

# Gendering Parliamentary Diplomacy: The case of EU27-UK Relations

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Parliamentary diplomacy (PD) is a contemporary feature of modern parliamentarism but remains, thus far, underexplored from a gender lens. PD incorporates the relationships that parliamentarians or parliaments as institutions have with other parliaments, parliamentarians, and nonstate actors to foster peace, democracy, understanding, dialogue, legitimacy, and scrutiny of governments. Parliaments are spaces of parliamentary and international negotiation and communication, practiced through rules, practices, and symbols. This article draws on a single case study of the European Parliament (EP) and of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) gendered PD, at the time of Brexit—a period when international agreements and relationships were shaped and how gendered PD was culturally legitimized. It is based on a unique qualitative dataset of 140 interviews and ethnographic research (2018–2020) generated at the time of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom’s MEPs from the EP. Based on this analysis, it further considers what a feminist PD might look like.

*Keywords:* Parliamentary diplomacy; European Parliament; feminist institutionalism; gender-sensitive parliaments; Brexit

## Introduction

How is parliamentary diplomacy (PD), an overlooked activity of parliamentary politics, gendered? PD means the relationships that parliamentarians or parliaments as institutions have with other parliaments, parliamentarians, executive actors, and nonstate actors to foster peace, democracy, understanding, dialogue, legitimacy, and scrutiny of governments. In essence, following a wide definition of PD, it is:

any declaration, action or activity of a diplomatic nature that involves at least one parliamentary actor, and which tries to impact on a particular international issue (or an internal one with international implications). (Stavridis 2021, 235)

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PD is practiced in peacetime and in times of conflict (resolution). PD *may* be fruitful for international cooperation in policy intersections, such as foreign affairs, trade, climate change, human rights, migration, and gender equality. Parliamentary practitioners cite the roles parliaments play in supporting democracy, using evidence such as the creation of parliamentary development programs (Immenkamp and Benzin 2019, 432); academics cite participation of conflicting actors in parliamentary dialogue (Stavridis 2021). Meanwhile, women parliamentarians, in survey and interview responses, described the value of PD for policy learning (Dibateza 2023). However, any assessment of the role of PD needs to include the perspectives of those most marginalized and may be visible only in the long run.

PD is distinguishable from government diplomacy, promising a unique contribution to global relations. This is because in addition to scrutinizing governments' international decisions, parliamentarians have representative and communicative linkages with constituents, enabling a more participative approach, and their activities are semi-public. Governments follow their conception of the national interest through cabinet collective responsibility, whereas parliamentarians deliberate the national interest, somewhat discursively and balance this among other issues. PD can be more flexible since parliamentarians are not always committed to government positions (Stavridis 2021, 239). This enables creative acts of diplomacy, quite different from rational bargaining. PD involves a multitude of legislative, rhetorical, and individual (Fiott 2015) activities: policy-learning, scrutinizing international agreements; information exchanges, and problem-solving and tools; routinized contact, media-engagement, trust-building.

The PD literature is “quite diffuse in theme and focus” (Murphy 2023, 93) and is still consolidating (Stavridis 2021, 227). Two influential volumes have been published: *Parliamentary Diplomacy in European and Global Governance* (Stavridis and Jancić 2017), published in a diplomatic studies series; and *Parliamentary Cooperation and Diplomacy in EU External Relations* (Raube et al. 2019), published in a global governance series. These are instructive volumes, but discussions of gender are omitted. In a state-of-the-art article, summarizing the existing literature, Stavridis (2021) notes that key themes in PD literature include: (i) flexibility, (ii) multiform/level(s), (iii) the role of individuals, (iv) state recognition, (v) conflict and post-conflict resolution, and (6) parliaments acting as moral tribunes. These facets all respectively speak to concerns at the very heart of feminism: institutional constraints and opportunities; venues and spaces for promoting gender equality; agency of parliamentary actors; recognition of minorities and marginalized issues; conflict and normative leadership.

A key observation in the PD literature is its directionality in terms of settings and actors. PD is *intra*, *inter*, or *extra* parliamentary. *Intra* means international and parliamentary negotiation within parliaments. *Inter* means how the parliament and its actors engage with other parliaments—such as informal

friendship groups. *Extra* PD involves diplomacy with civil society actors, executive actors, or outside formal parliamentary institutions. Stavridis (2021, 227) laments a “technical interparliamentary cooperation perspective” taken to PD despite the multiple locations and actors that encapsulate the “plurality, complexity and richness of the parliamentarization of international affairs” (Stavridis 2021, 245).

Given this vibrant emerging PD research agenda, the gap on how gender affects PD—a key power dynamic affecting institutions of global interaction—is a surprising omission. A comprehensive report has examined: “Promoting gender equality *through* parliamentary” diplomacy (Jančić et al. 2021, emphasis added). This report supports an October 2020 EP resolution on gender equality in EU foreign and security policy with the aim of pursuing an EU feminist foreign policy (FFP). However, while parliaments enhance or undermine an FFP, they may bring different objectives and practices to the table, outside of the parameters—or in the absence of, a formally recognized FFP.

Because both gendered and feminist PD are still concepts-in-formation, now is a critical moment for such an analysis. The framework presented in this article explores formal rules, informal practices, and symbolic meaning—constitutive of PD. The research questions are as follows:

- (1) How is PD gendered?
  - a. How are the formal institutions, practices, and symbolic meanings gendered?
  - b. How is gendered PD culturally legitimized in masculinized institutions?
- (2) What might a feminist PD look like?

This article is structured in the following way. First, it explores synergies between international relations theory: FFP, gender and diplomacy, and political science frameworks, and gender-sensitive parliaments (GSPs) and feminist institutionalism (FI), before presenting a synthesized FI framework. Second, it outlines the case of the European Parliament (EP) and methodology. Third, it empirically applies the framework in a study of the withdrawal of the United Kingdom’s MEPs from the EU in 2016–2020 before considering how gendered PD is culturally legitimized in masculinized institutions. Finally, the article considers what a feminist PD might look like.

## Theoretical Perspective: Gendering Parliamentary Democracy

In order to explore how PD may be gendered, it is instructive to turn to both key international relations literature and political science literature,

which have much to offer gendered analyses of PD. Their points of synergy are reviewed below.

The critical literature on FFP as an international norm (Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2023) offers foundational ideas to gendered analyses of PD, such as prioritizing an ethics of care (Aggestam et al. 2019); a gender transformational politics; an intersectional analysis; and not assuming women (parliamentary or political actors) are—or should be—inherently diplomatic. The constraints of FFP literature derive from the empirical take-up of FFPs in traditional foreign policy areas (Guerrina, Haastруп, and Wright 2023, 488). Although some FFPs mention representation in parliaments (Government Offices of Sweden 2022, 6; Global Affairs Canada 2017); embassies hosting cultural events in parliaments (Government Offices of Sweden 2022, 97); reporting to parliaments (Global Affairs Canada 2017, 70); and parliamentary scrutiny and approval of international development funds and human rights bills (Scottish Government 2023, 5, 14), there is overall less discussion on more varied roles of parliaments (cf Jancić et al. 2021).

