

## PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/178013>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2019-01-17 and may be subject to change.



**The Amsterdam Centre for Contemporary European Studies**

**SSRN Research Paper 2017/03**

The merchant and the message:

Hard conditions, soft power and empty vessels as regards gender in EU  
external relations

Anna van der Vleuten

**The merchant and the message:**

**Hard conditions, soft power and empty vessels as regards gender in  
EU external relations**

Anna van der Vleuten

**ACCESS EUROPE Research Paper 2017/03**



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

© Van der Vleuten, 2017  
Anna van der Vleuten  
Professor of Contesting Europeanization, Radboud University  
a.vandervleuten@fm.ru.nl

[www.accesseurope.org](http://www.accesseurope.org)

## **Abstract**

The EU claims to be a normative power which in its external relations acts as a teacher on gender issues. However, in spite of its commitments it does not yet systematically practice what it preaches. Also, the EU does not define but transfers the 'normal' as regards gender equality, based on standard-setting by other international and regional organizations. Finally, the EU does not offer an attractive model to others, who sometimes even have developed stronger gender equality norms than the EU. This can be explained by the constraining effect of the EU identity as market power and the concomitant underlying logic. As a result gender equality is considered marginal to trade and security issues. Typically the EU political arena sidelines feminist actors that seek to transform EU policies, and silences feminist voices from third countries. The paper starts with a plea to take gender issues seriously, and to adopt an intersectional approach.

## **Key words**

EU external relations, gender equality, intersectionality, normative power

## **Introducing the topic and two preliminary comments<sup>1</sup>**

The merchant and the message – these connected concepts will sound familiar to readers who are acquainted with the literature on Dutch foreign policy: *de koopman en de dominee* (Voorhoeve 1979). The merchant and the message; this label also fits the EU as a Market Power which aims to be a Normative Power as well. Is there something wrong with that? I will argue that when it comes to gender equality, the EU is a problematic normative power, because in its external relations it acts as an authoritarian teacher on gender issues, without acknowledging the extent to which its behaviour and teachings are constrained by its identity and concomitant underlying logic as Market Power Europe. As a result, the EU neglects and even harms the interests of people in other, so-called third countries because it limits gender equality to concerns about women's liberal human rights while turning a blind eye to underlying structural inequalities. Furthermore, it not only claims to determine 'the normal' in international relations, but it does so unilaterally. This contributes to the perception of the EU as a neo-colonial power. The outcome is problematic for the legitimacy as well as the effectiveness of EU's external policies. Of course this is not a premeditated plot, but rather the outcome of underlying logics and power asymmetries. Before we get there, let me first make two preliminary comments about gender and gender equality.

### ***The personal and the political – taking gender seriously***

The first comment is a request to take gender seriously. More than once vice-president of the Commission Frans Timmermans has expressed his commitment to gender equality. He repeatedly has mentioned that he feels worried about his daughters – because of the rise of violence against women and the increase in sex discrimination – and he does not want them to have

---

<sup>1</sup> This working paper is based on a keynote speech given at the workshop 'Transforming Gender Relations in the Word? Gender and Intersectionality in the European Union's External Relations', ACCESS Europe, Amsterdam, 11-12 May 2017. I thank the conveners of the workshop, Hanna Muehlenhoff and Nathalie Welfens, for their invitation and the organization of an excellent workshop.

to fight the same battles as their grandmothers.<sup>2</sup> He clearly considers gender equality and women's human rights to be important issues which the EU should tackle urgently for social, economic and moral reasons. Indeed, Timmermans honours the Dutch tradition of the preacher, the *dominee*. Although I applaud his commitment and I do not doubt the sincerity of his concerns, his statements also allow me to make the point that there seems to be something peculiar about gender issues and politics: time and again the relevance – or irrelevance – of gender equality policies is justified in terms of personal observations.

Such arguments have much rhetorical power, of which Timmermans is surely aware, but they also carry risks. Which observation do you take as reference point? In the Netherlands, for instance, it is argued that in 2017 gender equality policies are not necessary anymore because women are free to do what they want, make a career, become the top dog – look at Edith Schippers, Khadija Arib, and Jeanine Hennis.<sup>3</sup> Others argue that gender equality policies only have helped women to get access to male privilege and become like men instead of contributing to structural change (Engelen, 2016); or even that gender equality policies are not desirable because many women (and here one always has some next-door example ready) deliberately and happily choose to be a fulltime or part-time housewife, and should be free to do so. When personal observations are taken as benchmark, the risk is that discussions become based on N=1 and the issue is not taken seriously anymore in the public domain.

Of course 'the personal is political', as used to be the slogan of the women's movement, but it does not mean that the political should be *reduced* to the personal and the individual. Yet, this reduction seems to slide into our thinking so easily, perhaps because we all have some gender awareness. In

---

<sup>2</sup> Speech by First Vice President Timmermans at the Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment - New York, 27/09/2015:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/timmermans/announcements/speech-first-vice-president-timmermans-global-leaders-meeting-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/timmermans/announcements/speech-first-vice-president-timmermans-global-leaders-meeting-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment_en)

<sup>3</sup> Three successful Dutch female politicians, respectively Health Minister, Chair of the Second Chamber of the Dutch parliament, and Defence Minister.

that respect, discussions related to gender and gender equality policies differ from, let's say, discussions about fishing and fishery policies: we do not all identify as fishers, actually, most of us do not; but we all identify as female, male, or non-binary. We all have a gender identity or some gender identities. Is this the reason why it is so difficult to take gender issues seriously? When I discuss feminist theories of international relations, students start to giggle. They never do so when they are confronted with the balance of threat or cultures of anarchy. But try to present *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, a feminist international relations classic by Cynthia Enloe (1990), and they giggle.

