Foreign economic policy" also wants to foster the participation of women and members of marginalised groups in economic processes, including in the digital economy and AI, which are equally priority areas in France's new feminist diplomacy strategy.

In terms of upcoming anniversaries of symbolically important feminist milestones, 2025 will mark the 30th anniversary of two key documents in the advancement of the rights of women and girls around the world: the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. France has made an appeal to continue to enforce this reference framework and go even further, hosting a feminist foreign policy conference in July 2025⁸⁸. The next milestone to (urgently) prepare for is the 2030 threshold of reaching all sustainable development goals, including gender equality.

87. "Sexual and reproductive health and rights: global overview and French strategy," Focus 2030, <https://focus2030.org/Sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-global-overview-and-French-strategy>.

88. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères, "Ministerial Event Feminist Foreign Policy Plus (FFP+) Group Address by Jean-Noël Barrot Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (25.09.24)," France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/france-and-the-united-nations/news-and-events/news/news-2024/article/ministerial-event-feminist-foreign-policy-plus-ffp-group-address-by-jean-noel>.

French and German FFP expressions briefly summed up

I. Conceptualising FFP

Launching its feminist diplomacy in 2019, France did not present a distinct foreign policy approach or definition. Interestingly, France chose the label “feminist diplomacy”, which could be interpreted as focusing mainly on advocacy work in line with the definition of diplomacy as “influencing the decisions and behaviour of foreign governments and people mostly through dialogue and negotiation”⁸⁹. France’s new international feminist diplomacy strategy (2024- 2028) is supposed to include a more thorough conceptual definition.

In its early feminist diplomacy days, France seemed to conceive of gender equality more instrumentally, as a way to pursue other, broader foreign policy goals, such as economic development at home and in partner countries, rather than as an objective in itself: an approach in line with liberal feminist thought. French FFP is associated at least initially with the presidential domestic and foreign policy agenda.

Mandated by the 2021-2025 coalition agreement, the German foreign ministry was tasked to deve-

lop a German feminist foreign policy. The ministry developed a designated feminist foreign policy approach over the course of a year, under the impression of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. Its feminist thinking appears to include reflections inspired by inclusive, as well as post/decolonial feminisms, with a strong anchoring in liberal feminism.

German FFP is grasping gender equality and gender justice as a goal in itself, which could transform the nature of internal, and of global politics. Feminist foreign policy does not benefit from a specific anchoring “at the top”, and there is no strong echoing of its goals via the chancellery. Compared to France, German FFP is spelling out a stronger inter-ministerial co- operation. It also does explicitly name country partners in the fight for gender rights and justice.

Both countries count on economic growth and the engagement of the private sector to promote gender equality, somewhat neglecting the negative effects capitalism can have on gender equality, one of the “blind spots” of liberal feminist thought.

II. Scope of FFP

In earlier strategy documents, France’s FFP had identified a limited number of FFP focus areas, often not spelling out specific programmatic actions it planned to undertake and objectives it was meant to meet. There also seemed to be shifting priority areas over the years, identifying SRHR for the period of 2023-2027, to possibly also focus on climate change and the digital in its upcoming new FFP 2024-2028 strategy. Without accounting for achievements and continuous engagement, such roving priorities could put the durability and sustainability of its approach into question.

France is using high-level international platforms for political declarations in favour of FFP, like for example appearances at the UN General Assembly, as well as specially organised events with high visibility, such as the Forum Génération Égalité in 2021. This approach seems to be neglecting systematic follow-up.

Germany’s FFP has defined ten policy areas, six abroad and four internal, detailing specific individual measures to be undertaken within each policy area, but without formal criteria for assessing progress it is making.

⁸⁹. See definition of diplomacy in the Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/diplomacy>.

III. FFP resources

France has gradually expanded, quantitatively and qualitatively, the resources at the disposal of its feminist diplomacy. However, given current budgetary constraints, it remains to be seen whether financial resources devoted to FFP will be kept, let alone increased. Gender budgeting is still resisted at the level of the French Foreign Ministry, and France seems to prefer special funds as FFP financing vehicles. Internally, as of 2024, feminist diplomacy is anchored in the Ministry's organigramme. A dedicated human resources development strategy has been put into place. Externally, good practices are being developed and implemented.

Germany is earmarking Federal Foreign Office funds, most projects funds as well as the regular budget in line with gender objectives. From its FFP beginnings, Germany seems to have allotted a critical mass of human resources, as well as high-level personnel to work on FFP issues. Foreign ministry staff are increasingly seizing on feminist tools available in their daily practice.

IV. FFP evaluation and feedback mechanisms

Both France and Germany lack a proper policy evaluation framework for their FFPs. Twice a year, the Secretary General of the French MEAE is conducting a meeting on feminist diplomacy implementation. France has also started to develop specific targets and indicators for evaluating its internal FFP dimension. But the quality (box ticking) and the infrequent/ long timeframe of the evaluation progress make its assessment tools less effective and transformative.

