

# **Less Talk, More Action: Why gender mainstreaming is so difficult to implement in the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy Missions**

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*Abstract: The European Union and the United States, two longtime leaders in women's rights, were two of the forces behind the passing of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 in 2000 and the scores of subsequent agreements, which emphasize the role women play in peace and security. However, the myriad of resolutions and reports that repeat the same sentiments and goals demonstrate that little progress has been made. What explains the lack of follow through? The policies in both the US and the EU falter because they rely on socialization, or soft incentives, for implementation in a patriarchal world. In the US, Republican presidencies have not made it a priority. Moreover, there is no legal basis for gender equality in the US as there is in the EU. However, hard incentives that normally exist in bureaucratic chains of command do not work in the EU's foreign and security policy realm because these policies are intergovernmental in nature. While each state should conform to the EU's agreed upon policy, there is no enforcement mechanism. Contributing to the lack of "action" is confusion over the term and dependence on hyper-masculinized institutions to execute gender mainstreaming. In the end, the EU's incursion into security and defense belies a reliance on traditional gender roles for the projection of a powerful world image, and the real meaning of 1325 and 1820 – that is listening to women's concerns – does not fit with that image.*

The United States and the European Union take the role of women in peace and security seriously – at least on paper. The Trump administration prided itself on signing into law the Women, Peace, and Security Act (2017), “the first legislation of its kind globally.”<sup>1</sup> On 8 December 2008, the EU Council adopted the “Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace, and Security.” Moreover, the EU adopted an operational document on the

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<sup>1</sup> United States Strategy on Women, Peace and Security, June 2019  
<http://www.peacewomen.org/sites/default/files/WPS-Strategy-FINAL-PDF-6.11.19.pdf>

implementation of these resolutions specifically within the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and their sponsored missions.

Nevertheless, these measures, by themselves, are insufficient. In a 2011 collection of stories about 1325's implementation – or non-implementation -- in the case of Kosovo, Igballe Rogova, Executive Director of the Kosova Women's Network voiced her frustration:

I'll never go to another conference. You know why? Because it's just words. You talk and talk and these high level people pretend to listen, but then they don't take any action. Then you go to another conference on the same topic two months later and say the same things again. I'm sick and tired of talking to people who don't listen. I want to see some action (Kosovo Women's Network 2011, 5).

Another Kosova women's rights activist, Sevdije Ahmeti, said: "Nothing is articulated in 1325. It is just dust in your eyes. They're misty words, checkmate words, and nothing else" (Kosovo Women's Network 2011, 5). Caty Clement agreed with the assessment: "EUSEC and ESDP missions in general are lagging behind international standards" when it has come to implementation of gender mainstreaming (Clement 2009, 251). The policies exist: what explains the lack of follow through?

The policy falters because it relies on socialization, or soft incentives, for implementation in a patriarchal world. Hard incentives that normally exist in bureaucratic chains of command do not work in the EU's foreign and security policy realm because these policies are intergovernmental in nature. While each state should conform to the EU's agreed upon policy, there is no enforcement mechanism. As a result, the successful implementation of a common policy depends on the habit of cooperation or on social pressure. Although the EU represents itself as a single, state-like entity on the world stage, the member states retain competence in foreign, security and defense policy.

Contributing to the lack of "action" is confusion over the EU's image and dependence on hyper-masculinized institutions to execute gender mainstreaming. Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is haphazard, and will remain so in the future because of structural organization, i.e., the intergovernmental nature of the CSDP, and the subsequent regulatory failures in the crisis management command structure, including the education of commanders in the European Security and Defense College. When combined with the task of making in-roads into some of the most male-dominated bastions: the

military; police; and diplomatic corps, soft incentives such as socialization and persuasion have little effect. In the end, the EU's image, itself, may benefit from portraying itself as a male protector in a dangerous world, thereby reinforcing the perception of women as weak victims rather than as important participants in the peace process.

The paper begins with a comparison of the US and EU in general and with regard to gender equality, documenting the similarities and difference between the US and the EU and assesses the utility of comparing them. This section will demonstrate that despite some significant differences, the US and the EU both feel the need to 'talk the talk'. Next, the paper will show that neither 'walks the walk': the EU's own internal documents find the EU lagging in this area, and women's organizations are blasting the EU for it. In the end, they both suffer from the same problem: general confusion regarding the term; dependence on male dominated and hyper-masculinized institutions to implement the necessary changes, and a reliance on socialization and soft incentives to effect change. Using Emilie Hafner-Burton's and Mark Pollack's research as a theoretical basis, the author concludes, as they do, that the soft incentives, as opposed to 'hard' incentives, used to implement gender mainstreaming in crisis missions are of limited use. In the case of the EU, considering the intergovernmental nature of the CSDP, hard incentives are impossible.