Not only students, also academics seem to have trouble taking gender seriously. The examples abound, but allow me to tell you one of my favourites. Economic historian Alan Milward, in his detailed and well-documented account of the European integration process, casually argued that in October 1956 equal pay between women and men could be settled because 'no country dared object to the inclusion in the treaty of a promise to legislate for equal pay for the sexes' (Milward 1992, 214). In the EU archives in Florence I studied the original documents of the negotiations eventually leading to the Treaties of Rome. I can assure you; Milward is wrong. At the meeting in Paris, October 20, 1956, two out of six countries strongly objected (Van der Vleuten 2007). Really annoying is his formulation that 'no country dared object'. Why wouldn't they *dare*? Milward projects some kind of emotion on the negotiations between the six (male) negotiators, apparently assuming that this further undocumented emotion convincingly explains the adoption of the equal pay principle in the treaty for the establishment of a common market.

So indeed, the personal is political, and personal emotions and experiences motivate our commitment to a cause, whether climate change, peace – or equal pay, for that matter; but that does not suffice as an explanation for the adoption of far reaching policies. When moving to the domain of academic research, we need to think in terms of structure and agency, and investigate how structural power relations enable and constrain actors, how actors

reproduce these structural power relations and under which conditions their practices may enable change. Let us take our emotions seriously but, especially when gender issues are involved, move to a higher level of abstraction and be a researcher aware and reflective of, but not reduced to our personal experience.

### ***Gender equality is about women and men***

A second preliminary comment regards the observation that gender equality policies are time and again focused on women and men. Women come first, and men second. For instance, the EU has developed a plan on the work life balance so (quote Timmermans) ‘female talent is not wasted’ and ‘men get a real chance to be with their children’.<sup>4</sup> Gender equality seems to be about women and men, as two separate categories of human beings who sometimes are treated differently in similar situations, which has to be remedied; or who are essentially different and therefore they *should* be treated differently and will live different lives. For starters, gender equality is indeed about women and men, but there is more to it. Policymakers and politicians should acknowledge in a more consistent way that women and men do not constitute two homogenous groups. This implies an intersectional approach, in the sense that we take into account race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation and other social identities which overlap or intersect with gender and in their overlap or intersection become sources of privilege, domination, discrimination and oppression (see Crenshaw 1991).

Furthermore, we should question the connections between sex, body and gender; we should analyse how masculinity and femininity are constituted and how practices of hegemonic masculinity legitimize men’s dominant position in society and justify the subordination of women as well as the marginalization of other masculinities (see Connell 1995). Some might consider this far-fetched theorizing which is unhelpful for analysing EU external relations. However, high quality feminist research is available which

---

<sup>4</sup> Statement of First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioners Thyssen and Jourová on European Equal Pay Day. Brussels, 31 October 2016: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_STATEMENT-16-3578\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-16-3578_en.htm)

shows how an intersectional lens and a critical approach can shed light on policymaking. For instance, in two large comparative projects on gender equality policies in the EU and EU member states, critical frame analysis was developed and applied.<sup>5</sup> They show how problem definitions (diagnosis) influence solutions (prognosis), how it matters who has voice and who is silenced, who is supposed to act and who is acted upon. If policymakers equate gender inequality with 'women (as a single group)/men (as a single group) have a problem/are the problem/are the victim', without questioning how the underlying structure of hegemonic masculinity constrains agency, well-intended gender equality policies might remain ineffective or even counter-productive.

Summarizing the argument, two points will inform my talk: first, academics should take gender issues seriously; and, second, gender equality policies is not about equal treatment of the categories 'women' and 'men', but about the transformation of hegemonic masculinity and the transformation of gendered power relations. This talk will now turn to an elaboration of some pitfalls of the EU as 'a merchant with a message on gender equality'.

### **The EU as world leader in gender equality and LGBT rights**

The EU claims to be a world leader when it comes to promoting women's human rights, lesbian gay and trans (LGBT) rights and gender equality (Woodward and Van der Vleuten 2014). This claim is based on its idea of being a role model given its own policies on gender equality, and it exercises this leadership through different instruments including the conditionality on the gender *acquis* applied to candidate countries (Peto and Manners 2006); references to gender mainstreaming in European Partnership Agreements (Van der Vleuten and Hulse 2014); and financial support to third countries for projects promoting gender equality (Debusscher 2014).

This claim to world leadership on gender equality fits with its wider claims to be a unique actor in world affairs. The EU cultivates and cherishes its

---

<sup>5</sup> MAGEEQ, <http://www.mageeq.net/>; QUING, <http://www.quing.eu/>.

reputation as norm promoter, because this adds to its power position (Van der Vleuten and Van Eerdewijk 2014). To be a preacher pays off in the global arena, especially when the actor lacks military capabilities. We all know how the EU, 60 years after its birth, still is an 'economic giant, a political dwarf, and a military worm', to quote Belgium's former Foreign Minister, Mark Eyskens. Its economic power as the biggest market and trade bloc in the world stands out, and it is complemented by its so-called 'soft power': its attractiveness as a zone of peace, stability and prosperity. Based on its economic power and its soft power, the EU aims to act as normative power by exporting democracy, rule of law, good governance and human rights, for instance to former Eastern and Central European countries, to its so-called neighbourhood to the South-East and around the Mediterranean, and to its former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. I propose to take a closer look at EU's exercise of so-called normative power in gender issues.

### ***The EU 'defining the normal' as regards gender issues***

When we connect the concept of Normative Power Europe with literature on the external perception of the EU (Chaban et al. 2013; Lucarelli 2014), we cannot but notice how the arrogance on EU side seems to blind it for practices in third countries, taking its own 'model' as the better one, and dismissing contestation as ill-placed. Instead of seeing the process of norm diffusion as one of reciprocal norm-making, the EU considers it to be an exercise of norm transfer, of norm sending: as an authoritarian teacher telling her pupils what to think. Of course we all know the concept of Normative Power Europe, which Ian Manners coined in his much-quoted article in the *Journal of Common Market Studies* (2002). The label refers to 'its ability to shape conceptions of "normal" in international relations' because of its normative distinctiveness (Manners 2002: 239). One has such power when one's norms are attractive to others to such an extent that they are emulated by them, or when one is able to impose norms through conditionality or in exchange for a favour.

