Fish Fingers and Measles? Assessing Complex Gender Equality in the Scenarios for the Future of Europe[†]

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Abstract

In 2017, at a time when the EU was experiencing a triple crisis, the European Commission published a White Paper containing five scenarios outlining potential ways out of it. In his State of the Union address Commission President Juncker added a sixth. Although the Commission refers to fundamental values it neglects gender equality and reduces equality to the harmonization of the quantity of fish in fish fingers and EU-wide access to vaccination against measles. Despite the neglect of gender equality, the scenarios are not gender neutral. A feminist institutionalist analysis unpacks the potential direct and indirect positive and negative gendered consequences of each scenario and illuminates how the choice of scenario makes a difference as to their gendered impacts and as to the access for feminist actors to bring gender issues to the table.

Keywords: European Commission; gender equality; White Paper; feminist institutionalism; impact assessment; crisis

Since 2008 the EU has been struggling with several crises simultaneously and seems to be in a state of malaise. The financial crisis starting in the USA hit the eurozone hard and turned into a public debt crisis, placing some countries on the brink of collapse. The EU responded with austerity policies, which for people in Greece and elsewhere caused employment losses and pension cuts. Since 2010, the sudden increase in the number of refugees trying to enter the EU and the inadequacy of EU policies to govern migration triggered another crisis. Murderous attacks in Paris, Nice, Brussels and Berlin convinced many Europeans that the EU was unable to defend their interests properly. Anger and fear found an outlet in support for extremist and eurosceptic parties. This so-called legitimacy crisis culminated in the UK in the referendum on 23 June 2016, when the majority of voters opted for Brexit. While the crises already constituted a push for change, the British decision made reflection on EU integration imperative. Thus, it constituted a critical juncture; an event provoking the destabilization of institutions (Waylen, 2009, p. 249).

Against this turbulent background, in March 2017 the European Commission published a long-awaited proposal for renewing the EU; the White Paper 'The future of Europe – Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025' (European Commission, 2017a). It proposed five scenarios as possible paths for the EU integration process, which were elaborated in five reflection papers (European Commission, 2017c–2017g). In his 'State of the Union 2017' address, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker proudly

added a sixth, a 'personal' scenario (European Commission, 2017b). Strikingly, the scenarios do not address the issue of gender equality, 'as if gender were not relevant to them' (Walby, 2018, p. 316). In the sixth scenario, equality tout court is addressed in internal market terms as a problem of differing quantities of fish in fish fingers and unequal access to measles vaccines (European Commission, 2017b). Of course, given the open, 'thought-provoking' character of the White Paper and its limited length, other themes are also poorly elaborated, such as research and development, sustainability, climate change and digitalization, but the absence of gender equality merits special attention for several reasons.

Firstly, since the entry into force of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1999, the EU is simply obliged to take into account gender effects of all its activities.[1] Secondly, the triple crisis has clear gendered dimensions that undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of future EU policies if they are not addressed. Austerity policies have hit men and women differently, depending on national gender regimes and the gender segregation of employment (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Karamessini and Rubery, 2014; Walby, 2015). Not only are women more likely to be in precarious employment than men, but the reduction of the welfare state also has increased their burden of unpaid household work (Bruff and Wöhl, 2016). Governance of the refugee crisis has been characterized by a security-dominated approach based on stereotyped ideas of masculinity and femininity that constitute male migrants as a threat and female migrants as victims (Freedman, 2017). The widespread lack of confidence in EU governance, known as the legitimacy crisis, has induced far more men than women to vote for eurosceptic radical right parties (Spierings and Zaslove, 2017), as was testified by the Brexit campaign and its aftermath as well (Guerrina and Masselot, 2018). Thirdly, gender equality and non-discrimination are proclaimed as foundational values[2] of the EU. In several member states, however, gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights are threatened by state and non-state actors (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Verloo, 2018). Moreover, the gender equality index shows that gender equality is far from being reached and in 2017, 12 member states even have regressed.[3] In spite of these compelling reasons for taking gender seriously, the White Paper scenarios are gender-blind. While some feminist scholars would argue that this confirms that EU gender equality policies are being dismantled (Jacquot, 2015, p. 137), even calling it a U-turn (Karamessini and Rubery 2014, p. 333), others claim that the EU gender equality project has always alternated between progress and stagnation (Debusscher and Van der Vleuten, 2017; Weiner and Macrae, 2016). In the light of this discussion, how can we make sense of the six scenarios?