### *Comparing the US and the EU with Regards to the Status of Women*

The United States and the EU are quite different and not easily compared. First of all, the United States is an established federation with centuries of binding legislation and case law. The EU has elements of federation, but is not on the same par as the US. With regards to security and defense components, the US is led by a single commander-in-chief with control over its extensive armed forces and a single Department of Defense. The Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) is a common policy, where all the member states (MS) promise to follow an agreed upon policy, akin to a chorus singing the same music, rather than a single policy, decided by the chief executive. In this case in particular, the EU's CSDP is intergovernmental in nature, and not federalized, like the US.

Comparing security and defense policy between the two is further complicated by the difference in size. Only four EU countries rank in the top twenty militaries in the world, from largest to smallest, France, Italy, Poland, and Germany.<sup>2</sup> The US eclipses these countries combined in all areas, budget,

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.businessinsider.in/defense/ranked-the-worlds-20-strongest-militaries/slidelist/51930339.cms>

personnel, aircraft, tanks, submarines, etc. Moreover, the US has a much stronger presence overseas than the EU, which currently has a total of eighteen civilian and military CSDP missions.

The US and the EU also differ significantly on their view of gender equality, despite the fact they have similar gender statistics, e.g. percentage of women in the workforce, etc..<sup>3</sup> Although the US has a generally good reputation for gender equality and quality of life for women, with one of its states, Wyoming, being the first government in the world to allow women the right to vote in 1869, it is one of seven countries in the world not to have ratified the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and it has no Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The lack of these legal protections tied with the US tradition of negative rights, i.e. where the government restricts itself from involvement, “has led to extremely unjust gender equality rulings”<sup>4</sup> and spotty gender mainstreaming in general.

Gender equality has become politicized in the United States. Although the US supported UNSCR 1325 in 2000 under the democratic presidency of Bill Clinton, the accompanying National Action Plan (NAP) on how to implement 1325 came eleven years later in 2011 under democratic president, Barack Obama. Neither republican presidents George W. Bush nor Donald Trump made it a priority.<sup>5</sup>

The EU has legal status for gender equality as a founding principle in Article 119 in the Treaty of Rome. Moreover, the EU is deliberately adopting a “democracy equality model” of equality, focusing less on “equal rights and opportunities” and more on “enabling men and women to participate equally in a domains of citizenship.”<sup>6</sup> This legal basis makes it easier for the EU to embrace 1325 and the subsequent UN resolutions. In fact, the EU has pledged dozens of times to work towards substantive improvement in gender equality in the EU’s foreign and

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<sup>3</sup> Melissa Bellitto, "Gender Mainstreaming in the United States: A New Vision of Equality." *UCLA Women's Law Journal* 22, no. 2 (2015): 141.

<sup>4</sup> Melissa Bellitto, "Gender Mainstreaming in the United States: A New Vision of Equality." *UCLA Women's Law Journal* 22, no. 2 (2015): 125-150.

<sup>5</sup> Although the Trump administration proudly proclaimed its commitment to advancing women’s equality, in the United States Strategy on Women, Peace and Security report of June 2019, the Pentagon delayed promotion of two female generals because of fears that President Trump would reject the move because they were women, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/07/us/politics/female-generals-promoted-biden.html>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

security policy (CFSP). In 2020, the European Parliament cited no fewer than 24 EU statements, agreements, initiatives, protocols, and resolutions that promised the same in one of the most recent reports on gender equality in the CFSP.

Considering how different the US and EU are in their legal constraints and outward support for the gender mainstreaming, why has the EU failed to put more women in CSDP missions? Patricia Kruse and Tobias Pietz observed that, in 2020, no women led any CSDP missions a full twenty years after UNSCR 1325. Historically, no women have headed any military missions, and only six out of sixty-four civilian missions have been led by women. As of 2020, only three out of eleven civilian missions have women as deputy heads.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, the EU frequently uses images of the few women who are in these missions to show the world how committed they are to UNSCR 1325 (see below).