Rather than discuss EU attractiveness as a role model in general, I propose to look more specifically at gender equality and ask three questions:

1. Does the EU practice what it preaches and has it indeed gender

mainstreamed its external policies?

2. Does the EU indeed 'define the normal' as regards gender equality in international politics? And finally,
3. Does the EU offer an attractive model to others?

To start with the first question, does the EU practice what it preaches? Over the past few years, this question has been investigated for EU development policies (Allwood 2013; Debusscher 2014), security policies (Davis and Guerrina 2013) and trade policies (Garcia and Masselot 2015; Van der Vleuten forthcoming). Summarizing the results, gender blindness still seems to characterize EU external policies (Allwood, Guerrina and MacRae 2013). Has nothing changed in recent years? Let us check the Africa-EU partnership as one of the key areas of EU external relations. Its objectives were defined as 'Enhancing strategic dialogue on common and global issues such as climate change, environment and natural resource management issues, irregular migration, terrorism and transnational crime and illicit financial flows' (The Africa-EU Partnership 2017). Gender was not mentioned as a specific objective nor as a cross-cutting issue, although all these so-called common issues clearly were gendered. Yet, in June 2017 the Council of the EU has adopted a document which is definitely more in line with its ambitions. In this so-called 'Renewed Impetus for the Africa-EU Partnership', the EU formulates its main objectives as a stronger mutual political commitment, security and economic development (Council 2017). The brief elaboration (the document counts nine pages in total) contains references to gender equality for each objective, as the EU 'acknowledges the role of women in the work on peace and security', 'underlines that resilient societies are inclusive societies', 'underlines the need for further efforts to eliminate gender-based violence', 'emphasises the importance of increasing investments in inclusive quality education and training at all levels' and strongly supports the investment in and the modernisation of African agriculture and agrobusiness, including small-scale food producers, in particular female and family farmers' (Council 2017). For the time being, we may conclude that the EU has started to include attention to gender in its external policies, but that it does not yet systematically practice what it preaches.

Turning to the second question, is the EU indeed able ‘to shape conceptions of what the “normal” is’ (Manners 2002, 239-40) as regards gender equality in international politics? In 2015 the Council of the EU has endorsed the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (GAP) which aims at [I quote the title] *Transforming the Lives of Girls and Women through EU External Relations* (Council 2015). Without going into detail here,<sup>6</sup> let me say that the plan offers strong commitments, an overarching vision and a gender mainstreaming effort which translates into extensive check lists. The EU bases the Gender Action Plan and its external policies on gender equality on standard-setting by global organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, the ILO, the OECD, and the Council of Europe, especially its Istanbul Convention on violence against women and domestic violence (Council of the EU 2015; Council of Europe 2011). In fact, the EU clearly is not so much of a norm *setter*, and less so than one would expect from a normative power. Nevertheless, it stands out as the only regional organization which pursues explicitly normative aims beyond the borders of its own region. As a result, we argue that the EU does not *define* but *transfers* or diffuses the ‘normal’ as regards gender equality in international politics.

Finally, as regards the third question, we want to know whether the EU’s model of gender equality is attractive to others, which is a precondition for being able to act effectively as a Normative Power. Of course, in EU policy documents we do not find contestation or contrasting voices, or any voice of the Other, for that matter. Therefore we turn to the literature on the perception of the EU by others. The *mission civilisatrice* of the EU is not received and viewed with a positive eye everywhere. Research into the perception of the EU abroad (Chaban et al. 2013; Lucarelli 2014) shows that the perceptions of the EU are issue-specific and differ in different parts of the world, but the predominant view is one of the EU as an economic giant. In his

---

<sup>6</sup> See papers presented by Gill Allwood, Friederike Beier and Hanna L. Muehlenhoff at the workshop Transforming Gender Relations in the Word? Gender and Intersectionality in the European Union’s External Relations, University of Amsterdam, 11-12 May 2017, <https://www.accesseurope.org/images/jevents/files/58f8afb66ad483.26705722.pdf>.

overview of the findings from different research projects, Larsen argues that the image of the EU takes three forms:

‘The first presents the EU as a partner with no special normative status. The second sees the EU as a self-declared promoter of legitimate norms, but views this as an attempt by the EU and its former colonial powers to reintroduce neo-colonial control. A third sees the EU as a power that attempts to further its own norms rather than universal norms’ (Larsen 2014, 905).

There is a large and ever expanding body of literature on the perception of the EU abroad, but, unfortunately, it does not unpack the perception of EU more specifically as promoter of gender equality norms. As far as the EU is associated with universal values, it is about human rights, democracy, good governance and rule of law; these four concepts are all clearly gendered but they are not discussed as such in this strand of literature. On the other hand, feminist researchers have not (yet) studied the question in a large scale comparative way similar to Chaban et al. (2013).