Gender and diplomacy literatures (Aggestam and Towns 2019; Cassidy 2017; Standfield 2020) offer insights on both “gender” and diplomacy. Focusing first on “gender”—race, postcolonial, and queer scholarship on diplomacy broadens our understanding of gender to show how diplomacy is racialized and hetero-patriarchal (Blaschke 2021; Opondo 2018; Stephenson 2020). Regarding diplomacy—gender and diplomacy literature broadens our understanding of the actors, acts, and practices that constitute diplomacy through representation, negotiation, mediation, and communication. However, core institutions analyzed so far by gender and diplomacy scholars include NATO and Ministries of Foreign Affairs. This discussion has not yet been substantively brought into the parliamentary context.

Diplomacy has communicative functions, such as (non)verbal signaling (Cohen 1987; Jönsson and Hall 2003). Symbols attribute recognition for diplomatic agency and alienate diplomatic partners (Adler-Nissen, Galpin and Rosamond 2017). Importantly, diplomacy is “symbolically and rhetorically gendered” (Towns 2020, 574)—that is, entangled in meanings interwoven with masculinities and femininities, deploying gendered stories, and constructions of power and transactional language. Symbols are also expressed in affective performances that cross national borders in social media (Hedling 2023). Mediating estrangement (Der Derian 1987) may involve eschewing traditional diplomatic symbols sometimes infused with rationality and replacing those with those that communicate empathy and understanding.

In sum, FFP and gender and diplomacy literature provide theoretical and empirical foundations (transformative politics and intersectional approaches to gender and diplomatic practices, respectfully) to gendered PD. The article pivots toward two political science literatures that have contributed significantly to understandings of gendered parliaments and are fruitful for exploring gendered PD.

## Gender-Sensitive Parliaments

GSPs are both an “ideal and a practice” and an “emergent and arguably widely accepted international norm” (Childs and Palmieri 2023; Cassidy 2017, 174). Like FFP, there are competing GSP frameworks, toolkits, definitions, and foci. Two influential GSP self-assessment toolkits (EIGE 2019; IPU 2016) include criteria pertaining to formal institutions of PD such as monitoring compliance with international gender equality mandates (EIGE 2019, 17; IPU 2016, 22); the composition of delegations (EIGE 2019, 19)—including men’s presence on those dealing with gender equality or gender mainstreaming (IPU 2016, 30); and the composition of committees (EIGE 2019, 5) (in)directly dealing with international concerns and the distribution of travel opportunities (IPU 2016, 28).

GSP literature ties analyses of PD to the very core activities of parliaments in their local contexts (Palmieri 2020). It emphasizes shared responsibility for gender equality and parliamentary transformation (Palmieri 2019). Two key developments in the GSP literature are notable. First, the most recent GSP definition has foregrounded culture as “the missing ingredient” (Childs and Palmieri 2023):

A GSP values and prioritises gender equality as a social, economic and political objective and reorients and transforms a parliament’s institutional culture, processes and practices, and outputs towards these objectives (Childs and Palmieri 2023, 177; see also Verge 2022).

Attending to the symbolic is likewise important because of the ability to construct identities, (de)legitimizing objects, subjects, and practices (Verge 2022, 1050). This includes “the construction of [diplomatic] subjects capable of having relations with each other” (Constantinou 1996, 26). Descriptive representation in delegations, events, and awards convey symbolic meaning (Verge 2022, 1058). Parliamentary actors also model diplomatic agency (symbolic representation)—not only to citizens affected by geopolitical processes but also to executives—to demonstrate parliamentary collaboration. A symbolic approach can regender PD in its “range of available repertoires aimed at eroding the association between politics and masculinity” (Verge 2022, 1048). It may also scrutinize PD’s connection to histories of ideas around women and gender and affective processes.

Second, GSP has the possibility to foreground intersectional parliamentary gender insensitivities (Childs and Palmieri 2023). Some intersections in PD may be heightened, including race, (ethno)national representation, class (Kuus 2015), and disability. Some parliamentary gender action plans include clauses on procurement (Parliament of Catalonia 2020, 19), embedding parliaments in international political economy (Rai and Spary 2018). Overall, GSP ties gendered diplomacy substantively to parliamentary life, contributing empirically to feminizing *formal* institutions (Childs and Palmieri 2023)—though moving toward the symbolic and ways to target the most marginalized in parliamentary activity.

## Feminist Institutionalism

GSP shares ground with FI literature (Childs and Palmieri 2023, 175), notably how gendered parliamentary actors interact with their institutional context. GSP takes us so far, but FI links theory with practice and has clarified connections between gender, power, and institutions (Palmieri 2019). Gender and diplomacy scholars have identified FI's enormous promise (Aggestam and Towns 2019) for exploring both the gendered character and gendered effects of different types of institutions: formal rules, informal practices, and symbols.

Formal rules for PD include statements in rules of procedure around those parliamentary bodies authorized with negotiating or making external representations. "Rules about gender" (Lowndes 2020) include making use of formal gender equality mandates and may be undermined through processes of institutional forgetting. Analysis of formal rules includes exploring gaps in design and implementation (Thomson 2019, 607).

Informal PD practices may be missed by GSP's focus on formal institutions (though formal rules are introduced to address or support informal practices). Practices are repetitive and routine patterns of action that both reproduce inequality (Waylen 2022) and can also be transformational. Practices work through informal structures, such as informal (diplomatic) networks and alliances—inside, outside, and across institutional spaces that play important, but underestimated, roles (Piscopo 2023). Meanwhile, gender and diplomacy scholars highlight how conceptions of diplomatic practices ignore gendered practices (Standfield 2020). Addressing these gaps would tell us much about "everyday" gendered PD beneath formal institutions.

Finally, symbolic meaning is important for PD because of its persuasive power (Lowndes 2020, 553). FI explores the dynamic role of gender, ideas, and effects around institutions and explores (strategic) framings (Mackay 2011, 182). Verbal symbols in parliamentary speeches, questions, and petitions interact with multilingualism, presenting challenges for (non)native speakers to be "diplomatic" in their word choices (Ringe 2022, 134). Nonverbal symbols may include the composition, membership, and attendance of parliamentary bodies and parliamentary delegations; parliamentary spaces; social media and embodiment in descriptive marks and gesture (Miller 2021). Regarding the latter, decorative markers inhere in parliamentarians' participation in international campaigns, such wearing as pin badges; dressing with an appreciation for cultural customs; holding banners when attending marches; using hashtags, and posting online photos. Notably, while institutional entities are analyzed, "FI is predominantly social constructivist in its approach to the analyses of institutions and actors and to the broader social context in which these are constituted" (Mackay 2011, 182), therefore how meanings inhere in constructs of formal rules, practices, and symbols of PD is discussed in this article.