Photo 1 [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/48308/do-smart-thing-gender-mainstreaming-civilian-csdp-missions\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/48308/do-smart-thing-gender-mainstreaming-civilian-csdp-missions_en)

### *Main Obstacles – Systemic Sexism*

Part of the problem is plain sexism, dismissal of women’s issues, and protection of organizational behavior. Many officials excuse any sexist behavior in

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Kruse and Tobias Pietz, “Why so few women in EU missions?” *EUObserver* 3 July 2020 <https://euobserver.com/opinion/148837> .



crisis management missions as “boys will be boys”. The EU is a sexist organization as are most militaries, police forces and diplomatic corps, i.e., the main actors in crisis management. Margot Wallstrom, Vice-President and, at the time most senior woman in the European Commission, derided the EU as a “reign of old men” (*EUObserver* 2008). The *Economist* agreed with Wallstrom that the EU is dominated by men and characterized by “camp-forming, bribery, and bullying. Its summits are like meetings of some ghastly men’s club.” Without female perspectives for balance, the men continue to define security in terms of “military investments” (*Economist* 2008). The Swedish government often feels alone in beating the drum of gender mainstreaming, having to explain that UNSC 1325 is not about equal pay for equal work, but about peace and security. Thirteen years later, men still dominate the EU. In ‘sofagate’, EU Council President Charles Michel took the seat intended for European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen, relegating her to sit alone on a sofa, leaving her to feel “hurt and alone.”<sup>8</sup>

Rather than tackling the problem head on, Swedish Major General Karl Engelbrekton, suggested marketing gender mainstreaming as an aspect of force protection and successful crisis management, thereby circumventing people’s prejudices and misconceptions about issue. However, recognizing that the very image of the EU as a powerful state-like entity “asserting its identity on the world stage” relies on gender stereotypes demonstrates that the problem may deeper than marketing and may explain its intransigence. The paper concludes by questioning whether liberal feminist solutions such as leadership, ‘marketing’, and hard incentives are the solution.

### *The European Union’s Commitment to Gender Mainstreaming*

The European Commission defines gender mainstreaming as “the integration of the gender perspective into every stage of policy processes - design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation - with a view to promoting equality between women and men. It means assessing **how policies impact on the life and position of both women and men** - and taking responsibility to re-address them if necessary [sic]” (DG Justice). The European Union’s commitment began much earlier after the 1995 UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing endorsed the concept and the European Commission established a “Group of Specialists on Mainstreaming”. Within months, the Commission published

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<sup>8</sup> Daniel Boffey, “‘Sofagate’ snub would not have happened to a man – Von der Leyen” *The Guardian* 26 April 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/26/sofagate-snub-would-not-have-happened-to-a-man-von-der-leyen>

“Incorporating Equal Opportunities for Women and Men into all Community Policies and Activities” (European Commission 1996). At the same time, at the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference (IGC), the member states negotiated a legal basis for gender mainstreaming at the EU level committing to an active gender equality policy in the Treaty of Amsterdam.

With regards to UNSCR 1325 and 1820, the EU committed itself in several documents. In 2005, the Council created an operational document to implement the UNSC resolutions. A year later, the Council came up with a checklist. In December 2008, the Commission and Council issued a joint report titled the “Comprehensive EU approach to the implementation of UNSCE 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security,” which defined the premise and suggested many specific measures to employ. In 2010, the EU adopted progress indicators to measure how it implemented this policy. A year later, the Council issued a report on the subject.

The report was mixed. It praised some innovative approaches and good practices, but it identified still more challenges. It noted that very few women were represented at peace conferences. Only two joint actions establishing CSDP missions even mentioned gender. Almost half the member states (12/27) lacked National Action Plans (NAPs) on the subject. In 2021, seven countries still have no NAPs: Bulgaria; Cyprus; Greece; Hungary; Latvia; Malta, and Slovakia. In many cases, only women received training in EU delegations on gender; in other words, gender mainstreaming was seen as a women’s issue (Council 2011).

In the case of EULEX Kosovo, the Kosova Women’s Network published a book decrying the EU’s lack of action in implementing appropriate measures. Sirpa Rautio, former Head of the Human Rights and Gender Office at EULEX from 2008 to 2010, was sympathetic:

The EU is a new actor in the field of peace-building so it did not have a lot of institutional memory to draw on. So first it was the realization that actually people do not really even know how to work, or there are no clear priorities set or guidance, particularly on the monitoring side, especially police. They didn’t really know what they were supposed to do. Police need very clear guidance, and there certainly wasn’t anything on gender issues and little on human rights to start with (Kosova Women’s Network 2011, 5).