The article has two ambitions; to show empirically how apparently gender-blind policy ideas affect the prospects of gender equality, and to explore theoretically the extent to which a feminist institutionalist lens may be useful for understanding the implications for the gender equality of future plans. We first present our theoretical perspective and formulate questions that guide our empirical analysis. Next, we turn to the scenarios,

[1]Article 3(2), Treaty of Amsterdam: 'In all the activities referred to in this Article, the Community shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women'.
[2]The other foundational values – human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy and the rule of law – are not primary law and we would therefore not necessarily expect their inclusion.
[3]For details see http://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/about. Last accessed 7 May 2018.

focusing first on the problem definition of the White Paper and then on the potential gendered impacts of the solutions it proposes as well as the access they offer to feminist actors. We conclude by tentatively explaining the sidelining of gender equality in the Commission documents.

I. A Feminist Institutionalist Lens

All institutionalists agree that formal and informal institutions matter: they set incentives and disincentives for actor's behaviour (rational institutionalism), constrain actors' choices (historical institutionalism), shape their notions of appropriate conduct (sociological institutionalism) and are internalized (discursive institutionalism) (Weiner and MacRae, 2017). Mainstream institutionalists have engaged extensively with the EU and EU policymaking (for an overview, see Jupille and Caporaso, 1999). However, they have not recognized that gender is 'profoundly entangled in institutions' (Weiner and Macrae, 2017, p. xx). Feminist institutionalism adds an awareness of the gendered nature of institutions and institutionalized power relations to explain how 'formal and informal institutional mechanisms, rules, values, and norms reconstruct and reinforce gender inequality' (MacRae and Weiner, 2017a, p. 208). When referring to gendered effects, feminist institutionalism analyses how an institutional arrangement has different consequences for men's and women's lives, and often privilege either men's or women's interests (Gains and Lowndes, 2014). In our analysis, however, rather than conceptualizing women and men as two homogenous groups we acknowledge that EU governance can exacerbate or tackle inequalities selectively at the intersections of gender, class, race/ethnicity and sexual orientation. Verloo and Walby (2012) call this complex gender equality; the complex conceptualization of multiple inequalities and their intersections. Where we refer to gender equality we mean complex gender equality (see also MacRae and Weiner, 2017a, p. 209).

In this article we use feminist institutionalism in an innovative way by hypothesizing the gendered effects of future EU institutions and policies instead of examining them after their adoption. Hence, we stretch feminist institutionalism by focusing on *potential* gendered outcomes. To show how gender is implicated in the scenarios, we relied on the four dimensions identified by Gains and Lowndes (2014, p. 527): (1) rules about gender (equality), (2) rules that are not specifically about gender but have gendered consequences, (3) gendered rule makers and (4) gendered policy outcomes. However, we had to adapt our feminist institutionalism analysis in several ways. For the first dimension, in the absence of explicit attention to gender equality in the scenarios, we could not examine new formal rules. Hence, we evaluated the potential consequences for existing policies like the gender mainstreaming obligation, directives and soft law; in other words, their path-dependency. Also, we assessed whether and how the scenarios deal with multiple inequalities or target specific groups of people. For the second dimension, we expected that rules that are not specifically about gender equality may have gendered effects because they interact with institutions governing the economy, finance, welfare, security and violence. Here we wanted to know how the scenarios relate to enshrined gender biases in these institutions. Klatzer and Schlager (2017) have identified several interlinked biases in macroeconomic governance, most notably the deflationary bias, which refers to policies giving low inflation and fiscal restraint priority over public

spending, thereby constraining distributive and redistributive policies. Concomitantly, the governance of security and violence displays a state-centred bias when it prioritizes the security of state borders over human security, and it displays a gender bias when issues such as gender-based violence and stereotyped masculinity are not considered to be part of security concerns (Muehlenhoff, 2017). The third dimension brings in agency. The rule makers, their gendered identities, and the shifting balance of influence between feminist and other actors shape gender equality institutions and policies. Gains and Lowndes (2014, p. 529) rightly warn against an essentialist focus on the sex of actors, because '[f]emale actors may adopt masculine styles and/or pursue non- or antifeminist goals (the "Thatcher counterfactual")' while 'male "critical actors" can act for women'. Hence, assessing the plurality of interests represented in the rulemaking process and the access it offers to a plurality of voices is more relevant than identifying the sex of the rule makers. For the fourth dimension, we hypothesized the gendered policy outcomes shaped by the rules and previous paths in policymaking. Of course, feminist institutionalism has not been conceived as forecasting tool, but given its strength in unpacking path-dependencies we considered it eligible for extrapolation. To this effect, we utilized a classic from the gender mainstreaming tool box, gender impact assessments,[4] for forecasting their potential effects for complex gender equality. We merged core steps from Verloo and Roggeband (1996) and the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016) into guiding questions that allowed us to address the dimensions of feminist institutionalism and their extrapolation:

1 How is the problem of the future of Europe constructed and how is this gendered?
2 How are the proposed solutions to the problem constructed and how are they gendered?
3 Who is or will be involved in rulemaking? Who has access/voice, who is sidelined?
4 What direct and indirect, positive and negative gendered impacts can we expect?