Fortunately some single case studies offer some indications as regards the attractiveness of the EU as a role model on gender equality. In our project called *Granddeur* (Gender and Regional Norm Diffusion: Debunking Eurocentrism) we found for instance that norms on gender-based violence in the Gender Protocol of the Southern African Development Community are not based on EU policy documents but on the so-called Maputo Protocol,<sup>7</sup> because, as an interviewee from *Gender Links* – a Southern African feminist organization – claimed, ‘It came from here. It came from us’ (Van Eerdewijk and Van de Sand 2014: 211). This is an important aspect as regards the legitimacy and, concomitantly, the effectiveness of EU external relations. The perception of the EU as a neo-colonial power plays against it when it comes to the diffusion of gender equality norms, because it gives ammunition to those who are looking for an argument to refuse these norms as being ‘not adapted to the non-European context’, and it weakens the position of those ‘local’ actors who support these or similar norms. This is particularly problematic in Africa, Asia, and the Arab world, but also in Russia and China,

---

<sup>7</sup> The full name is *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (African Union 2011), [http://www.achpr.org/files/instruments/women-protocol/achpr\\_instr\\_proto\\_women\\_eng.pdf](http://www.achpr.org/files/instruments/women-protocol/achpr_instr_proto_women_eng.pdf) (accessed August 16, 2017).

for instance.

In addition, sometimes EU norms in the field of gender equality are not the strongest ones available, as is the case when one compares the holistic vision on gender-based violence enshrined in the Maputo Protocol of the African Union and the SADC Gender Protocol with EU policies on gender-based violence. Still, the EU continues to be cast in its role as norm-setter rather than norm-taker, while the AU and SADC are never referred to in terms of normative power. This asymmetry in the perception by the EU of its normative power and its perception by others, as well as the perception of others as not being a normative power reflects power asymmetries between the EU and others. It results in an absence of reciprocity, both in the soft way in the sense of mutual learning, and in the hard way, in the sense of mutual conditionality. Instead, we see one-way teaching and one-way conditionality.<sup>8</sup>

A key sentence in the new GAP is that the EU wants ‘women and girls’ to have voice – but it is meant to be a voice in *their* national context, not as part of a joint policymaking process. This explains why NPE stands in the eyes of many for Neo-colonial Power Europe, and where disappointment on both sides becomes predictable; disappointment on the side of Other that their knowledge and experiences are not taken seriously, their voices silenced, their problem definitions not adopted let alone their proposed solutions. As a result, opposition to implementation can always be justified by saying that ‘This is not appropriate for us’, or ‘This has been imposed by the EU/the West’ or ‘This does not fit our norms and values’. And disappointment on the EU side because its norms – which it considers to be liberal ‘global’ norms – are contested, and implementation is less successful than hoped for.

---

<sup>8</sup> Last year I experienced this pattern of non-reciprocity, when I participated in a workshop on gender in the relations between the EU and the League of Arab States. The workshop’s objectives were mutual learning and sharing of knowledge between officials and experts from the EU and the Arab region. However, reality had it that the input from the Arab side fell on barren ground as the senior representatives of the Commission left after their five minute welcome speech, when the real work started. Some juniors stayed behind. One of the high-ranked officials from the Arab region told me that this is what happens time and again in such meetings: there is no senior presence from the EU, and the officials who are there are new each time, so there is no cumulative build-up of shared knowledge. She felt frustrated and silenced.

Let us look more into detail what norms the EU is able to export.

### **Which gender equality norms? Logics and actors**

Here I will argue that the EU promotes a specific set of gender equality norms for external use; that its legitimacy and effectiveness are undermined by the gendered norms it promotes as part of its Market Power; that uncovering the underlying logics helps understand what happens – and that change is not easy because of the ways in which logics (dis)empower certain actors (Roggeband, van Eerdewijk and Van der Vleuten 2014).

#### ***Logics of EU governance***

Obviously, the promotion of policies and norms is not a linear process. It is influenced by the compatibility of the underlying logic of such policies and norms with the logic of governance by the EU. I will first elaborate on the logics of EU governance and then move to the logics of gender equality norms and policy domains.

The EU is part of a system of regional governance situated between the global and the national level, of the same category as regional organizations such as ASEAN, UNASUR, ALBA, ECOWAS, COMESA and SADC in other parts of the world. State and non-state actors have developed regional governance as a political reaction to economic and financial globalization and/or region-wide violence and insecurity, in order to manage cross-border problems and strengthen their position in the world economy and in international politics. In this respect regional organizations are similar. However, they differ as to the identity which constructs their region, and the mission which was formulated when the organization was established. Its identity enables and constrains the activities of an organization and opens up or restrains the access for different actors. It thus favours or hinders the development of certain policies and actor constellations.

Zooming in on the EU, I have argued elsewhere that the identity of the EU

and of its predecessors, the European Communities, is based on the reconciliation of France and Germany, and on economic integration as a means of locking-in this reconciliation (Van der Vleuten 2007). This identity was enshrined in two ways: first, institutionally, to ensure formal equality between France and Germany, no matter what their actual power relations were; and second, to make the political project of reconciliation the outcome of the economic project. The economic project was institutionalized as a common market, as an open space which would enable all interested actors to contribute to peace and prosperity of the region. In order to shape this open space as a level playing field, all EU policies are based heavily on deregulation at the national level, and the removal of barriers to free movement of goods, services, capital and people (which often requires regulation at the supranational level), aimed at creating a single market, not a welfare state (Leibfried and Pierson 1995).

This market-oriented logic influences the power relations between the actors involved. For instance, it requires the member states to gear their policies towards improving the functioning of the market and thereby strengthens the hand of economic actors capable of benefitting from a common market. Social policies are interventionist, by nature, aiming at intervening in the market and redressing power relations between workers and non-workers, and between workers and employers. In the EU they are merely add-ons that are pursued as far as they are necessary to legitimize market integration policies and better prepare workers for economic integration (Barnard and Deakin 2012; Scharpf 2002). In April 2017, for instance, the European Commission, squeezed between the rise of euro scepticism and the market-induced need for austerity policies, has proposed a social pillar.<sup>9</sup> Yet, such a social pillar has to fit the market integration logic underlying the EU and therefore will be biased and limited from the outset. Also EU gender equality policies have to be justified in terms of the logic of the level playing field: non-discrimination in the labour market, preventing unfair competition, strengthening the economic position of the EU ('not waste female talent', as

---

<sup>9</sup> European Commission 26 April 2017, 'Press release. Commission presents the European Pillar of Social Rights', [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-17-1007\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1007_en.htm).