Despite 1325’s and 1820’s requirement that women be active participants in the peace process, very few women have participated in EU crisis management missions. The EU appointed its first gender advisor (GA) in 2005, two years after

its first mission. By 2009, the EU had appointed nine gender advisors, that is, a gender advisor for about fifty percent of missions (Hazelzet 2010). According to a 2011 International Security Information Service Europe (ISIS) report, on average, only 25 percent of the international and local staff were women. The EU Border Assistance Mission in Rafah (Gaza strip) has no women in any position (ISIS 2012). These numbers are a tremendous improvement compared to the figures from the Council's own assessment in 2011 9990/11 which reported a total of ten percent women across all levels and all missions (Council 2011, 33). Numbers and analysis are hard to come by as a 2017 European Parliament report on the subject stated "[n]o specific research measuring the impact of women in managerial positions in the EU crisis management missions and operations could be identified."<sup>9</sup>

As a result, in January 2012, the Politico-Military Group (PMG) sent a memo to the Political Security Committee (PSC) on ways to improve the implementation of the gender UNSCRs in the context of CSDP missions and operations. Stressing that it was a living document, the PMG suggested no fewer than 58 proposals from lessons learned to incorporate gender into all levels of policy-making in CSDP missions ranging from ordering that all "Exploratory missions, fact finding missions, planning teams and all other planning activities are to consider gender aspects" to ensuring relevant training from the European Security and Defence College (Council 2012). Will this 'talk' result in 'action' on the ground? The answer is 'no' because the intergovernmental structure precludes the use of hard incentives, and, without them, even under the best of circumstances, such gender mainstreaming policies have met with little success in EU institutions.

#### *Why so little success? Hard versus soft incentives*

Emilie Hafner-Burton and Mark Pollack noted that the Commission had little success in getting bureaucrats to implement gender mainstreaming policies when using soft incentives, such as socialization and persuasion, compared to hard-incentive carrot or stick measures. In other words, officials would only implement policies if they were rewarded for doing so or punished for not doing so. Persuasion had limited use (Hafner-Burton & Pollack 2009).

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<sup>9</sup> European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies, Policy Department, Study: Women in CSDP Missions 2017, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603855/EXPO\\_STU\(2017\)603855\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603855/EXPO_STU(2017)603855_EN.pdf)



The same lessons apply to gender mainstreaming in CSDP missions, except that the intergovernmental nature of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) makes the task more difficult. The CFSP is negotiated among the member states, and each has a veto. In other words, there is no single policy, but one ‘policy’ position common to all 27 member states. Whereas a single policy is one policy or one voice emanating from Brussels, a common policy is the coordination of the 27 separate, but similar member state policies: in other words, a chorus of 27 singing from the same page. As a result, there is no single bureaucratic entity as in the case of the Commission, but a de facto coalition of the willing among the 27 member states, each with its own bureaucratic cultures and promotion systems. Therefore, no hard incentives are possible because there is no overarching bureaucracy. The EU can only make ‘suggestions’; nothing is compulsory. The challenge to CSDP missions is a hundred-fold when one considers the number of actors involved from the 28 member state governments to each of their militaries and civilian staff who execute missions. How to persuade and socialize all 27 member states to make gender mainstreaming a priority? To complicate matters further, in an international crisis, the stakes are higher: people’s lives as well as international reputations and diplomatic negotiations are at risk. Consequently, implementation of 1820 depends entirely on the motivation of the particular member state, thereby explaining the unevenness in its application across CSDP missions. The following section delineates the rubber-meets-the-road problems with implementing the UNSCRs in CSDP missions.

### *Implementation Difficulties at the European Level*

In 2005, the Council of the European Union secretariat developed the “Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the context of the ESDP.” A year later, the secretariat provided a “Checklist to ensure gender mainstreaming and implementation of UNSCR 1325.” The checklists and implementation strategies use terms such as “underlines”, “invites”, “should”, “encourages”, “considers” and “urges”; in other words, nothing is compulsory. Intergovernmentalism means that there is no structure to ensure compliance. As a result, finding personnel, especially qualified women volunteers, is problematic, training is hit-or-miss, and best practices are lost because the final reporting body, the ambassador-level Political and Security Committee (PSC), is loath to critique the militaries or diplomatic corps of its fellow colleagues.

One consequence of the CSDP’s intergovernmental structure is difficulty ‘manning’ missions. There is no European army; as a result, there is no pool of forces from which the EU can draw to ‘man’ a mission. The EU must pass around the hat asking for donations, that is for volunteers from the member states. To

date, no mission has ever been fully manned. Catherine Ashton, EU High Representative, stated that she will not support any new crisis management missions until the ones currently underway are actually manned (Bruxelles2 2011). For military missions, each state can draw upon its armed forces, so finding personnel is less difficult than it is for civilian missions. Rather than simply cut orders for someone to be seconded to a military mission, civilian missions require finding policemen, lawyers, bailiffs, and judges to leave their comfortable homes and families to be placed in dangerous crisis situations. If finding volunteers is difficult, finding qualified women is even more problematic. As a result, the EU fails in 1325 and 1820's mandate to increase the number of women in peace missions.