These questions are answered by doing a document analysis of the White Paper on the Future of the European Union, the reflection papers and the sixth scenario of President Juncker's State of the Union 2017. According to the EU glossary, 'European Commission White Papers are documents containing proposals for European Union (EU) action in a specific area'.[5] We understand the various scenarios in this logic, even though the 'specific area' is the future EU governance structure itself. Given the sketchy style of the scenarios, we have opted for extending the assessment to the accompanying reflection papers which offer more in-depth coverage than the scenarios themselves. They were published in May–June 2017. Four of them present policy options in specific domains; namely the social dimension, globalization, economic and monetary integration, and defence (European Commission, 2017c–f). Some directly refer to the White Paper scenarios while others take a more general approach to their topic. The fifth reflection paper details the budgetary consequences for each of the scenarios (European Commission, 2017g).

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[4]Since 1996 the Commission has institutionalized impact assessments (IA), resulting in 2002 in integrated IA guidelines that measure the likely economic, social and environmental consequences of legislative initiatives, and since 2009 of non-legislative initiatives, including white papers (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; Radaelli and Meuwese, 2010). However, no IA exists for the 2017 White Paper.
[5]See online glossary https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary.html, Last accessed 25 April, 2018.

Building on secondary literature, we assessed the possible gendered impact by contrasting the history of EU gender equality policy with the content of the Commission documents.

The following section deals with the first question. It unpacks the gendered character of the construction of the future of European integration as a problem and hence provides us with the underlying rationale of the scenarios. This is where we stretched feminist institutionalism, as it normally does not ask for a diagnosis. We considered the diagnosis (problem definition) as the master frame that allows for policy proposals only within the defined frame. We then answered the second and fourth question for each scenario, also referring to the corresponding sections in the reflection papers. Finally, the third question is addressed in a separate section for all scenarios jointly.

II. The Construction of the Future of the EU as a Problem

Taking the introduction to the White Paper (European Commission, 2017a, pp. 6–14) as the problem definition, the future of Europe (sic) is considered to be in dire straits for several reasons. We summarize them in four main points and reflect on the underlying values and how they are gendered.

Firstly, the relative weight of Europe in the world is shrinking (its population share, economic power, and the euro as global currency), which the White Paper considers problematic in the light of the rising influence of emerging economies. This worldview typically conflates size and influence and reflects a tenet of hegemonic masculinity by reducing international politics to patterns of rivalry and zero-sum games as if this is the only game in town. Secondly, the global context is described as increasingly tense because of war and terrorism in the Middle East, Africa and at the eastern borders of the EU, and due to increasing militarization around the world. The White Paper warns that Europe is unable to take care of its security because it is weak on hard power, which is indispensable 'when force can prevail over rules' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 9). The White Paper dismisses soft power as less useful, and hence presents militarization as the problem as well as the solution, again reproducing hegemonic masculinity. Another security concern relates to migration, especially in the light of a further increase in the number of refugees due to 'population growth, widespread tensions and climate change' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 11). Migration is framed as a security issue rather than a humanitarian one connected with EU fundamental values. Thirdly, Europe is said to be in a process of profound transformation, which is problematic in so far as the social market economy is not well adapted yet. Many member states are already struggling with long-term and youth unemployment and high levels of public and private debt; also, in the light of ageing population and the flexibilization of work, social protection systems will become unaffordable unless they are modernized. The working-age population is shrinking, some regions are suffering from a brain drain and not all talent is mobilized. This is the only place where the text refers to gender equality, stating: 'There are more women in work than ever before but achieving real gender equality will mean breaking down persisting barriers' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 9). The entire section reflects liberal ideas of a workforce that should be well equipped to fit the needs of the economy, and of a society in which inequalities can be dealt with by applying the right incentives. To women it gives a double message: women are talents whose potential should be better mobilized to keep the economy afloat, and women face structural obstacles to 'real' (sic)

gender equality, which should be eliminated. However, what exactly these obstacles are and how they should be removed is not further addressed. Fourthly, EU citizens suffer from insecurity, which is problematic because it undermines the legitimacy of national and European politics and increases euroscepticism. They simply lack awareness of the EU's positive impact on their daily life. This diagnosis reflects the rather elitist idea that citizens do not understand what is good for them, and that communication is the problem, not European politics themselves. All in all, the future of the EU is constructed as threatened by emerging economies, militarization, migration, the lack of competitiveness and uncomprehending citizens. As this diagnosis is predominately gender-blind, the scenarios can be expected to relegate gender equality to the margins as well. Which solutions are considered appropriate in the light of this problem definition?