Overall, there are many synergies within this feminist literature. Foundational lines of inquiry in the FFP and gender and diplomacy literatures are extended by GSP and FI by focusing squarely on the formal rules, informal practices, and the symbolic in *parliamentary* contexts. Having outlined the FI theoretical framework, this article now moves onto the methods before the empirical application of the framework.

## Method: Case Study—The EP

As outlined in the introduction, PD occurs in a variety of locations. This article is based on a single case study of EP PD. While in-depth qualitative case studies are not generalizable, with FI, they generate theoretical propositions—elaborating broad processes, conditions, and settings where gendered PD occurs. Simultaneously, case studies allow interpretivist approaches to gender—observing how gender plays out in situ, rather than gender being predetermined. Rather than a wholly masculinized description, the article “tell[s] the story in its diversity, allowing the story to unfold from the many-sided, complex and sometimes conflicting stories” (Flyvberg 2006, 238), providing a rich and nuanced account of gendered PD.

The EP has been chosen for this single case study because it has been described as at the “forefront” of PD (Stavridis and Jančić 2017, 4). However, in addition to moving toward a “normal parliament,” the EP is an international parliamentary institution (Colefice 2019)—a supranational setting of both parliamentary and international negotiation—notwithstanding that national parliaments are settings of parliamentary and international negotiation too. The EP is the first parliament to commission research into “PD” and gender equality and the EP’s normative power is emphasized (Guerrina, Hastrup, and Wright 2023).

This article looks more specifically inside the EP and how EU27-UK PD was practiced after the 2016 UK referendum and prior to the UK’s withdrawal (2016–2020). Brexit encapsulates complex PD since it involved the quasi-negotiation and parliamentary ratification of international agreements, notably the Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration and Trade and Cooperation Agreements; navigated sensitive and territorial issues; and had implications on human security. Overall, returning to Stavridis’s (2021) definition, Brexit exemplifies PD because it showcased how parliamentary actors were integral to quasi-negotiating, shaping, and scrutinizing a complex international process.

Overall, the role of *parliamentary* diplomacy has been less researched in UK–EU27 relations (cf Bressanelli, Chelotti, and Lehmann 2019; Cooper 2019; Meislova 2023), compared to the literature on EU27–UK executive diplomacy (Barston 2019). Such literature analyzes the European Unions’s and the United Kingdom’s (integrative and distributive) negotiating stances

(Larsén and Khorana 2020); their cultural underpinnings (Martill and Staiger 2021, 261); and the gendered norms of militarism and deal-making (Achilleos-Sarll and Martill 2019).

This article deepens analyses of EP Brexit diplomacy through a gender lens, by presenting insider accounts, collected contemporaneously. Gendered and racialised external relations have been criticized for both parliaments when Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) took money from a state with poor human rights (Qatar); Members of Parliament participating in the UK parliament's country-specific All Party Parliamentary Groups were criticized for sexist and orientalist practices (Webber and Gallardo 2022); and UK Members of Parliament experienced racist and Islamophobic treatment whilst travelling with a parliamentary delegation (Gyane and Lynch 2023).

This article is based on data from an European Research Council-funded project on gendered practices and policies of the political groups. The EP is not a uniform actor and different diplomatic actors have been analyzed therein, including the EP President (Gianniti and Lupo 2017); political groups (Fiott 2015; Gatterman 2014; Shemer-Kunz 2017); intergroups (Dutoit 2017); standing committees dealing with external relations (Delputte et al. 2017) and individual MEPs (Redei 2019). Methods used to investigate the EP's (non) PD have used in-depth interview data (Redei 2019; Shemer-Kunz 2017, 97) to understand the scope of (parliamentary) contacts.

(Gender and) diplomacy literature recommends ethnography because it provides “novel insights to gendered micro-practices and the daily mundane institutional practices” (Aggestam and Towns 2019, 9; Kuus 2015). Shadowing, meeting ethnography, and hanging out, comprising the parliamentary ethnography, have been detailed elsewhere (Miller 2022). A broader corpus of 192 pages of field notes taken during onsite visits in Brussels and Strasbourg over a period of fifty-five days in 2018–2020 was compiled. Shadowing nine MEPs enabled mobility to observe *diplomatic encounters* in “classic” and restricted diplomatic settings, such as the neoclassical Egmont Palace in Brussels, used for receptions by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and meetings with permanent representations in the MEPs' Astrid Lulling Bar. Meeting ethnography included attending ten political group meetings, all in which Brexit was discussed. Quite tellingly, observations did not include the Brexit Steering Group, though AFCO's final recommendation meeting giving parliamentary consent to the withdrawal agreement and plenary debate were observed. Hanging out afforded opportunities to talk with civil society activists in informal spaces such as the EP Mickey Mouse bar; attend leaving parties for UK MEPs and staff; and engage in shared embodied processes such eating and dancing (Neumann 2013, 46).

A total of 140 interviews were conducted in the project. Data on both EU27 and UK MEPs are included, albeit with considerations of anonymization, to show conflicts and convergences. The effect of Brexit on political groupings was a project question from the start. I asked UK MEPs how they



used their mandates vis-à-vis Brexit; how/if they would continue relationships with MEPs; and how Brexit affected informal EP spaces. I asked EU27 MEPs how Brexit was affecting their groups and relationships with UK MEPs. Interviews were conducted with EP Secretariat staff and political group staff close to the process. Documents such as the EP's rules of procedure were also analyzed.

All interviews and ethnographic fieldnotes were first team-coded with Atlas Ti. For this article, I included the topical code Brexit. To make PD identifiable, I started with Stavridis's broader definition (Stavridis 2021) and empirical PD activities identified in the literature (Fiott 2015, 4–5; Stavridis 2021, 238). However, my concern, following FI was to identify the rules of the game, that is, formal rules—recorded and communicated officially; informal practices—repetitive patterns of action demonstrated through conduct, outside of formally authorized channels; and symbols—shared signifiers that communicate meaning in (non)verbal form.