Daniel Korski recommended the creation of a civilian reserve corps from which to draw civilian specialists when need be. He explained:

Despite commitments made at the Feira and Gothenburg Councils in 1999 and 2001, it remains difficult to find high-quality staff for missions, as the experience in EULEX in Kosovo and EUPOL in Kabul shows. Some Member States do not bother sending people to training course[s]; the selection process for missions is often indiscriminate; [...] and follow-up or refresher training is rare. When citizens are deployed on missions, they are regularly assigned tasks which do not match their training (Korski 2008).

Haphazard training does exist. Inspired by the NATO Defense College to “contribute to the effectiveness and cohesion of the Alliance” and to “Foster strategic level thinking on pol-mil matters,” the European Security and Defense College (ESDC) was envisioned to do the same. The difference is that the ESDC does not offer courses; rather, it is an accrediting agency. Classes are offered by member states and sometimes on line; in other words, one need not even set foot in Brussels to be ‘Europeanized’. There is no ‘training’ session on UNSCR 1325 and 1820 per se, but a gender awareness section, that when offered, lasts from two to four hours. In any case, it is usually reduced to rape and prostitution rather than how to incorporate gender mainstreaming into policy. Although the operational command made gender mainstreaming an obligation in EUFOR RD Congo, many contributing member states did not (EQUAL 2006). All personnel working in EULEX Kosovo are supposed to undergo awareness training; Slovenia omitted the section altogether (EU official 2012). In the end, according to a 2010 European Parliament report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325, only fifty percent of states undertook gender training for all military missions, and sixty percent undertook training for police or UN peacekeeping operations (Gya 2011).

The intergovernmental system also prevents stocktaking and the promotion of best practices. The CSDP is run by the Political and Security Committee made up of the 28 ambassadors each representing a member state. They must approve, by consensus, any and all missions and operations plans. To uncover best practices and for accountability, all heads of mission must report to the PSC. However, these reports are usually general in their scope; no head of mission wants to be too critical of his mission. Moreover, the mission leader will always come from one of the EU member states. To quote one official, in the context of the PSC, any criticism, whether implicit or explicit, is “diplomatic suicide” (EEAS official, 2011). The ambassador of the criticized country will be embarrassed and will not cooperate in the future. As a result, few, if any, lessons are learned and no best practices are disseminated. Instead, the heads in question are promoted or sanctioned by their home country’s chain of command. If gender mainstreaming is not a priority in the home country, if it is one of those twelve member states without a national action plan, then gender issues fall by the wayside.

### *Implementation Difficulties at the Operational Level*

Considering the EU’s explicit cultivation of the image of itself as a masculine world power and the image’s dependency on male institutions to effect such change, perhaps it is not surprising that most agencies “talk the talk” of gender mainstreaming, but few “walk the walk”. In the hyper-masculinized bastions of the police, the military, and diplomacy, many officials misunderstand the concept or are indulgent of “boys being boys”. In addition, the sheer variety of CSDP missions, ranging from rule of law to combatting naval piracy, make it difficult to discover best practices and result in very generic recommendations with little field relevance. Moreover, double-hatting, where the gender advisor is working for more than one mission or also as the human rights advisor, spreads resources too thin and diminishes the efficacy and importance of the position. To make matters worse, often the gender advisors are women academics who are not used to the culture of command in the crisis mission.

### *Misconceptions of the Term*

General Karl Engelbrektson, Swedish military representative to the EU and NATO, said that if he could not convince a soldier of the importance of gender mainstreaming in two minutes, he did not want him on his team. He explained, if rape is used as a weapon to systematically destroy societies where they are deployed, therefore, in order to provide security, it is their obligation to factor in the role of women in these societies. In doing so, they learn that women are the providers of the micro economy that allows these societies to function. He often

used the example of building a bridge. Military and civilian planners were designing a bridge to facilitate trade and community. The male architects designed a bridge for two-way automobile traffic. They saw no need for a pedestrian path across. Engelbrektson asked who cooked the meals for families? The answer: the women. Did women need to be able to go to market to get food to prepare? Yes. Did the women have cars? No, they usually walked. Then, how were women supposed to use the bridge if there were no pedestrian path? That was what gender mainstreaming was about (Engelbrektson 2012, 2013).

Misunderstanding the concept is a major reason for resistance to gender mainstreaming. Many member states either skip the requisite two to four hour gender awareness training before a mission or, seeing it as a women's issue rather than as a gender issue, give it to women only. Engelbrektson explained that a significant number of soldiers thought that gender mainstreaming was about equal work for equal pay and dismissed the concept as having nothing to do with their work in crisis management (Engelbrektson 2012). Others thought that gender mainstreaming was about prostitution. Considering that prostitution is legal in some EU member states such as Belgium or the Netherlands, many officials prefer to see it as a 'local' problem, i.e., outside the purview of the crisis management mission, rather than a European problem -- if a problem at all (EEAS official 2011). As Enloe demonstrated in her 'ovular' book on women in international relations, foreign women are seen to have different mores, so sexual relations in the field are not a problem if 'boys are to be boys' (Enloe 1989). As a result, gender mainstreaming is conveniently misunderstood, and pushed to the back burner.