III. Forecasting the Gendered Impact of the Scenarios

The White Paper proposes five scenarios that lay out different integration paths instead of conveying a clear preference, although this 'is more in line with the consultative approach of a Green, rather than a White Paper' (Begg, 2017, p. 1). Scenario 1, 'Carrying on', proposes the pursuit of the reform agenda presented in the 2014 Commission's 'New Start for Europe' and the 2016 Bratislava Declaration about the EU without the UK, with no further attempts to reform decision-making. The 'Nothing but the single market' in scenario 2 suggests a focus on economic integration only, significantly reducing the regulatory burden, while abstaining from cooperating in other policy areas such as migration or security. Scenario 3, 'Those who want more do more' speaks to the idea of a variable geometry when a 'coalition of the willing' can decide to collaborate more closely in a specific policy area, comparable to the Schengen area or the eurozone. Scenario 4, 'Doing less more efficiently', recommends choosing priority areas such as trade, border management or migration where the EU could move forward quickly while doing less or even abstaining from action in the remaining areas. With 'Doing much more together', scenario 5 adds a perspective where cooperation between member states could go further than ever before with speedier supranational decision-making procedures. In the 'State of the Union Address 2017' President Juncker presents a sixth scenario that combines elements from the different scenarios, depending on the policy area. He supplements it by discussing values, unity and the rule of law (European Commission, 2017b). We discuss the reflection papers in connection with the scenarios as far as a link could be established.

Scenario 1: 'Carrying On' – Stagnation or Decline

This scenario of the 'status quo and muddling through' (Begg, 2017, p. 2) does not mention equality, non-discrimination or gender equality. Some apparently gender-neutral elements, however, merit further reflection. The scenario warns that outdated legislation will be withdrawn. This was already the case for the maternity leave directive, which was not updated but withdrawn by the Commission in an unprecedented manner (Ahrens and Abels, 2017). The 2008 'Draft directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment outside the labour market, irrespective of age, disability, sexual orientation or religious belief' remains blocked by the Council, as has the 2012 'Draft directive on gender balance among non-executive directors of companies listed on stock exchanges'. In scenario 1, one can expect that these drafts will suffer the same fate as the maternity leave directive. Furthermore, the scenario promises a continued focus on jobs,

growth and investment by strengthening the single market. This focus, characterized by a deflationary bias, has proven ineffective in promoting gender equality, not least because rules on gender equality were eradicated step by step from the European employment strategy (Hubert, 2012) and have been subordinated to fiscal and monetary objectives (Jacquot, 2015). EU austerity policies have legitimized cuts in public spending, (re)creating as a result a gendered division of labour (Kantola and Lombardo, 2017; Karamessini and Rubery, 2014; Walby, 2015). European social policy promotes work–life balance but only under the umbrella of growth and not equality (Stratigaki, 2012). The scenario mentions 'investment in digital, transport and energy infrastructure' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 16), yet omits the care infrastructure in spite of its relevance in an ageing society. The scenario reduces migration policies to an issue of border management and disregards the way that stereotyped notions of masculinity exacerbate the securitization of migrants, as is typical for a gendered, state-centred bias. Here, gender mainstreaming would mean unpacking such stereotypes and discussing, for instance, the EU's take on family reunification for refugees as well as the protection of homosexual, transgender and intersex persons inside and outside the EU.

The reflection papers offer additional insights. The social dimension reflection paper discusses inequalities between member states as regards income and employment rates, inequalities between generations, and the persistence of significant gender gaps and stereotypes in the labour market and in economic and political decision-making positions (European Commission, 2017g, p. 15). However, this gender-sensitive diagnosis is not followed by a strategy to fight structural inequalities and stereotypes. As regards the question who should act, the member states remain firmly in the driver's seat, enabling them to continue blocking progress, while the Commission limits itself to offering guidance and strengthening collaboration with social partners. It comes as a positive surprise that the reflection paper on EU finances makes provisions for funding social inclusion and employment, and links positive incentives to the European semester.

Scenario 2: 'Nothing But the Single Market' – Backtracking?