My positionality as a white, UK national risks emphasizing delimited aspects of gender and the diplomatic contributions of UK MEPs. To mitigate this somewhat, critical approaches to diplomacy, intersectional feminist governance (Townsend-Bell 2023), and operations of whiteness within the European project (Begum 2023; Galpin 2022) have been explored. My nationality affected the fieldwork in several ways. Not being in the Schengen area necessitated providing a criminal record extract for security. In Firat's (2019, 49–50) ethnographic study on Turkey's diplomacy during EU accession negotiations, she became a metonym for Turkey "you" and she discussed the gendered politics around her (absence of) hair covering. For some pro-EU MEPs, my presence on a Horizon 2020 project became a metaphor for the (then potential) loss of UK–EU scientific cooperation. MEPs often asked me if I was an ERASMUS student. I was advantaged by English as a lingua franca in the EP and team members of Finnish, German, French, and Polish nationalities also conducted interviews, which allowed for a more candid discussion with EU27 actors. This article now presents the empirical analysis.

## Gendering EU27-UK PD: Formal Rules, Practices, and Symbols

This section explores how the rules, practices, and symbols were gendered in EU27–UK PD. While rules, practices, and symbols have been separated analytically, there are overlaps.

### Formal rules

The EP sought to be a key player in the Brexit negotiations. Formally, the EP had the right of veto, which it had exercised previously in international agreements. As mentioned, PD is multilayered and multiform. There are

plethora of temporary and permanent PD actors. Traditionally, the EP President and EP committees, notably Foreign Affairs and International Trade, are important for PD. However, while all three EP Presidents, Schultz, Tajani, and Sassoli, visited the United Kingdom and the Constitutional and Foreign Affairs committee (AFCO) made a recommendation to the EP for the Withdrawal Agreement, overall the body formally authorized to be a “quasi-negotiator” was the Brexit Steering Group (BSG). Guy Verhofstadt, favored by Martin Schultz (Laffan and Telle 2023), was the BSG’s chair and the EP’s Brexit coordinator. The BSG was simultaneously an informal organ. The Treaties suggest that MEPs are representatives of the European Union. This means the EP “can’t (not) formally be a parliament of 28” (EP Secretariat Staff M 190320). Therefore, the BSG was set up informally, under the Conference of Presidents, to exclude UK members. However, the group’s activities were formally recorded on the EP website as a formal parliamentary interlocutor.

The BSG operated formally from April 6, 2017 to January 31, 2020. It consisted of five broadly pro-EU groups: the European People’s Party (EPP), Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Alliance for Liberals in Europe (ALDE), Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), and the European Unitarian Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL). It had a formal mandate on behalf of the Conference of Presidents to negotiate for the EP with the Commission, the UK government, and the UK parliament. In sum: “the BSG’s purpose was to coordinate and prepare Parliament’s deliberations, considerations and resolutions on the UK’s withdrawal from the EU” (Bressanelli, Chelotti, and Lehmann 2019). It had an agenda-setting role—particularly around Northern Ireland. Many groups openly opposed to gender equality initiatives, such as European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), and the Identity and Democracy group (ID), were excluded from the BSG. This may have constituted a permissive opportunity for more feminist resolutions.

In terms of resources, the EP does not have Foreign Ministry-level resources, but the BSG received support from the parliamentary administration, including the Deputy Secretary General, the Director for Legislative Coordination and Inter-institutional Affairs, and DG Presidency Staff. The BSG’s diplomatic tools included issuing press releases and making diplomatic visits to European capitals (Bressanelli, Chelotti, and Lehmann 2019, 354). Furthermore, by having access to the Conference of Presidents, the BSG’s resolutions had plenary access.

Despite praise from parliamentary leadership for the Commission and EP’s “transparency” in which the Withdrawal Agreement was concluded (AFCO Chair, Antonio Tajani, field note 230123), gatekeeping information from Eurosceptics and the UK government required a degree of secrecy. Informal rules existed. Although the BSG’s resolutions were subject to parliamentary voting, BSG texts were not distributed to groups until they were adopted by

the Conference of Presidents and tabled. This included even the Greens/EFA group, who struggled to adapt to the rules of the BSG:

for our group, this was super weird. We believe in transparency, we believe in . . . cooperative decision-making processes, and in the [BSG] this was not possible . . . this is a more traditional way of leadership, that we are not used to. And I think the fact that it was mainly male-dominated contributed to that. (Greens/EFA F Staff 100320 EU27)

The BSG bypassed further parliamentary structures, such as the committee system. While the Conference of Committee Chairs received punctual information, committee involvement was technical (Closa 2020, 641). The Women's Rights and Equalities Committee (FEMM) was not invited to attend the BSG (personal communication EP Secretariat, 20/03/20).

Access to the BSG was uneven. Renew MEPs praised a consultative, "easy and open communicative relationship" with Verhofstadt (Renew MEP M 131219 UK; see also Renew MEP F 240220). However, an S&D MEP described (in)appropriateness when interacting with the BSG that perpetuated "insider/outsider" status: "there's a hierarchy as well. If I had gone to Guy Vanhofen . . . I can never pronounce his name and said 'Oi what do you think?' who the hell am I? So, you have to . . . there are channels" (S&D MEP F 200220). Actors with newer (2019) mandates noted the interaction of gender with incumbency:

[They] were long-standing, heavily involved for a long time. They were not listening, they were already on a course that they understood and knew and were confident with . . . then the UK sends, five new women, Green MEPs, you might think "okay so that would be an opportunity for the women to have more of a say" but, we weren't really being consulted . . . those who were already heavily invested . . . didn't think that there was any necessity to start talking. (Greens/EFA MEP, F 240220 UK)

For others, accessing the BSG required being a "force of nature" and "difficult to refuse" (GUE/NGL Staff M 210220). Gender may simultaneously be a capital for women (Standfield 2020) to access formally authorized PD spaces through gendered agency:

She did manage to open doors, she was perhaps able to be more, insistent, as a woman, than a man might have got away with, with people like Brok and Verhofstad [laughs]. She was able to push much harder . . . she has a good relationship with Danuta Hübner which is helpful and personally with Gabi . . . that sort of chemistry . . . if we had a man from (Left Republican party) going in and demanding, it would have been a different dynamic. (GUE/NGL Staff M 210220)

The overrepresentation of men on the BSG was constructed in masculine subjectivities of power hoarding: “men should have taken themselves off the [BSG] to make way for women” and its disbandment might open spaces for women (S&D MEP F 270120 UK). Staffers reiterated the “almost male-only composition” at the MEP and political level:

The AFCO chair, [a woman was] present there and the chair of GUE, but the rest of the members were men. It was terrible. And from Barnier’s team, it was quite male-dominated. (Greens/EFA F Staff 100320 EU27; see also S&D Group Staff F 020320)

The BSG had gendered late-night and weekend working practices (EP Secretariat M 190320). Gender contents in the discussions, or lack thereof, were impacted by the male dominance. The eventual inclusion of gender issues into other directives, such as pay transparency “depend[ed] a lot on the specific person who is in that meeting” (Greens/EFA F Staff 100320). Ultimately, the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and the Withdrawal Agreement are thin on gender (Haastrup, Wright, and Guerrina 2019, 68). The BSG followed the EP’s bureaucratic negotiations, and turned “what started as a plebiscite into a highly technocratic process” (MacRae, Guerrina, and Masselot 2021, 194). What follows from rationalist bureaucratic sequencing is that negotiations are abstracted from social life.

