NEW APPROACHES TO FOREIGN POLICY

Feminist Foreign Policy and its Potential for Advancing Transatlantic Relations

Considering the ongoing security crises, the global pushback against human rights, and the climate emergency, the transatlantic partnership is more critical than ever. This three-part event series by the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP) and 1014 aimed at increasing the dialogue between both sides of the Atlantic and fostering awareness about more sustainable approaches to foreign policy. It discussed transatlantic priorities in the fields of security, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and climate justice from a Feminist Foreign Policy perspective.

Feminist Foreign Policy - Employing a People-Centred Approach to Transatlantic Security and Peace

With a new U.S. administration and a more assertive and capable European Union, there is now a once-in-a-generation opportunity to design a new transatlantic agenda for global cooperation based on our common values, interests and global influence. Against the backdrop of a new geopolitical and economic reality, a strong transatlantic relationship to sustain peace and security is undeniably relevant. A Feminist Foreign Policy questions the traditional understanding of state security and calls for a people-centred approach to security and peace. How can this approach be integrated into transatlantic relations? What are the resources and policies needed to strengthen European and transatlantic defence, as well as transatlantic security cooperation from a feminist perspective? The CFFP and the 1014 discussed these questions with Pam Campos Palma, political strategist, former military intelligence analyst, and Director of Peace and Security at the Working Families Party, and Verity Coyle, Senior Advisor and Nonresident Fellow with Stimson’s Conventional Defense program. The event was moderated by Kristina Lunz, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy.
What people all over the globe want is human security, defined by the United Nations as the “right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to freedom from fear and freedom from want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential” (A/RES/66/290). Security should not be focused on states as it traditionally is but on people. The discourse around security needs to be driven by and center those most affected: civil society, the harmed, and the wronged. Traditional security has become deeply intertwined with arms trade and business and seeks to create safety through arms. It is those arms that make people less safe.

So what happens when those in power do not act on behalf of the people? The answer may seem radical but it is rooted in the strong belief in the power of democracy: they must be removed from power - the government has to work for the people it purports to serve and protect. In the meantime, we, as civil society actors, will continue to build our own inclusive spaces and paths and invite others to build with us.

One of the core questions when we redefine security and place people first is, how did we distribute power in the past and how do we want to distribute it in the future. Representation of marginalized groups in a flawed security system is not enough: positionality without power means little. We have to shift power so that it is distributed equally and equitably among all those affected by our security structures. We have to think beyond representation and shape a new security system from the ground up - one that places people first.

In a time when world leaders fail to call out the most obvious human rights abuses including those currently being perpetrated in Myanmar, the need for a principle-led security policy is more urgent than ever. An intersectional Feminist Foreign Policy places the needs of people first, invests in human security and disarmament, and is shaped by civil society. It is key to creating people-centred security.

**Rights, Responsibilities, and Revolutions - Understanding Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in a Transatlantic Context**

In recent years attacks on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) - such as the Global Gag Rule and Poland’s abortion ban - have been growing on both sides of the Atlantic with the number of actors fighting to undo the international achievements for women’s and sexual and gender minority rights gaining further ground. Across the globe, states and NGOs are working to undermine the international women’s rights agenda: they lobby to alter the language in UN resolutions, to advance alternative understandings of international treaties, to delegitimize feminists and their work by advocating for cultural realism and ‘traditional values’, and to pull financial resources from education and health services that account for reproductive rights. How can existing national and international human rights legislation be protected? How can the strengthening of transatlantic relations and collaborations between Europe and the US support SRHR on both sides of the Atlantic?
How can a Feminist Foreign Policy contribute to the protection and expansion of SRHR? We discussed these questions with Heather Boonstra, Vice President of Public Policy at the Guttmacher Institute, and Leah Hoctor, Regional Director for Europe at The Center for Reproductive Rights. The event was moderated by Nina Bernarding, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy.

Throughout the last couple of years, we have witnessed attacks on human rights defenders, civil society, and the rule of law, cuts on freedom of expression and assembly, and the rise of authoritarian governments. U.S. President Donald Trump was one of the biggest anti-gender actors in national and international contexts. Right-wing organisations from the US provided substantial funding to foster and shape anti-SRHR policies, movements, and agendas abroad. Under the Trump Administration, Europe stepped up to protect SRHR at the global level. With the Biden-Harris Administration, expectations for continued and new US engagement in the realm of SRHR are higher than ever. Biden has a proven record of strong leadership with regards to the topic of gender-based violence and was the lead sponsor of the Violence Against Women Act. Within the first days of the new administration, the Global Gag Rule was revoked and a White House Gender Policy Council established. These are promising starting points but continued pressure from civil society to establish lasting structures that safeguard SRHR for all is needed. Moreover, it is crucial that the EU does not step back with the US now stepping up again. This is a critical moment for the US and the EU to develop a shared SRHR agenda for post-COVID times.