The second scenario omits (gender) equality in the text, but the reflection papers on the social dimension and the future of EU finances speak directly to rules on gender when stating that in this scenario equality legislation will be abolished, the equal treatment of part-time workers will no longer be ensured and there will no longer be minimum standards at EU-level for maternity and paternity leave or for parental or carers leave (European Commission, 2017c, p. 26). Moreover, programmes for research and innovation as well as for 'aid to the most deprived, health, culture, citizenship, etc.' will be discontinued (European Commission, 2017g, p. 32). Clearly, the gendered policy outcome will be negative. The White Paper warns of a race to the bottom and correctly notes that this scenario will most likely lead to a reduction in regulation, with the effect that 'differences persist or increase in areas such as consumer, social and environmental standards' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 18). The focus on a single market without regulation will exacerbate inequalities between and within states along the intersections of class, race and gender. In other words, the success of supranational gender equality will be reversed (Walby, 2015). Not only will the EU be reluctant to initiate new rules on gender equality, the scenario even calls for deregulation by withdrawing two existing pieces of legislation for every new proposal. As a contrasting perspective, the scenario could result in improvements if re-centring on the single market pushed the EU to follow its treaty

obligations more strictly, including gender mainstreaming. This would require a complete make-over of the single market as the EU would have to scrutinize and adjust all macro-economic policies so that their negative effects on gender equality would be corrected. However, this reading seems highly unlikely given the deregulatory logic of the scenario.

Scenario 3: 'Those Who Want More Do More' – Selective Upgrading?

Explicit rules or statements on (gender) equality are lacking in this scenario as well, and the reflection papers add little in the way of additional features. In general, scenario 3 muddles through like the first one, but it offers the option for groups of member states to step up cooperation. Leaving aside the question of how this could be institutionalized, considering the role of the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice, upgrading would offer promising options for promoting gender equality if a 'coalition of the willing' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 20) agreed on common, new and high social standards. This might include harmonizing parental leave, maternity leave, quota laws, marriage equality or social rights for domestic workers at an advanced level but also it could also include effectively tackling gender gaps in pay, pensions and leisure time (Plomien, 2018). Given the increased divergence in the EU since the economic and financial crisis, it might indeed be easier to find common ground with a small groups of like-minded member states. Furthermore, in the past pioneer states have played a key role in advancing gender equality policies, especially when the Commission put strong proposals on the table and was pushed by a strong transnational mobilization in favour of gender equality (Van der Vleuten, 2007). Scenario 3 could enable a pioneer alliance to circumvent resistance from the laggard states. However, if, in an integrated market, a subgroup of member states adopted high social standards, this would make them expensive and hence less attractive for business. The reflection paper on the social dimension recognizes this problem. It envisions deepening the social dimension in the eurozone, motivated by the desire to be better prepared 'when the next crisis hits' (European Commission, 2017g, p. 28), but acknowledges that countries outside the eurozone could attract business by deliberately lowering their standards, making it even more costly for the others to invest in upgrading. As a result, selective upgrading would increase inequalities between and within member states. Regarding gendering security policies, scenario 3 would enable concerted action by committed member states on trafficking and prostitution and could integrate the fight against gender-based violence in any strategy against organized crime and terrorism or information exchange on this matter. However, in spite of the cross-border character of these issues, member states continue to be reluctant to relinquish their sovereignty in these fields (Askola, 2007).

Scenario 4: 'Doing Less More Efficiently' – Sidestepping

The fourth scenario points in a similar direction as the second. It proposes a focus on a reduced number of areas, allowing the EU to stop acting in others. The overall budget will be reduced. The scenario does not mention (rules on) gender equality,and thus its effects on gender equality depend largely on which policy areas will be included in or excluded from further EU action, and whether gender mainstreaming is implemented in each action. Begg (2017) expects the EU to play much-reduced role in employment and social policy, because the scenario suggests excluding domains 'such as regional development, public health, or parts of employment and social policy not directly related to the functioning of the single market' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 22). Narrowing the focus of EU activities bodes ill for existing gendered inequalities in the EU between and within

states, because common standards will likely be set at a minimum level and different salaries and social legislation will continue to vary significantly across Europe (Plomien, 2018). Over the decades, the reduction of EU gender equality policies to single market corrections was much criticized, for instance, for restricting the fight against gender-based violence to non-binding recommendations, while the only binding instrument was on sexual harassment in the workplace and could be motivated only by the argument that a harassed worker is less productive (Elman, 1996). Moreover, the European Commission had to legitimize funding for anti-trafficking projects with a reference to public health for lack of a more appropriate treaty base (Van der Vleuten, 2007). As the scenario proposes to abstain from further EU action in the realm of health, this will further limit activities combatting gender-based violence. On the other hand, the scenario favours a focus on 'excellence in R&D', which might bring positive results in attention to gender (in)equalities in EU-funded research, depending however on how excellence is defined and measured (Abels, 2012).