In sum, formal rules of PD were constructed as gendered when they unequally distributed opportunities for women as groups and individuals to participate. The corollary of such an institutional arrangement are gendered outputs. However, in lieu of formal routes, parliamentary actors may pursue feminist PD through less formally authorized routes.

### Informal practices

This section outlines two practices constitutive of PD: knowledge gathering and (cross-institutional) networking. These were performed by wider parliamentary actors outside of the formal BSG.

*Masculinist knowledge-gathering.* Knowledge-gathering is a core PD activity. Parliamentarians must gather, synthesize, and evaluate policy and political knowledge. Parliamentarians are often busy generalists. Even with a substantial research service, parliamentarians rely on civil society. The EP’s infrastructure, such as meeting rooms and communications, provided spaces for parliamentarians to organize informal knowledge-gathering activities. A repetitive pattern of behavior was masculinist knowledge gathering. In the context of Brexit, there had also been debates about disinformation, which accentuated the need for “reliable” knowledge.

Regarding policy knowledge, relative importance was placed on legal knowledge compared to other (social science) knowledge. Lawyerly expertise,

moderation, and Radio 4 as an information source—a UK radio channel with an older, middle-class demography of listeners, were reasserted and contrasted with the “Badboys of Brexit” (Fieldnotes MEP Brexit Rule of Law Civil Society event, 051218, UK MEP).

Some efforts in the parliament were made to introduce feminist policy knowledge, such as the threat of reigniting violence in Northern Ireland:

She [MEP], very consciously, undertook what could be probably best termed a diplomatic offensive, initially within the group, talking to every single delegation, explaining the Good Friday Agreement . . . backed up by legal studies . . . making sure that everybody understood, why this is so important for Ireland, and basically getting the group on board, and getting the group to agree to, uncomfortable positions, signing up to resolutions . . . she’s a very powerful personality and she kind of carried that. (GUE/NGL Staff M 210120)

Overall, though, feminist knowledge was marginalized:

[On] the policy side, it was like “OK, how are we going to deal with transborder crime, trade, investments in the financial sector, fisheries, agriculture?” So a lot of those things took up so much of the, attention span and talking space around Brexit that I still think we (had the problem of) making people realise that all of these issues are ultimately gendered . . . it was seen as an extra, an additional way of looking at it. (S&D Staff F 020320)

This absence may have been informed by the United Kingdom’s status as a third country. Europe is the “oft-claimed original site of diplomacy” and forged in “a myth about peace [that] is uniquely European” (Neumann 2013, 15–16). Gender only appeared in discussions of citizen’s rights (MacRae, Guerrina, and Masselot 2021, 195). There was a “silent consensus on gender equality, there has been no dissensus or open struggle, but gender equality never got on the agenda” (S&D MEP 270120 UK). Eurocentric (Neumann 2013) constructions of women’s rights in third countries underpinned these practices: “the UK specifically is not a third country where the gender issue is the same maybe as . . . Latin American countries or to Asian countries, African countries” (EPP MEP M 120120, EU27; see also ID MEP M 120320 EU27; cf Guerrina and Masselot 2018). Within the EP, critical diplomatic (self) knowledge (Constantinou 2013) was occasionally articulated such as the United Kingdom’s colonialist foreign policy as constitutive of racism in the India Citizenship Act (FN S&D Group meeting, 290120) and the United Kingdom’s Windrush scandal highlighting EU citizens’ requirements for physical documentation (Delbos-Corfield MEP, Fieldnote, AFCO meeting 230220).

In addition to policy knowledge, political knowledge about the negotiating space circulated. Since an agreement rested also on the domestic UK legislative process, informal cooperation between EP and UK parliamentarians ran parallel to executive negotiations, raising public awareness about alternative policies and (electoral) coalitions. This included real-time updates and UK parliamentary proceedings being watched in MEPs' offices. The group meeting was a key organ of PD, where political and policy knowledge about "third" countries is shared (Fiott 2015, 9). UK MEPs became interlocutors of UK parliamentary and polity developments (see also Kantola and Miller 2023):

The complexities of Brexit politics in the UK have got really arcane at times and byzantine, and trying to explain how the Letwin amendment affects the Benn Act and how those affect the Brexit negotiations. . . . So there has been quite a lot of explaining. (Renew MEP M 131219 UK)

This need for knowledge was exacerbated by the lack of a UK constitution:

German colleagues ask me: "can she [Theresa May] do that?" I reply: "yes, if she can get away with it." (Fieldnotes MEP Rule of Law event, 051218, UK MEP)

UK MEPs advised their groups on the feasibility of approaches toward their negotiating partner, Theresa May, in uncompromising constructs. Unconcerned by May's diplomatic loss of face, they emphasized *her* hard-line negotiating style (FN S&D Group meeting 181118). Alternatively, in some committee meetings, political knowledge included public opinion. Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield MEP (Greens/EFA, EU27) drew on gender and public opinion, noting that 80 percent of women aged 18–24 voted to stay in the European Union (Fieldnote, AFCO, 230123). Political knowledge could be shared in cross-institutional networking too.

*Cross-institutional networking.* Parliamentarians' international contacts matter. Parliamentary actors "use political camaraderie and affiliations to reach-out to interlocutors when traditional channels are strained" (Fiott 2015, 4). In this EP case, actors in the Euro-parties (networks of national political parties) became important bridges between European and national politics. Networking through like-minded parties and Europarties provides stable, informal contacts outside of summits. Renew Group MEPs described identifiable PD between the Liberal Democrat (UK) and En Marche (France) NPDs—persuading President Macron to a Brexit extension, a concrete outcome of PD.

Extra-parliamentary networking empowered those who already had sway in the EP, such as Group Leaders and Heads of National Party Delegations (NPDs) where men are overrepresented (Kantola and Miller 2022) and sometimes have ex officio roles in national and Europarties. Group leaders (for

most groups) were constructed as less presidential, eschewing symbols of traditional foreign policy: “less powerful, ceremonial, flying on Airforce 1” (Renew MEP M 081219). However, they were described as performing PD as go-betweens of groups and European leaders. Regarding ECR leadership, an MEP noted:

Because he was British and a Conservative [visiting Prime Ministers] would always come speak to him about Brexit. He didn’t necessarily seek it but he fell into that role as interlocutor—a really useful role to play. (ECR MEP M 191219 UK)

There are gendered costs and benefits to networking. Ciolos, breaking informal conventions of a unified parliament, was celebrated as a conduit to Emmanuele Macron (Renew MEP M 081219). In contrast, S&D group leader Iraxte Garcia Perez was described as “always down the line to Madrid [Pedro Sanchez]” (S&D MEP F 060219, EU27). Her networking broke appropriateness and she was informally sanctioned with disapprobation: “what’s the point of having a parliament if it will behave just like the European Council?” (Fieldnotes S&D Staff 180220).