The German Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development hold regular meetings on policy implementation and evaluation, in order to adapt and improve it. Such efforts would benefit from standardised reporting and assessment criteria, in order to make progress measurable and more verifiable.

Working closely together to promote FFP

France and Germany have built the most institutionalised bilateral relationship in the world⁹⁰. Supranationally, at the level of the European Union, ground-breaking decisions depend on Franco-German alignment. At the multi-lateral level, common positions of France and Germany carry considerable weight, providing impetus for other countries to join initiatives supported by the two partners.

Yet Franco-German relations present a number of paradoxes: they link countries that despite their geographical proximity are very different culturally, and whose strategic interests often diverge profoundly, especially in the area of defence and security. While the institutional density of relations, which include exchanges of key personnel, as well as multi-level institutionalised dialogue should guarantee a high degree of familiarity with the privileged partner and a high quality of exchange, this does not always seem to be the case. The existing institutions are designed to survive periodic open crises in Franco-German relations, but they seem unable to durably bridge political differences. It is striking to witness how important political initiatives or communications often do not seem to have benefited from prior agreement or at least briefing between partners.

In the realm of FFP, informal exchanges are taking place at the ministerial level, among high-level foreign ministry civil servants. There are ad-hoc collaborations among embassies on FFP topics on the ground. France and Germany also cooperate in the framework of the FFP+ Group.

Technically, there is more (institutional) room for co-operation on questions of gender equality and rights. Signed in January 2019 in commemoration of the January 1963 Elysée Treaty, the Aachen Treaty on Franco-German co-operation and integration envisages a new quality of the bilateral relationship. It foresees closer coordination on economic, diplomatic and defence policies, and provides for co-operation between the two countries' ministries and parliaments⁹¹. Page 2 mentions "empowerment of women and gender equality" as part of the overarching objective of contributing to European social and economic convergence. The same formula reappears on page 6, this time in relation to the objective of an ever-closer partnership between Europe and Africa⁹². In May 2021, the Franco-German Ministerial Council announced it was adding 13 new projects within the Aachen framework to enrich and complete Franco-German co-operation. Among them featured the creation of a joint working group on gender equality, family and social cohesion.

Should the two countries' FFPs invest in a designated "feminist foreign policy track" in Franco-German relations? While French and German FFPs could benefit from closer coordination and possibly joint positions flagged as "Franco-German" within the European Union (through EU presidencies⁹³ or the EU Gender Action Plan⁹⁴), the Council of Europe⁹⁵, or the G7, promoting an official Franco-German stance on the international stage might prove to be counterproductive, as we will see in the next passage.

90. See for example Ulrich Krotz and Joachim Schild, *Shaping Europe: France, Germany, and Embedded Bilateralism from the Elysée Treaty to Twenty-First Century Politics* (OUP Oxford, 2013).

91. «Aachen Treaty on Franco-German Cooperation and Integration» 22 January 2019, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/allemande/relation-bilaterales/traité-d-aix-la-chapelle-sur-la-coopération-et-l'intégration-franco-allemandes/>.

92. See Aachen Treaty, page 6 : «Les deux États s'engagent à établir un partenariat de plus en plus étroit entre l'Europe et l'Afrique en renforçant leur coopération en matière de développement du secteur privé, d'intégration régionale, d'enseignement et de formation professionnelle, d'égalité des sexes et d'autonomisation des femmes, dans le but d'améliorer les perspectives socio-économiques, la viabilité, la bonne gouvernance ainsi que la prévention des conflits, la résolution des crises, notamment dans le cadre du maintien de la paix, et la gestion des situations d'après-conflit.»

93. Under an agreement between the European Council and European Parliament reached following ten years of deadlocked negotiations, listed European companies must have a balanced representation of men and women on their boards. Member States must now seek to ensure that, by 2026, in listed companies, at least 40% of non-executive director posts or 33% of all executive and non-executive director posts are occupied by each sex. See "Six Months of French Presidency at the Service of Europe," Elysee.fr, June 30, 2022, <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2022/06/30/six-months-of-french-presidency-at-the-service-of-europe>.

94. The EU Gender Action Plan is the EU's strategy to reach Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Number 5. The third EU Gender Action (2021-2025) has just been extended to 2027, until the end of the current funding period. Its focus is "gender mainstreaming, increasing gender-targeted actions and funding, and ensuring a gender-responsible review process of all Global Gateway and Team Europe initiatives. Gender analysis and data collection are vital for targeted policies and result monitoring. The EU will also continue to step up efforts to ensure that EU-funded humanitarian aid adequately addresses the needs of women, girls, men, and boys." (See: "Gender Action Plan," European Commission, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_5858).