Timmermans aptly called it).<sup>10</sup> This is Market Power Europe at work.

However, it is not the full story (see Table 1). Peculiar about the EU is its 'secondary identity' which is rooted in the mission and the success of the original political project: reconciliation between France and Germany. The mission got a dynamic of its own after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. From then on the EU gradually developed an additional identity to its common market identity, in order to reap the benefits of its position as a stable and prosperous community of states. This was the attractive model a would-be Normative Power needs. The EU was an attractive model for the neighbouring post-communist states. In the 1990s, in order to stabilize the unstable neighbourhood and strengthen its power position, the EU developed a second identity, based on its opposition to totalitarian regimes and on the promotion of human rights, good governance and democracy in third countries. Its new mission was codified in the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997,<sup>11</sup> and it enabled the inclusion of democratic conditionality, good governance clauses and anti-discrimination requirements in accession treaties, development policies and trade agreements. However, the new mission has not replaced the older one, as economic power is the main asset of the EU and neoliberal-style market integration remains the predominant logic. As a result, human rights instruments are mainly non-binding, except for candidate countries, and they are mainly addressed at third countries rather than applied to the EU internally (Van der Vleuten and Ribeiro Hoffmann 2010).

---

<sup>10</sup> European Commission, 31 October 2016, 'Statement of First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioners Thyssen and Jourová on European Equal Pay Day', [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_STATEMENT-16-3578\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-16-3578_en.htm).

<sup>11</sup> 'New Article F: "The Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States... Article F.1. 1. The Council... may determine the existence of a serious and persistent breach by a Member State of principles mentioned in Article F(1), after inviting the government of the Member State in question to submit its observations. 2. Where such a determination has been made, the Council, acting by a qualified majority, may decide to suspend certain of the rights deriving from the application of this Treaty to the Member State in question, including the voting rights of the representative of the government of that Member State in the Council'. (1997, Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/treaty/pdf/amst-en.pdf>).

**Table 1. The Identity, Mission and Logics of the EU**

	<b>EC/EU until 1997</b>	<b>EU since 1997</b>
<b>Identity: what the organization opposes</b>	Second World War	Communism, fascism, totalitarianism
<b>Mission</b>	Transcend Franco-German enmity, reconciliation	Stabilize neighbourhood Consolidate democracy and human rights
<b>Means</b>	Market integration	Conditionality, market integration
<b>Logic market/state</b>	Non-interventionist	Non-interventionist in the EU, interventionist outside
<b>Gender equality framed as</b>	Non-discrimination in the labour market to prevent unfair competition	Human right

To illustrate this point: *within* the EU, fighting gender-based violence has remained the domain of the member states. At EU level, it has taken shape in non-binding instruments and project support (Elman 2007). Yet, in its external relations, the EU positions itself as a role model in fighting gender-based violence (Woodward and Van der Vleuten 2014). Interestingly, the EU does not want to learn from regional organizations which fare better in this domain and have adopted far-reaching legally binding instruments such as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (1994) of the Organization of American States (OAS); the Maputo Protocol (2003) of the African Union (AU) and the binding Gender Protocol of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Roggeband 2014; Van Eerdewijk and Van de Sand 2014).

Another illustration of the secondary place of EU's human rights identity as well as its out-bound character is the fact that within the EU, discrimination of lesbian, gay and transgender persons can be addressed only as long as it relates to the labour market (pension rights, dismissal, social security entitlements). There is no possibility to deal with other dimensions of discrimination, such as the gender reassignment issues transgenders face, for

lack of an appropriate treaty base. However, in its dealings with third countries the EU preaches respect for LGBT rights as if it has its own affairs in order (Kennel 2016).

Given the double identity of the EU, of which the logic of market integration remains the dominant one, it is no surprise that in its external relations the EU combines positive incentives (such as access to the EU market and project financing) with the removal of obstacles for free movement of all kinds and binding regulations when they are required for the sake of 'fair' competition. The merchant first, the preacher second, unless preaching serves market-based interests (stability, accountability) required for Foreign Direct Investment, or prevents the spill over of insecurity and violence from outside the EU to border regions and member states.

The perspective of enabling and constraining logics may help us to understand how difficult it is to 'gender' EU external relations. To gender, or to gender mainstream, means to apply a strategy which has a transformative logic: it challenges the existing gender order and aims to redress gendered power asymmetries between and among women and men – in an intersectional way (Squires 2005). For that reason, gender mainstreaming is based arguably upon an interventionist logic: the state is supposed to promulgate an obligation to include gender concerns in all policy-making processes and outcomes, including market-making policies, and take all sorts of measures to realize it (Table 2). The non-interventionist logic of market power EU clearly does not match the interventionist logic of gender mainstreaming, even more so because gender mainstreaming does not aim at opening up a new policy domain, but operates in existing terrain (Roggeband et al. 2014). As a result, the incompatibility of the logics of governance operating in that terrain undermines the transformative promise of gender mainstreaming: even though gender concerns are addressed, gender mainstreaming will be articulated only on the side-lines, in a mainly symbolic 'checklist' way.