Constructions of networking were also interlaced with heterosexual coupledom (Standfield 2020; Stephenson 2020; Towns 2020, 574):

Dacian [Ciolos] had a big role in acting as a direct conduit, he’s very close to Emmanuel Macron because, Dacian was agriculture Commissioner and, through that he’s quite well known in France, his wife is French or his wife does certainly, have a connection to Macron’s wife, so they know each other very well, and he helped us convince Macron to support an extension. (Renew MEP M 081119, UK; see also ECR MEP M 040320 EU27)

An additional way of facilitating international contacts is through parliamentary friendship groups. An EU–UK friendship group was established in 2020. Following the Qatar lobbying scandal, new rules, agreed on July 13, 2023, banned friendship groups with non-EU countries for which official Parliament delegations already exist. However, it should be noted that support toward the EU–UK friendship group was not unequivocal, even from EU-supportive MEPs. The following quote shows how women parliamentary actors are not unconditionally diplomatic:

Personally, I was against it . . . we as Parliament have clearly called for a hard Brexit (nothing to do with breaking off friendships. That is clear). But the hard Brexit also means: ‘no sex with the ex’ . . . when it’s over, it’s over. Why should I play for them now? (S&D MEP F MEP EU27)

In sum, knowledge-seeking and networking were presented in narrow masculinized constructions of expertise and gendered logics of appropriateness in

networking. However, (non)verbal symbols provide another opportunity to (re)gender PD.

### Symbolic Meanings

This final section explores the symbolic meanings that emanated from the EP. Symbols are clustered into two overlapping media: verbal symbols are communicated through words; nonverbal symbols are communicated in the composition of parliamentary bodies, parliamentary settings, gifts, embodiment, and social media.

*Verbal parliamentary symbols.* Parliamentarians send diplomatic signals through carefully timetabled plenary debates, questions, resolutions, international media, press conferences, and press releases. Parliaments can have a “memorialising force,” moving beyond rationalist deal-making in international politics (Stavridis 2021). For example, Ciolos used the plenary debate on the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 2019) to contest nationalism and how Brexit recreates walls.

Parliamentarians are also symbol-makers in international media. Value was placed on the clarity and constructiveness of individual women’s verbal contributions:

a lot of the posturing and verbal diarrhoea of Brexit is male but a lot of the attempts to heal divisions and keep dialogues open has been done by women. There are a lot of powerful women MEPs, British ones and other ones, who are making a very constructive contribution. One of the vice-presidents here has been reported a lot in the British media. She’s been on Question Time a couple of times . . . . And she’s been a very good chair when she’s [often] chaired the Brexit debates. (UK MEP F 190319)

A visible, male EPP MEP (EU27) commentator on Brexit was praised for his “fluent” command of the English language (ECR MEP M 040320 EU27). However, positive valuations of language proficiency could also be exclusionary.

PD is performed in more diffuse, discursive interactions inside the parliament. Some MEPs practiced reflexivity. Examples included apologizing for the UK government’s communications:

I also keep good relations with [EU27] MEPs . . . there’s very little actual diplomacy now between Britain and the European capitals . . . (this) bullying strategy of the cabinet is incredibly destructive and then there’s just, endless vituperative rhetoric against other Europeans and just hurtful, destructive stuff, mentions of the war, ignorance about Irish history . . . we as MEPs try to smooth over as best we can in some sort of diplomatic role. I’ve personally apologized to quite a few Irish



people about the way Brexit has totally ignored their interests and belittled the terrible history we've got with Ireland. So that's a role I think is quite important for us. (UK MEP F 100120)

Damaged relationships were recognized by an ECR UK MEP at a civil society event "I come in peace" (Fieldnotes Rule of Law Event 051218). This also shows how parliamentarians' (non)attendance at events in informal parliamentary spaces—nonverbal symbolic activity—is also interpreted for meaning by parliamentary actors as discussed below.

*Nonverbal parliamentary symbols.* Power is signified in the composition of parliamentary delegations and parliamentary bodies charged with maintaining external relations (Verge 2022). Previous careers matter in PD (Stavridis 2021, 235). BSG members were drawn from a gendered and racialized recruitment pool of senior "heavyweights" (EP Secretariat M 190320) inside the EU institutions. These included a former Prime Minister (Verhofstadt); a "high-profile, former commissioner" (Danute Hübner) (EP Secretariat M 190320); a future finance Minister (Robert Gualteri) and the longest serving MEP and a thirteen-year long former chair of the Foreign Affairs committee (Elmar Brok).

Verhofstadt symbolized "Mr Brexit" (Laffan and Telle 2023, 75) both internationally and in the EP—enjoying the role of being a key "symbol-maker" (Verge 2022) on behalf of the institution. Similar connotations were drawn alongside seniority, such as being "a big, larger-than-life figure" (Renew MEP M 131219 UK); "a long in the tooth political animal" (Renew MEP F 240220 UK); with "trained intuition" (Aggestam and Towns 2019, 11); and linguistic agility when wording resolutions (EP Secretariat M 190320). Gendered binaries of hierarchicalized (inter)national politics were also articulated. Senior members were described as national parliamentary "carnivores" with "macho politicking" and large ministerial ambitions, compared with consensual EP "herbivores" (ECR Staff M, 070422).

Parliamentary settings convey symbols (Verge 2022), such as the architecture of the curved EP chamber, where MEPs could reach (physically) across party divides to hold hands and sing "Auld Lang Syne". One MEP sent signals to the UK government in her seating, when possible: "There are—attacks on judiciary, executive and parliament battles . . . the bad boys of Brexit. I never thought things could get so sinister in Britain. I deliberately try to sit next to Judith Sargentini [Rapporteur on Article 7 and The Rule of Law]" (Fieldnotes MEP Rule of Law Event 051218). The Greens/EFA held a "leave a light on" candlelight vigil, with the parliamentary backdrop in the heart of its symbolic activity, to maintain relationships with the United Kingdom.