95. In March 2024, the Council of Europe's Commission on gender equality adopted its Gender equality strategy (2024-2029), see: "Le Conseil de l'Europe adopte sa Stratégie pour l'égalité de genre pour 2024-2029," https://www.coe.int/fr/web/portal/full-news/-/asset_publisher/y5xQt7QdunzT/content/id/265162967?_com_liferay_asset_publisher_web_portlet_AssetPublisHerPortlet_INSTANCE_y5xQt7QdunzT_languageId=en_GB. Among its six policy objectives feature: "Achieving balanced participation of women and men in political, public, social and economic life", and "Ensuring women's empowerment and gender equality in relation to global and geopolitical challenges".

FFP challenges: Global backlash, institutional “side-streaming” and national “outphasing”

“Global Gender/ Rights backlash”

Over the last two decades, global politics have become increasingly polarised. The multilateral order France and Germany depend on is increasingly contested, and not only by autocracies and illiberal democracies. The United Nations and the organisations of the UN family which have carried the promotion of gender equality over the past 50 years have become targets of national actors and international coalitions to dismantle a human rights-based agenda.

The reasons for this are multiple: At home and abroad, anti-feminist and anti-rights movements have grown in strength and influence, rallying both national and international populist/ conservative/ right-wing opposition to feminist foreign policy, also in the Global South. Outside the European Union and G7 countries, there is tremendous resentment of what is perceived as Western hypocrisy and hegemony, especially regarding the heritage of colonisation and decolonisation. In some instances, the promotion of gender equality and reproductive rights is now framed as a new form of colonialism, as “first world problems” instrumentalised to keep existing structures of domination intact.

With cleavages between North and South on many issues, combatting the impression that feminism and gender equality are Western concepts, rather than part of a universal struggle to achieve human rights for all is an uphill battle. In such a tense international environment, it appears imperative to favour promoting FFP objectives from within the FFP+ group, and/ or in partnership with countries from the Global South, rather than opting for very visible national or Franco-German initiatives.

These very real difficulties of international action point to a need to fundamentally rethink French and German approaches of international solidarity and development, especially with regard to the reaching of the SDG 2030 threshold.

If feminist foreign policy is contested in the international arena, it is also challenged in the digital domain. Selective silence on gender equality topics, as well as simply tolerating related online abuse could have the effect of depreciating the feminist profile of German and French feminist foreign policy⁹⁶.

96. See for example Katarzyna Jezierska, “Incredibly Loud and Extremely Silent: Feminist Foreign Policy on Twitter,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 57, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 84–107.

Gender “sidestreaming”

Gender “sidestreaming”

France and Germany both face specific external challenges in their FFP, France being a pillar of the current “traditional” international order, and Germany being asked to adopt a more “hard power” foreign and security policy approach lately. The conceptual and practical tension to square these demands with the reformative/ transformative outlook of feminist foreign policy is significant.

Internally, based on available statistics on women and people from diverse background in their ranks, institutions like the “Quai d’Orsay” or the “Auswärtige Amt” have been traditionally rather conservative institutions. Given these external and internal constraints and pressures, the temptation could be to deliberately, or unintentionally sideline feminist foreign policy. **Such gender “sidestreaming”⁹⁷ could take the form of relegating the topic/ the approach to specific areas of foreign policy and/ or limit gender equal and diverse leadership to specific segments of ministerial staff/ policy areas.**

Feminist “outphasing”

Feminist “outphasing”

Both France and Germany currently live through times of political turbulence. The outcome of French parliamentary elections in June/ July 2024 has already toppled two governments, Germany should head to the polls beginning of 2025, and France could expect another round of legislative voting in summer 2025. In both France and Germany, political forces which might not see feminist foreign policy as a priority are carrying strong electoral weight.

In this context of changed or changing governmental political orientation, it is instructive to turn to the case of Sweden, which first introduced a feminist foreign policy in 2014, only to abandon it after an electoral turnaround in 2022. Yet it appeared difficult for the new government to separate from Swedish feminist foreign policy objectives. As research has revealed, the incoming government was constrained by the already existing international normative framework regarding gender equality and rights in which Sweden is “embedded”, by

97. On this topic, see the instructive research by Vanessa F. Newby and Clotilde Sebag, “Gender Sidestreaming? Analysing Gender Mainstreaming in National Militaries and International Peacekeeping,” *European Journal of International Security* 6, no. 2 (May 2021): 148–70, documenting the sometimes difficult integration and implementation of the “Women, peace and security” agenda in line with gender mainstreaming and gender integration.

the margin of autonomy Swedish diplomats possess in their execution of duties, and lastly, by international expectations what concerns Swedish foreign policy behaviour⁹⁸.