Scenario 5: 'Doing Much More Together' – Deepening

The fifth scenario also makes no reference to (gender) equality. Again, its effects depend largely on whether the EU takes its treaty obligations seriously and undertakes a coordinated effort to implement gender mainstreaming in all policy fields, institutions, and governance levels. 'Doing much more together' would probably lead to the most positive effects for gender equality. It would allow for the further institutionalization of policy ideas that exist already in the form of soft law, or the reactivation of previous gender equality tools such as the policy programmes that existed since the 1980s and recently lost their legal status (Ahrens 2018, 2019). The same applies to introducing new measures such as gendering taxation, which would reflect how unpaid work contributes to the gross domestic product, and gender budgeting, an approach favoured by the European Parliament that allows us to assess the implications of budget allocations, taxation and economic policies on gender equality (Beveridge and Cengiz, 2015; Klatzer and Schlager, 2017). Theoretically, the fifth scenario could revive gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting for all EU legislation and policies. However, in order for such a revival to materialize, there should be consensus among the member states that the EU should act. Such consensus seems hard to find, given the contestation over gender, sexual and reproductive rights, and minority rights in a number of member states (Kuhar and Paternotte, 2017; Verloo, 2018). Here, the reflection paper on deepening and completing the economic and monetary union acknowledges that during the crisis the eurozone did not deliver on the promise of prosperity, stability and protection for all. As a result, social and economic divergences between and within eurozone members increased and political trust diminished (European Commission, 2017d, p. 7). The paper suggests deepening the EMU because it could contribute to '[j]obs, growth, social fairness, economic convergence and financial stability' (European Commission, 2017d, p. 18) – definitely a more encompassing mission than the traditional focus on price stability. Yet the means proposed to attain these objectives remain limited to the reinforcement of coordinating national policies as part of the European semester. The reflection paper does not deal with persistent criticisms of the opacity of decision-making on monetary and macroeconomic issues. As decision-making powers remain with the European Central Bank and the ministers of the Eurogroup, effective oversight by any parliament is precluded.

The reflection paper on harnessing globalization pleads for inclusive growth so the EU can deal with globalization more successfully than it does now. It stresses the need for tax policies that address inequalities, the unequal distribution of the benefits of globalization coupled with effective social protection and focused investments to foster social inclusion of vulnerable groups of people including migrants (European Commission, 2017c, p. 16). Its recommendations read like a shopping list for the establishment of an EU-wide welfare state, including measures to raise the labour market participation of women and the promotion of work–life balance, while also reiterating the need to make the EU a more competitive and innovative economy. However, no supra-nationalization is foreseen, as 'the centre of gravity for action in the social field should and will always remain with national and local authorities and their social partners' (European Commission, 2017g, p. 20). The reflection paper on the future of finances adds that the EU should invest in people 'from education and training, to health, equality and social inclusion' and that existing criteria for social spending may need to be revisited to 'reach those that most need it, particularly in regions with high social inequalities' (European Commission, 2017f, p. 22). However, if the EU 27 were to meet these aims, they would have to agree on expanding the EU budget, which seems highly unlikely as they already have to compensate for the loss of the UK contribution to the budget, estimated at €10 billion per year (European Council, 2018). Scenario 5 would also aim at developing cooperation in matters of security and defence, resulting in the EU speaking 'with one voice' (European Commission, 2017a, p. 25). This voice, according to the reflection paper on European defence, aims to protect citizens against terrorist strikes, cyber-attacks and energy-security related threats (European Commission, 2017e). However, it does not refer to the broad concept of human security, gender-based violence and trafficking, nor does it gender other threats to the safety of citizens, for instance, by elaborating the conceptualization of masculinity and terrorism.

Scenario 6: State of the Union – Equality Tout Court

The sixth scenario implicitly provides several options for promoting gender equality. Indeed, in their analysis of the 2017 State of the Union address, Pansardi and Battegazzorre (2018) find that it refers relatively often to social and ethical values (although this is surpassed by references to political values such as democracy, transparency and accountability). However, President Juncker surprisingly did not address the promotion of gender equality despite his strong emphasis on freedom, equality and the rule of law as 'unshakeable' principles (European Commission, 2017b). Likewise, his praise of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage and the 'celebration of cultural diversity' did not result in valuing gender, ethnic or sexual diversity. Overall, his speech reduces equality to one between nationals from different countries who deserve equal treatment in the internal market. Strikingly, in 1957 this standpoint led to anchoring equal pay for women and men in the Treaty of Rome. It also enabled non-discrimination to become a fundamental EU principle, because in an internal market, there can be no unequal treatment of persons based on nationality or other grounds (Van der Vleuten, 2007). Nonetheless, Juncker does not apply the non-discrimination principle to inequalities between groups within and across countries, for instance between Roma and non-Roma, lesbians, gays and hetero people, transgender and cisgender people, people of colour and white people, people with and without a migration background. He states that 'there can be no second class citizens' and talks about avoidable deaths and measles vaccination across Europe without referring to avoidable deaths by combating gender-based and racist