Parliamentary gifts communicate gendered meanings around history, wealth, pleasure, regional artistry, and local ingredients. Like in many parliaments (Niemi 2010, 97–98), gifting practices are ubiquitous in Brussels and

Strasbourg. Gifting food is “the oldest diplomatic practice . . . confirm[ing] belongingness and physiological similarity” (Neumann 2013, 45). During the final week of the United Kingdom’s membership, EU27-NPDs gifted UK NPDs Swedish fika, French macarons, and Belgian chocolates in leaving parties. However, Eurosceptic MEPs constructed parliamentary entertaining as luxurious, personal ingratiation: “you get so many invitations to cocktail parties, visiting embassies and lobbyists . . . I didn’t do any of that because my goal was leaving. So fill your boots with the other countries” (NI MEP F 290120, UK). This shows contestations over the appropriateness of PD (Cooper 2019).

Embodiment is highly institutionalized in PD. Embodiment includes forms of salutation, such as handshakes, embraces, and emotion (Cohen 1987). Parliamentary spaces such as group meetings permitted less institutionalized embodiment. A UK MEP was “weepy” in the group meeting: “a safe environment and you’re among the people that you know and love” (Greens/EFA MEP F 210120 UK). Pro-Remain groups used the metaphor of (European) family—a construction with exclusionary connotations (Begum 2023). Cross-party women committee members, wearing colorful blazers, hugged in the margins of final committee meetings (FN AFCE 23/01/20). Silence and inactivity are also PD signals. Some emphasized that they had not cried (Martina Anderson 2020, Sinn Fein, UK) and inactivity from the UK Labour leadership held significant meaning for UK Labour MEPs and staff (S&D Staff F 020320).

(Non)verbal symbols are conveyed online and can be “ambiguous and disclaimable” (Cohen 1987, 19). For example, a male MEP tweeted images of government permanent representatives negotiating with MEPs from the national opposition party (Fieldnotes, Autumn 2018). Terry Reintke MEP (Greens/EFA, EU27) performed active (digital) diplomacy. This was exemplified in her Christmas greeting to the United Kingdom (2018), imitating a scene from the film, *Love Actually*. An MEP remarked: “She’s so supportive . . . it always amazes me when other Europeans are so pro-British: ‘What have we done to deserve your love?’” (Greens/EFA MEP F 210220 UK). This description downplays the strategic nous and purposiveness of Reintke’s diplomacy—indeed, nonverbal signals “are ‘unparalleled in their economy and diffusion . . . acts carry more conviction than words’ and concretize ‘abstractions such as allegiance, prestige and power’” (Cohen 1987, 213); and are to some extent measurable through social media “likes” (Hedling 2023, 12). Parliamentary actors also attended marches, holding “sexist Brexit” banners (S&D Staff F 020320); however, individual diplomacy brings personal risks, eliciting strong gendered reactions in Eurosceptic media (Wright and Guerrina 2020, 533).

Symbolic meaning in PD is conveyed (non)verbally. While PD was masculinist, especially in the composition of the key parliamentary body, the corollary of MEPs individually working outside of formal routes was that there

were opportunities to regender PD symbolically—but such symbolic activities carried personal risk.

### How Is Gendered PD Culturally Legitimized in Masculinized Institutions?

Two discourses culturally legitimized masculinized PD, notably both exogenous to the EP. Returning to [Mackay \(2011, 182\)](#), the construction of institutional contexts matters. The first discourse was the EP's muscular institutional patriotism, gaining actorness in international affairs vis-à-vis the Commission, the European Council, and the UK government. The composition of the BSG with authoritative heavyweights, while showing respect to interlocutors, also symbolized the principle of conflict and empowered individuals: "the EP's self-empowerment mainly served a small group of powerful politicians . . . the small BSG and political group leaders also found an opportunity to maximise their power vis-à-vis AFCO" ([Closa 2020, 641](#)). The momentum of the negotiations vis-à-vis these actors also stymied gender knowledge:

[Gender] was something that [he] was definitely [NPD leader] was aware of and he was interested in. But again . . . the politics of it in terms of "oh when's the next Brexit deadline coming, who are the key players in Westminster, how are they gonna get this vote passed?", those were the things that took up a lot of (members') attention. (S&D Staff F 020320, UK)

The second discourse was the persistent distrustful representation of the interlocutor—the UK government. UK and EU27 actors from across the political spectrum, excluding the ID group, critiqued the UK government's suboptimal, fraught, and ambiguous negotiating style (ECR MEP M 191223 UK). Theresa May's government's cherry-picking was constructed as "self-serving and unbalanced" ([Laffan and Telle 2023, 121](#)). Meanwhile, following Boris Johnson's brinkmanship and prorogation, a no-deal outcome was constructed as "entirely the responsibility of the UK government" (EP Resolution 18/09/19). This contrasted with an EU narrative that maximized (credibility for) preparedness and outsmarting the UK government ([Laffan and Telle 2023](#)).

In terms of gender, the UK Conservatives (the UK governing party) were situated in broader developments in global democracy—such as hyper-masculine rule-breaking by "strongmen" executive leaders ([Rachman 2022](#)) and within the EP, they had aligned with far right parties ([Gaweda et al. 2023](#)). Diplomacy performed by "Brussels bureaucrats" is critiqued by the European right ([Cooper 2019](#)). The damaging lack of contact with UK Conservative MEPs, post 2009, was emphasized by EPP members (the largest political group):

the last threads of conversation tear off . . . you just don't have any British colleagues with whom you can just . . . discuss things over a beer or a glass of wine, where you understand the other situation . . . compromises can come, *even when strong national leaders are gone . . . you end up having no more structures, then it might lead to it becoming even more radical.* (EPP MEP M EU27, 120122, emphasis added)

Notably, a distinction was made between parliamentary and executive actors. Structurally, UK MEPs had supranational mandates, but of a withdrawing state (Closa 2020, 639). Meanwhile, EU27 MEPs maintained relationships with a diplomatic partner with an ambiguous “third country” status. Both autobiographically—in birthplaces, places of work and study, tourism, language-use—and interpersonally—as colleagues and “Eternal friends” (Kantola and Miller 2023), these parliamentary actors were embedded, through multiple identifications, in each other's lives and identities.

Overall, from the empirical discussion, gendered PD is legitimized culturally by appeals to exigencies exogenous to the EP. Interestingly, PD did not operate in an inverse relationship to, or always necessarily contest (Galpin 2022), masculinized executive Brexit politics due to the arrangement of its rules, practices, and symbols. A feminist PD has to be worked toward and some proposals are presented in the next section.

## What Might a Feminist PD Look Like?

Thus far, gendered PD and how it is culturally legitimated have been analyzed. This final section considers what a *feminist* PD might look like. FFP scholarship explores articulations of the (contested) feminist label (Guerrina, Hastrup, and Wright 2023). “Feminist” may not only involve the pursuit of gender equality or pertain only to categorical variation among women (Townsend-Bell 2023, 92) but also links to broader feminist epistemologies, methodologies, and social justice agendas (Cohn 2023). Furthermore, FFP scholars highlight FFP's provenance as emerging from executive elites. GSP was developed in international parliamentary Institutions. PD has emerged from practitioners themselves (Stavridis 2021, 236). If the impetus for feminist PD came from the EP, and is “exported” elsewhere, this could be problematic. Furthermore, feminist PD may be practiced without formal articulations.