**Table 2. Logics of policies**

	<b>Aims EU</b>	<b>Logic</b>
Gender mainstreaming	Transform gender relations	Interventionist: state intervention in the market
Trade liberalisation	Eliminate trade barriers	Non-interventionist: reduction of state intervention in the market
Development aid	Promote human rights, reduce poverty, enable access to the world market	Interventionist/non-interventionist
Security and defence	Create and maintain a cooperative world order	Interventionist

Looking at EU external relations, the transformative logic of gender mainstreaming contrasts sharply with the logic of trade liberalisation. Whereas gender mainstreaming requires heavy policy intervention by the state, the aim of trade liberalisation is actually to reduce the level of state intervention in the market. With their emphasis on eliminating barriers, trade liberalisation policies are, unsurprisingly, based on a non-interventionist logic which seeks to improve the functioning of markets by freeing them of distorting obstacles such as tariff and non-tariff trade barriers. As a result, trade policies tend to confirm and exacerbate power asymmetries between the parties involved, because they offer opportunities ‘equal to all’ which however are easier accessed, seized and exploited by those states, businesses and individuals which have more capital, knowledge and other resources than others. For that reason, feminist economists argue that the ideology underlying trade liberalisation and neoliberal economic policies is detrimental to equitable growth, gender equality and the empowerment of women (Benería 2014). A transformative approach to trade policies, meanwhile, would focus on the interrelationship between the formal and informal, between productive and reproductive sectors of the economy, and the distributional consequences of liberalisation across these sectors. As Mariama Williams argues, it would prioritise the elimination of poverty instead of shifting the burden of adjusting to global economic processes to unpaid labour (Williams 2013). To what extent the recent call by the Commission for fair trade in the globalized economy (Commission 2017) will

realize this feminist agenda remains to be seen, because the redistributive and interventionist principles underlying fair trade do not fit the dominant logic. The mismatch of underlying logics helps us to understand the weak presence of gender equality concerns in the trade policies of the EU, and, conversely, the weak presence of trade in the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020.

Fortunately, the development of a secondary identity of the EU with an emphasis on human rights issues, even though especially for external use, has created an opening which might enable actors to put gender mainstreaming on the regional agenda. Here the Gender Action Plan (GAP) fits in. Unfortunately, here a different clash of logics becomes visible. In spite of its broader aims, the GAP is mainly about development policies. Development policies are interventionist by nature and aim to redress power asymmetries between the EU and so-called developing countries by institution-building, state-building and market-making policies. Gendering development policies might seem to be more promising than gendering trade policies. However, the domain of development policies shows an ambivalence as regards its underlying logics because its interventions are mainly aimed at opening up space for a market-oriented logic and they confirm the power asymmetry between the EU as teacher (and paymaster) and the other as pupil. In its policy documents, we see how EU development policies pursue gender equality in instrumental, technocratic frames (counting the number of boys and girls in schools – no matter what they learn there) which are aimed at neoliberal market-oriented economic growth and results-based management (proposing check lists and creating employment for those involved in the ‘development industry’) (Debusscher 2014). As a result, the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming is undermined.

Last but not least, what about EU security and defence policies? Despite being a political dwarf and a military worm, these domains have gained in importance since the end of the Cold War and in spite of member states’ persisting reluctance to hand over sovereignty. In this domain there is a general lack of support for gender focused initiatives; gender issues are considered to be part of human rights and not considered to be a core part of

foreign policy, defence and security policies (David and Guerrina 2013). This is unfortunate, as the interventionist logic of EU security policies, aimed at creating and establishing a cooperative, rules-based world order (European Union 2016: 15), could absorb such policy. At least, spurred by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, a specific program called Women Peace and Security was developed in 2008. Interestingly, there is no program called Men Peace and Security, making tangible how security issues in general are not considered to be gendered, how gender is considered to be marginal to security issues and how gender is reduced to women. The EU is not a norm-setter in this regard but a norm-taker, implementing UNSC resolutions as add-ons to business as usual.

### ***The actor constellations***

A final step in unpacking how logics influence the dynamics of gender mainstreaming in external relations relates to their effects on access for and inclusion of feminist actors in the policy-making arena. Research shows how the commitment of individual Commissioners is crucial in creating openings for access to non-state actors, and creating mandates and filling them with feminist officials (Van der Vleuten 2007). For that reason the importance of vice-presidents Federica Mogherini (heading the EEAS) and Frans Timmermans, who are both outspoken about their commitment to gender equality, should not be underestimated. However, it should not be overestimated either.

The EU as economic giant, with its non-interventionist logic of market integration, has generated an informal hierarchy within the supranational bureaucracy which favours the directorates with expertise in market-oriented domains. As a result DG Trade is very powerful. After the latest rounds of reorganizing it has maintained its autonomous position and has not been absorbed by the EEAS. Unfortunately it has a poor gender-profile. Gender concerns are not considered to be relevant to trade issues and staff is not hired because of their expertise in gender issues (Van der Vleuten forthcoming). The GAP is to be coordinated by DEVCO in cooperation with ECHO and NEAR. In the Commission hierarchy these directorates are not the

most powerful parts of the bureaucracy, as is borne out by regular changes of their denomination and shifts to other parts of the organization. The ‘political dwarf and military worm’ have found an institutional home in the EEAS, a relatively new institution which is still trying to carve out its turf. In spite of Mogherini’s commitment, the institution and its staff are reported not to be gender-sensitive (Horst 2016). The creation of the post of Gender Advisor to the EEAS in 2015 with a staff of two and a seconded expert was an important step to create an entry point for feminist actors – but no more than that (Guerrina and Wright 2016).

The gender sensitivity of the committees in the European Parliament mirrors the gender sensitivity of Directorates General in the Commission. There are personal links between the FEMM committee and the DEVE committee, but not between FEMM and INTA (the Trade Committee) (Van der Vleuten forthcoming). FEMM is not rapporteur for trade issues, which means that there is no institutionalized way to take gender issues into account in EP debates on trade policies. Of course this is not a sexist plot, but it reflects the prevailing conviction that gender issues are marginal to EU core business. In the domain of security, however, FEMM and the committee on Security and Defence (SEDE) cooperate on a regular basis, most notably on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security (Guerrina and Wright 2016).