violence.[6] In a similar manner, when stating that 'there can be no second class workers', Juncker does not refer to the gender pay gap, which is the oldest EU gender equality issue, but to equal pay for posted workers. In other words, it is framed as an issue of free movement, not as one of social and gender justice. Juncker's final equality claim is that 'there can be no second class consumers'. Here, he uses the example of Slovakians who have less fish in their fish fingers than consumers elsewhere in the EU. This rather narrow approach to inequalities between consumers is understandable in the light of Slovakian commotion over the issue, but is ridiculous in the light of the rise in inequality in income and purchasing power since 2008 (Eurostat, 2017). On a positive note, Juncker proposed establishing a common labour authority comparable to the European banking authority. Such an institution could have a positive effect on gender equality if gender mainstreaming becomes an obligation for the new authority, while ensuring effective and consistent prudential regulation and supervision of labour conditions across the EU, as the European banking authority does for banking – presuming it would have the power to combat discrimination, gendered pay differences, unequal treatment in paternity, maternity and pension schemes and similar issues. Juncker also emphasizes the need to combat social fragmentation and social dumping in Europe by strengthening the European pillar of social rights through agreements on European social standards – a hopeful connection, because the social pillar includes a number of gender equality aspects (Plomien, 2018).

IV. Who Has Voice and Who Should Act?

Our third question regards the actors involved. We lack detailed information about the authors involved in drafting the White Paper. The document has been presented as 'the Commission's contribution' and President Juncker has committed all commissioners to defending the White Paper in 'debates with the public' (European Commission, 2017b). Countering criticisms on the lack of transparency and responsiveness of the EU, the Commission organized over 2,000 public events across Europe after the publication of the White Paper and continues to hold such 'citizens dialogues' (European Commission, 2017b). These dialogues mostly take place in universities and high schools and the audience is mainly composed of students. As a result, the debates suffer from an underrepresentation of less-educated and ethnic minority citizens, and an overrepresentation of young, white and highly educated citizens.[7] Given high levels of euroscepticism amongst older and less-educated citizens, the debates therefore may fail to give voice to those who mistrust European institutions to defend their interests. As the events do not discuss the scenarios, it remains unclear how they will contribute to future policymaking.

In all these scenarios, the main addressees and actors are the member states, such as the EU 27, small coalitions of the willing or national policymakers. Although subsidiarity is not mentioned, all scenarios include an option to renationalize policies or leave it to national governments to act, and all scenarios (except the fifth) shift the balance of influence

[6]Interestingly, in the same week the EU (in collaboration with the UN) launched the 'Spotlight initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls', which, however is directed at the rest of the world outside the EU (https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/press-release-eu-and-un-team-eliminate-violence-against-women-and-girls_en).
[7]Not all events listed on the Commission website were recorded, making it impossible to detect the audience composition and topics discussed. Most events consist of a brief presentation by a commissioner or high-level commission official followed by Q & A.

away from supranational to intergovernmental actors, which, in combination with the underlying market-oriented logic, makes access to policymaking more difficult for actors promoting gender equality (Walby, 2018). With the exception of the sixth, in all scenarios the European Parliament, whose legitimacy is being contested in the Brexit campaign and by populist politicians, and the Court of Justice are sidelined. In the past, the European Parliament and the Court of Justice played key roles in promoting and enforcing complex gender equality policies, often supported by bottom-up subnational and transnational pressures, mobilization and litigation (Ahrens and Van der Vleuten, 2019). In spite of the Commission acting as the entrepreneur of norms, the White Paper hence seems to confirm new intergovernmentalist expectations in three respects (Bickerton *et al.*, 2015). Firstly, mass politics are taken seriously by preferring renationalization and citizens' dialogues to supra-nationalization and democratization. Secondly, intergovernmental actors are key players. Thirdly, new institutions (like a common labour authority) are created instead of strengthening existing ones. Although the institutional consequences are not further elaborated in the scenarios, they seem unfavourable in bringing gender issues to the EU table.[8]

Apart from the European Commission and national governments, the scenarios strikingly refer only to social partners and not to any other interest groups, civil society organizations or expert groups as relevant contributors to the future of Europe. Yet the latter two were of utmost importance for EU gender equality policy (Jacquot 2015; Van der Vleuten, 2007; Woodward 2004). Despite the EU recognition of the value of interest groups to legitimize its activities, and despite the adaptation of participatory democracy elements in the Lisbon Treaty (Sanchez Salgado, 2014), this is not addressed in any scenario.