While such an assessment of Swedish FFP “stickiness” is heartening, it remains to be seen whether France and Germany can and could count on the same levers to successfully continue with a feminist foreign policy outlook under new governments. International, European and national norms on gender equality and rights do indeed provide a framework structuring government policy and action. But to abandon a feminist approach, as would be the case in Germany, or to move away from a feminist foreign policy focus in France is bound to have lasting effects, as a shift in priorities is highly likely.

Whether ministerial staff will seize their margin of autonomy to continue to be feminist foreign policy promoters is more difficult to assess. A lot depends on whether they have experienced a feminist “reflex” as a productive and constructive contribution to their daily professional practice in the past and hence feel the need to continue to make use of it. Another lever could be the continued teaching of FFP modules at the ministerial training institutions.

One could nevertheless expect the internal dimension of FFP to stay and achieve a lasting impact, not least given its anchoring in national domestic legislation aiming for professional gender equality. The liberal feminist arguments made for gender equality and diversity as enhancing performance and improving policy effectiveness have become broadly accepted. A voluntarist approach to steadily increase the percentage of women, and to strive for more diversity in ministerial leadership positions in general seems to have been digested, if albeit grudgingly. Of course, the dangers of token “female/ diversity” side-streaming career tracks remain, as does the risk of neglecting male candidates less well-situated in social hierarchies. Female career “pipelines”, especially in certain policy areas remain leaky, with supervisors still selecting and promoting collaborators who resemble them.

What will stay of FFP is the real-life experience of thousands of ministerial practitioners: If there is political will, the impossible – producing a number of competent diverse candidates, nominating women, as well as gender and ethnic minorities to key posts they had never before occupied, changing the internal and external workings of foreign ministries – suddenly becomes possible.

98. See Towns, Jezierska, and Bjarnegård, “Can a Feminist Foreign Policy Be Undone?”, op. cit.

Policy recommendations: Make FFP “stick”, and more effective

Internal

- **Conceive feminist foreign policy as an overall approach**, not just as a policy.
- **Mobilize other ministries** to become FFP stakeholders.
- **Implement a gender mainstreaming and “whole of government” approach.**
- **Invest** in comprehensive gender budgeting.
- Permanently **anchor modules on FFP/ FeDP in the training curriculum**, both at the ministerial and the general civil service training institutions.
- **Raise awareness about FFP**, within and without respective ministries, by regular communication, as well as through training offers (online and in the classroom).
- **Use performance review** to assess how ministerial staff have concretely taken on objectives of feminist foreign policy and gender equality.
- **Devise both realistic and meaningful internal and external FFP assessment criteria** and evaluate on a regular basis.

External

- **Develop a new co-operation approach:** Given the link that is made between colonialism/postcolonialism and “Western” foreign policy and development assistance, there is a fundamental need to rethink international co-operation.
- **Benefit from the FFP+ group as a forum to reflect and strategise:** Ponder how best to conduct FFP deciding on actors and leadership, how such practice should be institutionalised and which structural conditions in terms of international, regional or national legal frameworks of gender/ diversity/ rights norms favour the success of FFP.
- **Keep in mind the importance of context:** While overall recommendations and best practices are relevant, a “one size fits all”, especially in

increasingly contested environments rules itself out. Just as FFP differ from country to country, how a feminist agenda connects and endures will strongly depend on specific international, national and local contexts.

- **Forge alliances within multilateral or regional fora** such as for example the African Union tying together specific themes with resources that can be mobilized in each forum.
- **Continue to build coalitions with the private sector**, while taking into account the need for accountable collaboration and follow-up.
- **Jointly compensate UN organisations, especially UNFPA for reduced US contributions.**
- **Conduct feminist foreign policy together:** It is vital to continue building coalitions with countries in South America, Africa and Asia.
- **Gather and use local knowledge through development operators:** What concerns national and local settings, the knowledge of national development actors (AFD/ GIZ) on the ground often equipped with a larger set of contacts in civil society can provide vital input for FFP.
- **Invest in building links to civil society counterparts in the Global South** beyond already existing networks: Representatives from the Global South tend not to be consulted even though they are producers of knowledge and of solutions for problems most often caused in/ by the Global North.
- **Devise a strategy for feminist digital diplomacy** rising to the specific challenges of online contestation: FFP being mostly absent from digital media is not sustainable.
- **Identify the worldwide anti-rights movements, nationally and internationally, as a systemic challenge** not only to feminist foreign policy, but to democracy: Cooperate among FFP+ countries in mapping and tracking existing and evolving national and transnational networks and coalitions among anti-rights movements.
- **Devise a gender focus for the future:** Prepare the agenda for “after” 2030.

Feminist foreign policy in contested times: French, German, and Franco-German perspectives

 contact@wiisfrance.org

 [@WIISFrance](https://twitter.com/WIISFrance)

Cover photo credits

© Jonathan Sarango / MEAE