Nevertheless, prostitution can affect crisis management, as can consensual relationships. Interestingly, prostitution is more of an issue in civilian missions than in military ones. The military is used to following orders, and 'hard' incentives, for lack of a better word, ensure that they follow the rules (EEAS official 2011). Civilian missions have more difficulty controlling their people. For example, one civilian worker in Aceh, who broke the rules of fraternization with local women, was sent home. His behavior threatened the mission. Having been caught in a hotel with an Acehnese Muslim woman, the story was published in the local newspaper. Residents were irate and the reaction threatened the effectiveness of the mission itself (EEAS official II 2012). The situation demonstrates the politics of male-female relations in a crisis management zone. One would want some interaction or integration of the civilian workers, but how much before the mission itself was compromised (EEAS official 2011)?

*Gender Advisors: An Impossible Job?*

EQUAL, part of Employment and Social Affairs in the European Commission, publicized the role of Captain Charlotte Isaksson, Senior Gender Advisor to the Swedish Armed Forces Headquarters, Directorate of Operations, as the gender advisor to the crisis mission EUFOR RD Congo. Gender advisors are recommended for each mission. Her job is “to sensitise, train, monitor and support both officers and soldiers with different responsibilities” within the mission. Although Isaksson frequently encountered trainees who did not take gender issues seriously, she credited her success to having the “absolute backing of the Operational Commander ... and this is what's essential when you set out to make gender mainstreaming a reality” (EQUAL 2006). However, her experience is the exception rather than the rule. Very often, gender advisors are divided in their jobs (double-hatted), and, while instructed at the EU level to give advice on every aspect of mission policy, they lack the access to the commander and/or the classified documents necessary to do their jobs, making the advisors feel sidelined. Moreover, Isaksson is a military officer, a native to military culture, facilitating her work. In the majority of cases where the gender advisor is a civilian, very often an academic, there is a culture clash, marginalizing the position even further.

As is the case for all EU missions, staffing the missions is a challenge; finding gender advisors is no different. At its start, the 2005 Aceh Monitoring Mission had no gender advisor. A month into the mission, Brussels sent out instructions to create a gender advising group, but there were no real experts, although some people working in Aceh had some good experience to draw from (EEAS official II 2012). Both Isaksson and Gya noted the human resources difficulty of finding fulltime GAs. By 2013, except for EUBAM Rafah, every mission had either a gender advisor or a gender focal point (GFP). The EU’s solution was to dilute scarce resources through “doublehatting”, that is, assigning more than one mission to a single gender advisor. Isaksson advised against the practice arguing it is, “difficult and give[s] less results” (Isaksson). Gya calculated that only four of thirteen missions have a fulltime, single-hatted gender advisor (Gya 20).

Not only are most gender advisors’ jobs split, their task is almost impossible to begin with. As dictated by the Politico-Military Group in 2012, all exploratory missions, fact-finding missions, planning teams and all other planning activities are to include relevant gender expertise. Where sexual or gender-based violence exists, specific assessments of the situations of men and women need to be incorporated in the report. The Operations Plans or OPLANs must consider the gender aspects to be included in the mission planning in the context of the target country. Moreover, the OPLAN must establish the objectives and envisaged results of the GA as well as the code of conduct for CSDP personnel in the mission -- all to be determined by the GA in the first place, one supposes. The GA is to write reports

on the gender related aspects of the mission to be sent to the operational headquarters (OHQ) and to Brussels. In the end, “the Chain of Command is to ensure gender mainstreaming and the implementation of more specific gender related tasks set out in the OPLAN and *to consider how each component of the mission or operation is to take account of gender aspects*, including with regard to the possible sexual and gender-based violence in the area of operation [emphasis added]” (Council 2012). In other words, the gender advisor is to be a watchdog to report on “each component of the mission”, yet not only is the sheer number of reports impossible for one person to do, she seldom has access to all levels of meetings or reports for security reasons (GA 2012). Moreover, even when she does comment, for example, to identify cases where inter-ethnic conflict is characterized by sexual violence, the comment is often forgotten or ignored. There are no accounting mechanisms to ensure that gender mainstreaming outputs exist; only suggested processes to demonstrate having gone through the motions.