Conclusion

In this article, by employing a feminist institutionalist lens we have illustrated how gender-blind policy proposals affect the prospects of gender equality. Feminist institutionalism illuminates the gendered nature of institutions but it has not hitherto been used to predict the future institutionalization of gender equality. Combining the four dimensions proposed by Gains and Lowndes (2014) with the gender impact assessment tool allowed us to stretch feminist institutionalism to enable us to forecast the *potential* gendered effects of future EU institutional development and policy proposals instead of examining them after they have been adopted. Furthermore, we paid particular attention to intersectional aspects and the role of actors, as these two aspects have been so far underresearched in institutionalist approaches.

Because of the EU treaty obligation to mainstream gender in all its policies, together with gender equality as one of its founding values and the salience of gender issues to the triple crisis hitting the EU, we would have expected that complex gender equality would appear as a policy issue in all six scenarios for the future of Europe presented by the European Commission in 2017 as well as its reflection papers; an expectation that was not fulfilled. The scenarios do not explicitly refer to gender equality. Consistent with the gender-blind construction of the EU future as a problem and the implicit gendered

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[8]The White Paper follow up confirms this tendency. At the informal Tallin summit (September 2017) the European Council launched the Leaders' Agenda, a work programme tackling contentious issues (migration, multiannual monetary framework, monetary integration) in Council meetings – again, without any reference to gender equality.

biases such as a deflationary bias and a hegemonic masculinity bias it contained, the so-lutions proposed by the scenarios reflect this frame. We detected the first feminist institu-tionalist dimension, rules about gender equality, in two patterns: firstly, as incidental gender-sensitive proposals inconsistent with the dominant logic of scenario 1; and secondly, in silencing (scenarios 3, 4 and 6) and potentially eliminating it (scenarios 1 and 2). The second dimension, gendered biases, became apparent in the dominance of a deflationary logic in the economic domain (scenarios 1, 2, 4 and 6) and a state-centric, hegemonic masculinity bias in the domain of security and violence (scenarios 1, 4 and 5). The third dimension examined whose voices were included in the diagnosis and prognosis. The White Paper is powerfully state-centred, presenting the EU under threat as a state-like actor in global politics, and referring in all scenarios to national govern-ments as key actors, sometimes in cooperation with (national) social partners (scenarios 1 and 5). Other organized interests are silenced. Citizens are addressed as a set of neutral beings without gender, class, ethnicity or other structural characteristics. Finally, concerning the fourth dimension of policy outcomes, the forecast ranges from scenarios that will probably exacerbate inequalities (scenario 2), will exacerbate inequalities selec-tively (scenario 3) or will offer potential openings for complex gender equality as well as serious risks for dismantling it (scenarios 1, 4, 5 and 6). Depending on which scenario is adopted, the EU gender equality project would indeed make a U-turn or continue to alter-nate between progress and stagnation, depending on the gendered power relations in the supranational and intergovernmental arenas.

The question remains why the Commission deemed it appropriate not to include gen-der equality. In their historical feminist institutionalist analysis of the EU gender equality acquis, Debusscher and Van der Vleuten (2017) found that after critical junctures during which (macro) economic and social instability disrupt the trajectory of the EU's gender equality efforts, it depends on the agency of the promoters of gender equality whether a favourable change is brought about or a negative one thwarted. In a similar way, in her analysis of the Lisbon Strategy and its successor, Europe 2020, Galligan (2017) finds that a gender perspective 'flows in and out' of EU politics depending on the push by 'gender-friendly' actors and the institutional power plays that undergird the policy salience of gen-der equality. Could this explain why gender equality has slipped off the table when the future of European integration is discussed? Was it because the powerful actors at the ta-ble did not have the commitment or knowledge to bring up gender mainstreaming, and those who did have such a commitment or expertise lacked the power to overturn the 'logic of appropriateness' held by more powerful actors? Within the Commission it is the case that most of the directorates-general (except those for justice, research and em-ployment) have not assigned responsibility for mainstreaming gender. Furthermore, re-search shows that gender equality actors are often perceived as disruptive, as 'gender police', and that opposition to gender mainstreaming is common (Ahrens, 2018; Hubert and Stratigaki, 2016; Jacquot, 2015). Or was it simply deemed appropriate to ignore gen-der equality in a document about the future of the EU because gender mainstreaming is considered a techno-bureaucratic exercise (Stratigaki, 2005) which does not fit into a 'vi-sionary' document such as the White Paper? Whatever the case, the European Commis-sion found examples of gendered inequalities to be less appropriate than the inequality in product quality (fish fingers) and access to services (vaccines). In fact, the latter are ex-amples of non-compliance with existing rules and regulations and enforcement does not

upset the internal market logic which constitutes the core of the EU; while gender inequalities are contested and dealing with them would upset that very internal market logic. None of the scenarios supports a transformation in that direction, despite Juncker's aim to 'restore the myth of the EU as a community of values' (Pansardi and Battegazzorre, 2018, p. 16).

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