Now, assessing access of feminist actors to EU policymaking in external relations, we notice three structural patterns. First, the dominant logic of market integration side-lines feminist actors that seek to transform trade policies. The ideas these actors promote do not fit the dominant logic, and therefore they will not gain entrance to the central policy arena; their ‘counter-perspective’ can be easily side-lined by dominant actors as irrelevant. Non-state actors who enjoy access to EU trade negotiations with third countries are business associations whose aims fit the dominant logic, not feminist representatives of third countries, workers, or civil society. Second, in the domain of development aid, non-state actors such as NGOs have access – but to the extent that they are feminist, they are predominately

European. Feminist voices from third countries are not heard. The NPE label with its non-reciprocity unfortunately is also applicable to non-state relations. Third, in the domain of security, the intergovernmental character limits influence for feminist actors in the EU arena, but the UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security agenda has created openings in the margins of core security policies.

### **By way of conclusion**

I started by discussing the personal and the political in politics and academia. Let me take this one step further to our role as feminist academics. For the record, a feminist researcher is not necessarily female, but a person identifying male or female or non-binary, who is self-reflective as regards their privileges and bias (which may come from their western background, their heterosexuality, their whiteness, their position in academia, their male sex and body). This awareness combined with the aim to provide theories and tools for understanding the situation and contribute to change by providing us with a better understanding of the conditions for change, are key to a feminist research agenda. A feminist researcher will theorize change and continuity, as well as act as ally to those actors who want to promote change within and outside the institutions, within and outside the EU, and create velvet triangles (Woodward 2003) and pentangles (Roggeband 2010).

When looking at our tool box, there are promising tools available. In an edited volume on gendering European integration theories (Abels and MacRae, 2016), the authors show how gendered lenses help to ask different research questions and how they enable to systematically address gender when analysing aspects of European integration, European institutions and institution-building, and European policymaking. They also show how gendering means the identification of often invisible, ostensibly gender-neutral and disembodied conventions, norms and institutional practices as male-centred (see also feminist institutionalism, MacRae and Weiner 2017). These tools will be relevant if we want to understand the perception of the EU as promoter of gender equality; the gendered character of Normative Power Europe; the contestation as regards gender equality by conservative groups

within and outside the EU; and the haphazard ways in which the EU addresses gender in external relations in spite of its big statements and commitments.

So here we are, May 2017, the EU weakened by increased disparity due to the British decision to start Article 50 negotiations, the aftermath of the financial crisis and the austerity policies, and the rise of authoritarian, anti-liberal governments within the EU and at its borders. In addition, the EU features several governments who play tied hands, especially where elections are coming up, because of the rise of Eurosceptic populist parties. And finally, the EU is facing unpredictable or authoritarian presidents in the United States, Russia, and Turkey, as well as violent extremism inside and outside its territory. In this situation, one might doubt the relevance of a feminist academic tool box. Yet, precisely against this turbulent background, it enables us to show how gender equality is not a luxury add-on, something which will be dealt with in the margins after all really important issues have been solved. It enables us to unpack contestations of gender equality and gender norms which are at the heart of all issues just mentioned because 'toxic masculinity' seems to dominate the political arenas in the West and the (Middle) East. It enables the EU to start taking gender equality seriously, informed by feminist voices from inside and outside, from activists and academics, in order to become a merchant who sells credible messages.

### **Reference list**

Abels, G. & MacRae, H. (Eds) (2016) *Gendering European Integration Theory. Engaging new Dialogues*, Opladen Berlin Toronto: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Allwood, G. (2013) 'Gender mainstreaming and policy coherence for development: Unintended gender consequences and EU policy', *Women's Studies International Forum* 39, July–August, 42-52.

Allwood, G., Guerrina, R. & MacRae, H. (2013) 'Unintended consequences of

EU policies: Reintegrating gender in European studies', *Women's Studies International Forum* 39, July–August, 1-2.

Barnard, C. & Deakin, S. (2012) Social Policy and Labor Market Regulation, in: E. Jones, A. Menon and S. Weatherill (Eds) *The Oxford Handbook of The European Union*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 542-555.

Benería, L. (2014) Neoliberalism and the Global Economic Crisis: a View from Feminist Economics, in: C. Verschuur, I. Guérin, H. Guétat-Bernard (Eds) *Under Development: Gender*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 257-287.

Chaban, N., Elgström, O., Kelly, S. & Yi, L.S. (2013), 'Images of the EU beyond its Borders: Issue-Specific and Regional Perceptions of European Union Power and Leadership', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51: 433–451.

Commission (2017) Reflection Paper on Harnessing Globalisation, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-globalisation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-globalisation_en.pdf), accessed on September 22, 2017.

Connell, R. (1995) *Masculinities*. Cambridge, Polity Press; Sydney, Allen & Unwin; Berkeley, University of California Press. Second edition, 2005.

Council of Europe (2011) Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, <https://rm.coe.int/168046031c>, accessed on August 16, 2017

Council of the EU (2008), Comprehensive approach to the EU implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on Women, Peace and Security, [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/features/features-working-women/working-with-women/docs/01-eu-comprehensive-approach-1325\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/features/features-working-women/working-with-women/docs/01-eu-comprehensive-approach-1325_en.pdf) , accessed

on September 22, 2017.

Council of the EU (2015) Council Conclusions on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020, 26 October, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/10/26-fac-conclusions-gender-development/> accessed on September 22, 2017.

Council of the EU (2017) Renewed Impetus for the Africa-EU Partnership - Council conclusions, 19 June, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/19-conclusions-africa-eu-partnership/>, accessed September 22, 2017.

Crenshaw, K.W. (1991) 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6): 1241–1299.

David, M. & Guerrina, R. (2013) 'Gender and European external relations: Dominant discourses and unintended consequences of gender mainstreaming', *Women's Studies International Forum* 39(July): 53–62.