Isaksson argued that a lesson learned is the importance of a top down approach to gender mainstreaming. She recommended that the gender advisor be in the Command Group in order to implement gender mainstreaming throughout the entire mission (Isaksson). While seemingly practical, such a procedure may not be popular in the OHQ. Commandants may be loath to let a civilian woman dictate policy, critique the mission, or to ‘squeal’ on subordinates. Moreover, there may be a culture clash on both sides: the GAs may come from an academic background, traditionally on the left and suspicious of the military and the police who are traditionally associated with the right. This mutual suspicion may marginalize both the gender advisor and her recommendations.

### *Gender mainstreaming and the EU’s Image*

Part of the problem with implementing gender mainstreaming is structural; the EU uses the CSDP to project a powerful, masculine persona to the world (Anderson 2010). Although the EU wants to demonstrate that it is a post-modern ‘state’, sensitive to gender issues; at the same time, it sees itself as a protector of the weak, an image dependent on both keeping traditional gender roles and on the hyper-masculinized organizations of the military, the police, and the diplomatic service that are bastions of patriarchy. These organizations are male dominated and traditionally exemplify traits associated with masculinity: the public sphere; rationality; strength; protecting the weak; and power and leadership in general. In other words, although the EU tries to project an image of being feminist, in fact, its perception of itself is based on very specific gender relationships.

The EU has made sensitivity to gender issues a talking point in its brochures



and self-promotion. For example, in its pamphlet, “Europe in the World: Working for Peace, Security and Stability”, published periodically, one cover showed a woman soldier, powerful with a rifle slung over her shoulder, but compassionate, holding a little girl. Significantly, both the woman’s and child’s heads were cut off: these were not individuals in a relationship, but rather examples of the treatment of females in the EU context. Cynically, this magazine cover used the female body to sell the European Union’s commitment to 1820 (see picture below) (Commission 2007).



### The EU as World Protector

The 2001 Laeken Presidency conclusions, agreed upon by consensus by the chief executives of all the member states, delved into the question of “What is Europe’s role in this changed world? Does Europe not, now that is finally unified, have a leading role to play in a new world order, that of a power able both to play a stabilising role worldwide and to point the way ahead for many countries and peoples?” The member states in the Laeken Presidency conclusions gave the EU an immense mandate: “The role it has to play is that of a power resolutely doing battle against all violence, all terror, and all fanaticism, but which also does not turn a blind eye to the world’s heartrending injustices” (Laeken Conclusions 2001). The words chosen by the leaders of the EU member states are significant: “The role it has to play”. Two meanings are possible: 1) that the EU is ‘play acting’; or

2) that the EU actually 'has to be' this 'Superman', or, perhaps in this case, 'Super-state'. The EU is to show its people that it is in a constant "battle" against 'evil' defined as "all violence, all terror, all fanaticism" and even worldwide "injustice".

Embracing the idea of chivalry, the EU seeks to protect people everywhere, and to export European values to the rest of the world, a bit reminiscent of colonialism, albeit with a nicer face. As Iris Marion Young describes the mindset of this masculine protector: "The world out there is heartless and uncivilized, and the movements and the motives of the men in it are unpredictable and difficult to discern. The protector must therefore take all precautions against these threats, remain watchful and suspicious, and be ready to fight and sacrifice for the safety of his loved ones". This conception has ramifications for those left at home:

The feminine woman, rather, on this construction, adores her protector and happily defers to his judgment in return for the promise of security he offers. She looks up to him with gratitude for his manliness and the admiration for his willingness to face the dangers of the world for her sake (Young 2005, 18).

In other words, men become the better, more important citizens in the role of both protector and ambassador. The soldiers in EU Battlegroups, nearly all male, are deployed to uphold EU values. As Luc Frieden, Luxembourg minister and President-in-office of the Council explained, "European soldiers in the world are like our visiting card." Therefore, the Council adopted standards of behavior to be applied to all categories of personnel involved in ESDP operations. Any violation of human rights is to be reported, and all are to respect the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of the local population. Drug use and sexual exploitation are forbidden: "It is a code of conduct so that EU soldiers are worthy representatives of the EU in difficult missions throughout the world" (*Europe* 2005).

(Male) Europeans are willing to die for their beliefs. In a response to the question "who will die for Europe", German Foreign Minister Joschka Fisher replied, "European soldiers are facing danger in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo. [...] They are there as members of national contingents, but they are serving a wider interest - Europe's. There is a soul, [...] here is a spirit. And people die for Europe, and have died" (*New York Times* 2005). Considering that one of the world's few universals is a near exclusion of women from combat (Goldstein 2002), women are excluded from these jobs and from the glory of dying for the European Union. Even in the Nordic countries, a region renowned for its equal treatment of the sexes, ninety-five percent of those participating in the Nordic Battlegroup are men.