Turning to FI approaches to PD, a feminist PD in its formal rules would interrogate and democratize who has access to international negotiation processes, agenda-setting, timetabling, and will-formation processes within the parliament. Furthermore, in a policy sense, the effective use of international mandates for gender equality and systemic links to other injustice projects, such as anti-racism, anti-capitalism, and climate change would be developed—as well as connections with multilevel actors charged with implementing change. Since the momentum of negotiations stymied gender equality,

having equalities data and networks in place would enable feminists to move at pace when needed (IPU 2016).

Regarding practices, an FI approach to PD would confer greater recognition on the diversity of practices, actors, and acts that build relationships between parliaments, for example at the official–official level in interparliamentary offices (Murphy, 2023). Parliamentary innovation includes reverse knowledge practices—such as reflection around privileged lived experiences of parliamentary interlocutors, in addition to those who are marginalized (Begum 2023; Galpin 2022; Kerr 2023). International networks may be enabling for both men and women (Piscopo 2023) when intersectional solidarities are forged (Palmieri 2020). Regarding geopolitical (gendered) knowledge practices, the regional and geographic mapping (Giesen and Malang 2022) of PD on gender equality topics could be undertaken. Friendship groups could be reclaimed by feminists to realize more expansive and creative forms of PD.

Regarding (non)verbal symbols, an FI approach to PD may project feminist ideas of solidarity/difference and historical reflexivity in speeches and media appearances, parliamentary architecture, gifts, and embodiment. Advice may be provided to parliamentarians on how to avoid reproducing existing unequal global power relations unintentionally on social media, for example in international hashtag campaigns. Meaningful translations of intersectional PD into practices could be developed (Townsend-Bell 2023, 95). Gift-giving may amplify gender history, or be an underutilized opportunity, such as giving cufflinks. Many symbols cannot be ruled for, since this would reduce their “spontaneity.” However, one-off creative acts may, over time, turn into institutional innovations.

In summation, Jančić et al. (2021, 156–66), drawing on GSP, directed empirical recommendations for the EP to improve its PD to pursue gender equality. To avoid duplication, table 1 theorizes general and indicative components that might provide a joined-up feminist (mostly) *intra*-focused PD.

Table 1’s FI components are procedural—and mostly target *intra*-parliamentary transformation. The table needs to be in permanent construction, monitored for its effectiveness and adaptive to the social formations that structure inequalities. However, the normative ends of feminist PD need reflection. These might include greater linkages with anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and environmental social movements (Achilleos-Sarll et al. 2023) and reflection on what care looks like (Aggestam, Bergman Rosamond, and Kronsell 2019) in PD (the absence of conflict is not always care). In *inter*-PD, reflection may include how parliamentarians would engage with other parliaments where threats of gender violence or racist harassment may occur. Can a parliament be credible in its *inter*-PD when it is divided on sexual health and reproductive health and its internal politics are not aligned? Finally, feminist PD would need strategies and tactics to counter resistance. This may require a “thinking and working politically approach” (Palmieri 2022).

**Table 1.** Components of an FI parliamentary diplomacy

FI approach to GSP	FI approach to PD
<i>Formal institutions</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules around composition of delegations (IPU 2016; EIGE 2019)</li> <li>• Rules around gender mainstreaming in outputs (IPU 2016; EIGE 2019)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules democratizing information channels, will-formation processes, and representative acts of parliamentary bodies, such as official visits</li> <li>• Multilevel representation to parliamentary decision-making bodies</li> <li>• Monitoring of adherence to formal rules around gender in policy scrutiny and practices</li> <li>• Support towards care to enable visits</li> </ul>
<i>Informal practices</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules around sex-disaggregated data (IPU 2016, 16)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessibility of intersectional data (funding and commissioning research)</li> <li>• Reverse knowledge practices where “lived experience” also spotlights the privileged (Kerr 2023) and global exemplars are explored.</li> <li>• Recognition and utilization of broader PD actors and extra-institutional networks</li> <li>• Exploration of possibilities for feminists to reclaim friendship groups</li> <li>• Equalities briefings given of the situation and cultural conventions of third countries</li> </ul>
<i>Symbolic meaning</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timetabling—coordination of debates with international dates marking gender equality (Verge 2022)</li> <li>• Composition of parliamentary delegations (Verge 2022)</li> <li>• Prizes (Verge 2022)</li> </ul>	<p><i>Verbal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requesting debates on matters of human rights abuses and the breaking of international law</li> <li>• Speeches that respect solidarity and difference</li> <li>• Historical reflexivity e.g. to colonialism and hierarchies</li> <li>• Attention to silence and inaction as diplomatic signaling</li> <li>• Translation and interpretation support</li> </ul> <p><i>Nonverbal</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gifting practices incorporating gender history</li> <li>• Parliamentary settings—accessible and creative spaces</li> <li>• Provision of gender expertise to allow more reflexivity around social media campaigns</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

This article makes a theoretical and empirical contribution to both GSP and PD literature. Theoretically, it has answered the question: “How is parliamentary diplomacy gendered?” Foundational lines of inquiry in FFP and gender and diplomacy literature were explored, before unpacking what GSP and FI might offer. PD is gendered (and can be regendered) in its rules, practices, and symbols. Feminist PD remains a concept-in-formation, but FI provides a base to develop maximum institutional leverage toward the normative ends of gender equality. Empirically, this article contributes to PD and GSP to explore how PD is gendered, by employing an in-depth case study of the EP’s *intra* PD at the time of Brexit. It highlighted the importance of formal rules around parliamentary bodies; practices of knowledge-seeking and networking; and (non)verbal parliamentary symbols (speeches and backstage interactions, composition of parliamentary bodies, parliamentary settings, embodiment, gifting, and social media).

Future research into *intra* and *inter* PD may involve multi-case comparative studies (Aggestam and Towns 2019). The type of parliament and its attendant opportunities and powers may be a relevant analytical category—working, debating, substate parliaments, and contested parliaments or those experiencing destabilizing conflict may provide different contexts for enacting feminist PD. Following FFP, future research might explore where, when, and how articulations of feminism appear in PD. Given the two (externalized) discourses that culturally legitimated masculinized PD, research could explore the reception of symbolic diplomacy on target audiences (Verge 2022). Finally, the institutionalization of PD could be explored, so it is not interpreted as a luxury in rapidly developing crisis situations.

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