Debusscher, P. (2014) Gender Mainstreaming in EU Development Policy towards Southern Africa and South America, in: A. van der Vleuten et al. (Eds), pp. 93-116.

Elman, R.A. (2007) *Sexual Equality in an Integrated Europe*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Engelen, E. (2016) *De mythe van de gemaakte vrouw. Nieuw licht op het feminisme*, Ambo/Anthos.

Enroe, C. (1990) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases. Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*, University of California Press.

European Union (2016) European Union Global Strategy.  
<http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en>, accessed on September 22, 2017.

Garcia, M. & Masselot, A. (2015) The value of gender equality in EU–Asian trade policy: an assessment of the EU's ability to implement its own legal obligations, in A. Björkdahl, N. Chaban, J. Leslie and A. Masselot (Eds) *Importing EU norms: conceptual frameworks and empirical findings*, London: Springer International, pp. 191-210.

Guerrina, R. & Wright, K.A.M. (2016) 'Gendering Normative Power Europe: lessons of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', *International Affairs* 92(2), 293-312.

Horst, C. (2016) Why EU diplomacy needs more women, *EUObserver*, 27 May, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/133583>, accessed September 22, 2017

Kennel, D. (2016) Between Sisyphus and the Danaïdes? The European Union's Efforts to Promote and Protect the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons in its Eastern Neighbourhood, *EU Diplomacy papers*, College of Europe, 4/2016, <https://www.coleurope.eu/study/eu-international-relations-and-diplomacy-studies/research-activities/eu-diplomacy-papers>, accessed September 22, 2017.

Larsen, H. (2014). The EU as a Normative Power and the Research on External Perceptions: the Missing Link, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52(4), 896-910

Leibfried, S. & Pierson, P. (Eds) (1995) *European Social Policy. Between Fragmentation and Integration*, Washington DC: The Brookings Institution.

Lucarelli, S. (2014) 'Seen from the Outside: The State of the Art on the External Image of the EU', *Journal of European Integration* 36(1), 1-16.

MacRae, H. & Weiner, E. (Eds) (2017) *Towards Gendering Institutionalism. Equality in Europe*, London/New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Manners, I. (2002) 'Normative Power Europe. A contradiction in terms?', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(2), 235–258.

Milward, A. (1992) *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, Oxon: Routledge.

Peto, A. & Manners, I. (2006) The European Union and the value of gender equality. In: S. Lucarelli and I. Manners (Eds) *Values and Principles in European Union Foreign Policy*. London: Routledge, pp. 97–113.

Roggeband, C. (2010), 'Double Triangles: How the Transnationalization of Gender Politics Affects Feminist Cooperative Constellations', Paper presented at the 51st Annual Convention of the International Studies Association (ISA) in New Orleans, 17-20 February.

Roggeband C. (2014) Latin American Advocacy on Violence against Women and the OAS Convention, in: A. van der Vleuten et al. (Eds), pp. 139-164.

Roggeband C., Eerdewijk, A. van & Vleuten, A. van der (2014) Reconceptualizing Gender Equality Norm Diffusion and Regional Governance: Logics and Geometries, in: A. van der Vleuten et al. (Eds), pp. 221-246.

Scharpf, F. (2002), 'The European Social Model', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(4), pp. 645–70.

Squires, J. (2005) 'Is Mainstreaming Transformative? Theorizing Mainstreaming in the Context of Diversity and Deliberation', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 12(3), 366–388.

The Africa-EU Partnership (2017) *Global and Emerging Issues*,

<http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org/en/priority-areas/global-and-emerging-issues>, accessed on May 10, 2017.

Vleuten, A. van der (2007) *The Price of Gender Equality. Member States and Governance in the European Union*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

Vleuten, A. van der (forthcoming) The conflicting logics of regionalism and gender mainstreaming: EU trade agreements with Southern Africa, in: Th. Kruesmann and A. Ziegerhofer (Eds), *Promoting Gender Equality Abroad: An Assessment of EU Action in the External Dimension*, Münster: LIT-Verlag, pp. 94-116.

Vleuten, A. van der & Hulse, M. (2014) Gender Mainstreaming in SADC and SADC-EU Trade Relations, in: A. van der Vleuten et al. (Eds) pp. 165-192.

Vleuten, A. van der, Eerdewijk, A. van & Roggeband, C. (Eds) *Gender Equality Norms in Regional Governance. Transnational Dynamics in Europe, South America and Southern Africa*, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.

Vleuten, A. van der & Ribeiro Hoffmann, A. (2010) 'Explaining the Enforcement of Democracy by Regional Organizations: Comparing EU, Mercosur and SADC', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48(3), 737–758.

Eerdewijk, A. van & Van de Sand (2014) Violence against Women and Southern African Advocacy on the SADC Gender Protocol, in: A. van der Vleuten et al. (Eds) pp. 193-217.

Voorhoeve, J.C. (1979) *Peace, profits and principles; a study of Dutch foreign policy*, The Hague: Nijhoff.

Walby, S. (2004) 'The European Union and Gender Equality: Emergent Varieties of Gender Regime', *Social Politics* 11:1, 4-29.

Williams, M. (2013), A Perspective on Feminist International Organizing from the Bottom Up: The Case of IGTN and the WTO, in G. Caglar, E. Prügl and S. Zwingel (Eds.), *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*, London/ New York: Routledge, pp. 92-108.

Woodward, A.E. (2003), 'Building Velvet Triangles: Gender and Informal Governance', in T. Christiansen and S. Piattoni (eds.), *Informal Governance in the European Union*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, pp. 76-93.

Woodward, A. & A. van der Vleuten (2014) EU and the Export of Gender Equality Norms, in A. van der Vleuten et al. (Eds), pp. 67-92.