The Nordic Battlegroup's recruitment materials focus almost entirely on men and male imagery (Kronsell 2008). As non-participants, women become secondary citizens.

Yet, the very task of peacekeeping is 'effeminate'. Liora Sion's study of Dutch peacekeeping units confirms links between military (especially combat) activities and masculinity: many in the units were unwilling to abandon the combat-oriented self-image for a peace-making task (Sion 2006).

In one of the clearest usages of masculine and feminine imagery, Robert Kagan, alluding to the famous book on relationship advice (Grey 1992), argued that America was from Mars and Europe from Venus. Like men, Kagan characterized the United States as more violent with "Americans generally favor[ing] policies of coercion rather than persuasion, emphasizing punitive sanctions over inducements to better behavior, the stick over the carrot" (Kagan 2002). Being very powerful, the US could work alone.

Being weaker, Kagan characterized Europeans as "generally favor[ing] peaceful responses to problems, preferring negotiation, diplomacy, and persuasion to coercion. They are quicker to appeal to international law, international conventions, and international opinion to adjudicate disputes. They try to use commercial and economic ties to bind nations together" (Kagan 2002). In other words, like women, Europeans placed a higher value on communication, cooperation, and consensus.

This male/female dichotomy even informed defense analysis:

The conventional wisdom among defence analysts holds that in US-European relations there is a neat division of labour: the US 'cooks dinner', dominating the war-fighting effort, before the Europeans step in to 'do the dishes', consolidating successful battlefield outcomes through peacekeeping. Some defence experts argue that this division of labour plays not only to America's strengths, but to those of Europe as well, since European soldiers are arguably better at peacekeeping than US forces (O'Hanlon 2004, 41-2).

Many Europeans rankle at the idea of 'cleaning up' after the American war machine relegating the Europe to second-class status as a 'nurturing' soft-power. EU's military ambitions are a direct result of the EU trying to look tough, and so as to be taken seriously as an international actor. However, the emphasis on the military belies a gendered understanding of international relations and citizenship. If the CSDP has militarized the European Union, as Ian Manners suggested

(Manners 2006, 189), then the EU has privileged violence for problem-solving, and in doing so has marginalized women, because, as Enloe explained, “Militarism legitimizes masculinized men as protectors, as actors, and rational strategists” (Enloe 2004, 154).

*Conclusions: Leadership, Marketing or Image?*

Engelbrekston recommended that leadership is the answer. He agreed with Isaksson that the gender advisor work as closely as possible with the commander to be sure that all policies include gender. When the leader takes responsibility for the importance of gender mainstreaming, it is much more likely to succeed. The European Parliament report on Women in CSDP missions agreed “a concerted effort by the EU leadership, the member states and the civil society is needed.”<sup>10</sup>

However, success depends entirely on the priorities of the commander. Since the gender advisor cannot possibly read and give comments on all the documents, get statistics on gender questions, or even see many classified documents, the only strategy is for gender advisor to have the head of mission’s ear before policy is made. However, he may not want to listen to a woman telling him how to do his job. As established earlier, the EU can only suggest policy, not compel it. A commander is assessed according to his country’s force goals and force requirements. If his bosses are not concerned about gender mainstreaming, then it will not be a priority for him.

Nevertheless, the military is more likely to follow orders if ordered to do so. The less hierarchical culture of civilian missions makes implementing gender mainstreaming more difficult (Engelbrekston 2012 and EEAS Official I 2011). Therefore, Engelbrekston recommended more leadership in the military context with its hard incentives to make gender mainstreaming more prevalent. He also recommended marketing it differently, calling it “force protection” or other names to remove the stigma associated with gender and feminism that often cause people to turn a deaf ear. Such policy changes could ameliorate the situation, but does the problem run deeper than that?

Gender mainstreaming requires powerful men to listen to women’s concerns. Men who talk about gender too much risk losing their gravitas. In fact, Engelbrekston worried that were he labeled the “gender general”, people would be

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[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603855/EXPO\\_STU\(2017\)603855\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/603855/EXPO_STU(2017)603855_EN.pdf) p. 30.

less receptive to his message. In other words, were the message to 'effeminize' the messenger, he would have less power to persuade others of the importance of gender mainstreaming.

While some countries, such as Sweden that produced Wallstrom, Engelbrekston, and Isaksson, lead on the issue of gender equality and gender mainstreaming, other countries in the EU do not. Moreover, the EU in its attempt to present a powerful image to the world may actually use the idea of man as protector to promote its crisis management, and in doing so, may undermine its living up to the spirit of the UNSCR 1825.

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