There will always be civil society actors fighting against SRHR and right-wing organisations have done immense harm to SRHR especially by undermining public opinion. It is however crucial to understand that it is not just those right-wing organisations that block progressive gender inclusive policy resolutions and question the necessity of the concept of gender equality, but conservative governments from all around the globe. This is exemplified by the current attacks on the Istanbul Convention by EU member states. Individual state legislation shapes the debate at the global level as well: paragraph 219a of the German Criminal Code prohibiting doctors from informing patients about abortion, for example, is being used as a model to push for more restrictive abortion policies in the U.S. and beyond. Governments have to step up and design policies that defend and safeguard the rights of everyone so that inclusive rather than exclusive policies will be the model of the future. The role of civil society remains crucial in this area and it is the responsibility of governments to not only ensure meaningful and fair participation of civil society but also to actively listen to and act on its demands.

Climate and Gender Justice - Addressing the Climate Crisis with an Intersectional Feminist Approach

Social movements like 350.org and Fridays for Future have become strong voices holding administrations accountable for enforcing international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement. These agreements are under threat, gendered and racialized inequalities of the climate crisis are too often neglected, both within and between nations, and the COVID-19 pandemic seems to overshadow the climate commitments on both sides of the Atlantic.
How does the climate crisis impact the current societal structures, both within and among nations? How can we use the climate crisis as an opportunity to reshape power structures? How is the fight for climate justice interconnected with the fight for feminism and how can a Feminist Foreign Policy address the current climate emergency? We discussed these questions with Natalia Cardona Sanchez, Associate Director for Justice & Equity at 350.org, and Leonie Bremer, climate activist at Fridays for Future Germany. The event was moderated by Kristina Lunz, Co-Founder and Co-Executive Director of the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy.

The climate crisis exacerbates existing inequalities. Marginalized groups are disproportionately and most affected by its impacts. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria gender-based violence increased in Puerto Rico, and in Uganda women are not able to receive any government support to cope with climate impacts, as they are not allowed to own any land. These are just two among many more examples illustrating the disproportionate impacts the climate crisis has on those most marginalized. Especially in times of upcoming elections, activists are being asked which politicians and parties they would like to see in office. However, the climate crisis cannot be a partisan question and opting out of addressing an issue that is and will affect all of us is not an option. The only way we can survive the most pressing crisis of our time is if everyone regardless of party affiliation acts in line with the Paris Agreement.

We need to keep disrupting a status quo marked by passivity and pressure politicians to develop concrete and effective policies for the next five years. It is not what we promise to do in the distant future but what we actively do in the next five years that matters most: legislative changes that prioritise addressing the climate crisis need to be developed. Our education systems have to prioritise climate education so that we learn about the climate catastrophe through education rather than the experience of its immediate impacts. Considering the growing abuse of climate policy narratives such as for the purpose of militarised population control, for example, we need to be aware of the narratives we create and use when speaking about the climate crisis. Global banks located and led by the Global North, who carry a large responsibility for funnelling fossil fuels and exploiting natural resources in the Global South, have to cooperate with the Global South at an eye level.

Change is possible: the idea of a Green New Deal was unthinkable before organizations such as the Sunrise Movement and fierce politicians like U.S. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez pushed for it. Now, it is almost impossible to talk about the climate crisis without talking about a Green New Deal and even the EU has agreed on an ambitious European Green New Deal, though social justice advocates continue to criticize it for the lack of climate justice provisions such as gender-specific policies. Movements are most successful when they listen to those affected, exercise self reflection, and address the inequities shaping their own movement. Moving forward, we have to focus on shaping a climate movement that centers the most affected people and areas (MAPA) - a movement that is not just focused on singular issues but the system as a whole. There is no climate justice without racial justice and there’s no climate justice without gender justice - justice encompasses system change. We need to organize ourselves globally and make sure the power is felt with the people hit hardest. This is how we can make politicians change course. We need nothing short of a civil rights movement.

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Conclusion

The joint event series by the CFFP and 1014 demonstrated the need for feminist approaches in all areas of foreign policy. Transatlantic security and peace, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Climate Justice in particular call for a human-rights based approach and global commitment. For a more just and equal future for all we will need strong collaborations in every area, strengthening of civil society, investment in sustainable transatlantic relations, and most important of all: feminism.

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For any questions or inquiries regarding “Feminist Foreign Policy and its Potential for Transatlantic Relations” or for permission to reproduce any part of this report please contact Antonia Baskakov at the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy.