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The Construction of Gender in EU Foreign
and Security Policy: An Analysis of the
European Union Police Mission for the
Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS)

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“Without justice there can be no love.”

bell hooks – All about Love

Dedicated to those, staying put despite continuous assault

Abstract

This thesis investigates how gender norms are produced and contested within EU CSDP missions by focusing on EUPOL COPPS, a civilian mission deployed in Palestine. Drawing on new institutionalism together with feminist institutionalism and queer IR theory, it develops a queer-institutionalist framework centered around three main frames: invisibility, heteronormativity, and binaries, looking into how institutional structure of the EU shapes gendered outcomes through GAP III, WPS, and the broader FFP. Building on existing work on the EU's formal commitments to the WPS agenda, gender mainstreaming and the implications of such, this study identifies a missing element: despite high-level policy frameworks of inclusivity, queer and LGBTQ perspectives remain marginalized. The case of EUPOL COPPS demonstrates that EU gender discourse often frames gender with cisgender understanding, reinforces heteronormative family models, and frames GBV by excluding queer vulnerabilities. These findings suggest, in line with queer IR, that practical transformational change requires systematically queering EU institutional rules and expanding the institutionalized frame on gender to include diverse sexual and gender identities further than the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

Keywords

Binary – CSDP – EU – EUPOL COPPS – Feminist Institutionalism – GAP III – Gender – Heteronormativity – Invisibility – LGBTQ – Queer Institutionalism – Security – WPS

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List of Abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CSDP	Common Security and Defense Policy
EEAS	European External Action Service
EU	European Union
EUPOL	European Union Police and Rule of Law Mission for the Occupied
COPPS	Palestinian Territory
FFP	Feminist Foreign Policy
GAP II/III	Gender Action Plan II/III
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IR	International Relations
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer
SGM	Sexual and Gender Minorities
UN	United Nations
VCA	Visual Content Analysis
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

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1. Introduction

With the turn of the century in 2000, the United Nations (UN) took a pivotal step towards women's rights by adopting the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, reaffirming "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction" (United Nations, 2000). This, in turn set a following trend on the international stage for key actors like the European Union (EU) to start integrating *gender perspectives* across their internal and external agendas. In particular, the EU's Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) has bolstered these commitments by requiring a thorough *mainstreaming of gender considerations* in all facets of EU foreign policy and external action (European Commission, 2020).

The prime objective of this thesis is to investigate how are such norms of gender equality translated through the foreign policy of the EU in regard to queer identities, whether or not they are truly upholding in Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions. Situating the research into the EU Police and Rule of Law Mission for the occupied Palestinian territory (EUPOL COPPS), a civilian mission deployed in Palestine, allows for examining the challenge to the EU- power distribution and foreign institutional building (Mullen and Bouris, 2025). Moreover, this work uses ground in institutionalist and feminist lens to build up the theoretical argument of deployment of queer IR theory in order to later on assess how gender constructed and manifested the case of EUPOL COPPS, under the overarching notion of gender mainstreaming, Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP) of the EU (Guerrina et al., 2023; Immergut, 1998, Mühlenhoff, 2017).

The insights of queer theory in foreign policy could offer in the conceptualization of gender on three key fronts – invisibility, heteronormativity and binaries, adapted as a framework of analysis, based on the work of Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff on queering EU foreign policy (Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025). The framework, contextualized in the EU's self-understanding as a foreign influence actor in relation to gender, together with local mission implementations, could enrich the understanding of how international institutions maneuver challenges around the concept in foreign policy.

Thereby, in light of the research, the central question guiding this thesis is:

In what ways is gender constructed and operationalized in the planning and implementation of EU CSDP missions?

From a societal point of view, examining the EU's foreign influence over the construction of gender is important, since often CSDP missions are intertwined with local actors, such as agencies and institutions (Mullen and Bouris, 2025, p. 10). Thereby, the way the EU exudes its understanding of gender would likely shape the way host countries address the matter as well, in their effort to keep a close connection with a powerful ally, such as the EU. Moreover, it is essential to evaluate the image of gender that the EU constructs, in order to assess practically what understanding of gender do CSDP missions hold and whether or not there are any potential shortcomings from such (Peterson, 2014; Weber, 2015; Hagen, 2016; Richter-Montpetit and Weber 2017; Thiel, 2018; Richter-Montpetit, 2018; Locken and Hagen, 2022).

Examining the topic is academically significant because it highlights the interplay between the EU's high-level gender commitments and their actual implementation on the ground, especially in civilian CSDP missions such as EUPOL COPPS. By lacking the element of hard power, civilian missions focus on engagement with the "domestic states' police, rule of law, security and judiciary sector reform and civil administrations" and thereby are inherently being prompted to more politicalization, and more implicitly exerted influence by the EU, compared to military ones (Mullen and Bouris, 2025, p. 2). Thereby, since gender could be considered one of the main priorities of EU external efforts in relation to soft power, it is essential to examine how this is translated in a civilian context within the broader frame of European foreign policy. Methodologically, this study deploys Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) together with Visual Content Analysis (VCA), combining two methods of analysis, used in a complementary fashion in order to enrich the field of existing literature.

This thesis proceeds in the following manner. The next, second chapter reviews existing scholarship on institutionalism and gender in EU foreign policy, beginning with an overview of new institutionalism and tracing its evolution into feminist institutionalism. It then highlights the missing queer critique within feminist debates on institutionalism and foreign policy by outlining key contributions from queer IR in building queer-inclusive institutionalism, together with mapping out contextually the construction of FFP. The third chapter details the research design, restating the main research question and sub-questions, describing the combined use of CDA and VCA, outlining the selection of primary sources, justifying the case, and addressing

the researcher's positionality. The fourth chapter presents the empirical findings, based on the theoretical framework as sub-categories, examining institutionalized typologies of gender as a norm and those of security, violence, and protection of gender. Finally, the fifth chapter concludes by summarizing the key findings, reflecting on the strengths and limitations of the study, and offering final remarks on the implications of applying a queer institutionalist lens to EU CSDP missions.

2. Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

In this thesis, new institutionalism, feminist institutionalism and queer critical theory are used to analyze the EU's foreign policy on gender in CSDP missions, focusing on EUPOL COPPS. These theories will explain and help understand the interrelationship between gender, how institutions portray and reinforce understandings of gender, and the impact that has on CSDP missions. To be able to do so clearly, this chapter outlines all relevant concepts, theories, and assumptions that are foundational for the building of queer critique on institutionalism and further moving IR theory of gender, forward from the invisibility of sexuality, heteronormativity in patriarchal policies in foreign policies and binary framework of gender understanding (Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025).

First, the chapter provides an account of the development of new institutionalism and how institutions facilitate norm production. Continuing from those ideas, the theory of feminist institutionalism is introduced, with its foundational concepts. Furthermore, this work aims to building on feminist literature by enhancing such with queer theory in IR, aiming to provide a new way of looking into norms regarding gender and how are they being institutionalized in foreign policy. Third, the chapter focusses on how the EU specific policies are outlined, such as WPS, GAP II, GAP III and more, in relation to the self-consideration of the union as a player on the international arena of foreign policies regarding gender, in order to help facilitate further in the analysis the ways such image is reflected in the themes of EU's foreign policy in comparison to local settings.

2.1. The development of institutionalism – from New Institutionalism to Feminist Institutionalism

2.1.1 New Institutionalism

New institutionalism emphasizes how formal and informal institutional structures shape political behavior, social norms, and policy outcomes (Immergut, 1998). Although not inherently an IR school of thought, institutionalism can serve greatly in debates of how

institutions shape the outcomes in foreign policy, such as in the case of EU CSDP missions (Mullen and Bouris, 2025).

New Institutionalism moves beyond merely documenting the existence of institutions to examining how they actively construct meanings, limit or expand possibilities, and embed power relations. Specifically, institutions are not viewed as neutral arenas but as sites where rules, norms, and collective understandings mold policy processes and govern expectations (Immergut, 1998, p. 19). Many prominent authors have placed forward the discussion of power relations embedded in institutions and how institutions translate such through time as more than the mere collective interest of individuals (March and Olsen, 1984; Immergut, 1998; Clement and Cook, 1999).

One of the key scholars on the subject, Immergut (1998) argues that new institutionalism rejects the idea that political outcomes follow purely from individual choices (Immergut, 1998, pp. 6-8). Instead, new institutionalism as an approach contends that institutions fundamentally shape political outcomes by defining actors' preferences (Immergut, 1998, p. 6). This prominent idea on which the author develops her argument is earlier addressed by Hall and Taylor, where they conceptualize three distinct forms of new institutionalism- historical, rational choice, and sociological (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Thereby, depending on the way scientists approach institutions, they will be prompted to see different outcomes in how institutions determine political outcomes (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 5).

A common understanding of all however, is that rejecting behaviorist assumptions is the essential core to new institutionalists literature, pointing that institutions do not naturally behave based on shared common interests of the people such are supposed to govern, but rather construct meanings, determine possibilities, and embed power relations into policy processes (Hall and Taylor, 1996; Immergut, 1998; Lieberman, 2002; Peters, Pierre and King, 2005). One of the three types of new institutionalism, proposed by Hall and Taylor, is sociological institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996, pp. 13-17). It is a branch of new institutionalism that focuses specifically on how identities and preferences, adopted through institutions, are socially constructed (Hall and Taylor 1996, p.14; Lieberman, 2002, p. 2). This construction is based on norms and practices common in different communities, beyond politics, and it creates implications for groups excluded from the overall social frame (Hall and Taylor 1996, p.14; Lieberman, 2002, p. 4).

Thereby, looking into sociological new institutionalism, political decisions as outcomes of institutions, cannot be seen as mere aggregations of common rational based preferences (Hall and Taylor, 1996, p. 8; Immergut, 1998, p. 7; Lieberman, 2002, p. 11; Peters, Pierre and King, 2005, p. 1281). Rather, they result from how institutions channel demands and what is considered to be the norm in determining procedural rules, such as legislative structures and policies (Immergut, 1998, pp. 19- 21; Lieberman, 2002, p. 15).

However, institutions, although embedded in power relations, are not static elements unable to endure changes, and by recognizing patterns influencing change positively or negatively, one can truly understand the development of new institutionalism. In their work, Clemens and Cook focus exactly on the notion of change, narrowing on how institutionalized patterns gain durability and thus become resistant to change (Clemens and Cook, 1999). However, they propose that new institutionalism challenges this phenomenon of institutionalism and focuses on the ways embedded norms and regulations can be systematically broken down (Clement and Cook, 1999; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2007; Seo and Creed, 2002). Although it is important to note that the authors discuss new institutionalism as a whole, the conclusions drawn are equally applicable to the branch of sociological new institutionalism, since it is under the same overarching umbrella. The often-problematic stabilization of institutionalism is characterized mainly through consistent reinforcement, whether by laws, bureaucratic routines, or cultural legitimacy, from different aspects of political, cultural, and social life (Clement and Cook, 1999). Thereby, key elements in breaking those down are regarded to be mutability, contradiction, multiplicity, containment and diffusion, learning and innovation, and mediation (Clement and Cook, 1999, p. 443; Seo and Creed, 2002, pp. 232-233; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2007, pp. 651-656).

Out of such elements, for the purpose of this work, the element of *contradictions* will be taken as a guiding change for the development of institutionalism (Clement and Cook, 1999; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2007; Seo and Creed, 2002). According to such, internal inconsistencies within institutions, like a gap between stated goals and institutional practices, can act as a tool driving transformation, fueling field-level change and creation of a new path of institutional work (Clement and Cook, p. 450; Schneiberg and Lounsbury, 2007, p. 649). In the following paragraph, focusing on the shift from New Institutionalism to Feminist Institutionalism, this work will examine how contradictions facilitate a shift in guiding theories.

2.1.2 Feminist Institutionalism

Building on the discussion of institutions and the way it translates norms, feminist institutionalism integrates a gender lens into new institutionalist approaches, focusing on formal and informal rules, norms, and practices that are deeply shaped by gendered aspect of power relations, specifically in the case of EU gender related foreign policies (Kenny, 2007; Kenny and MacKay, 2009; Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010; Chappell and Waylen, 2013; Waylen, 2014; Ansorg and Haastруп, 2018; Mullen and Bouris, 2025). A feminist critique states that although new institutionalism recognizes that institutions perpetuate norms, it fails to acknowledge that those are not merely based on political and social relations, posing an overarching note of gendered power dynamics that remains overlooked within new institutionalist literature (Waylen, 2014, pp. 95-96; Ansorg and Haastруп, 2018, pp. 1127-1130). It exposes how institutions can perpetuate specific gender dynamics of exclusion, marginalization, or repression, hindering transformative change for women's inclusion (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010, p. 581).

Furthermore, the prominent works of Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell (2010) and Chappell and Waylen (2013) focus on the importance of hindering challenges to new institutionalism. When one focuses on new institutionalism, it is essential to regard for some intractable issues within the approach- the distinction of formal and informal institutions, structure, agency and power reproduction imbedded in the approach (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010, pp. 578-579; Chappell and Waylen, 2013, pp. 604-608). Similarly to scholars on new institutionalism (Hall and Taylor, 1996), the work of Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell (2010) focuses on differentiating four distinct types of institutionalism, such being rational choice, historical, sociological, and discursive (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010). The authors point out that each of those four schools differs in terminology and emphasis, however, they recognize a common pattern and a point of convergence that each shall acknowledge – gendered power dynamics. Although the four different schools lay the ground on power whether seen in distributional struggles, path-setting legacies, social scripts, or discursive frames, by inflicting feminist approach, they recognize that the way power is imbedded in new institutionalism calls for a transformation of the approach- through gender and feminist theory on power relations and dynamics (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010).

This phenomenon of gender being left unrecognized within new institutionalism is conceptualized as *gender blindness* (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010, p. 574). In such, the literature on feminist institutionalism, critiques previous scholars for failing to “include women

as actors in political process, to ‘gender’ institutionalism, and to move the research agenda towards questions about the interplay between gender and the operation and effect of political institutions” (Mackay, Kenny and Chappell, 2010, p 574). This appears exceptionally interesting and relevant for sociological institutionalism. Provided that it is based on its conceptualizing institutions as heavily dependent on socially constructed norms, there is an immediate contradiction as to why it lacks placing attention on gender (Hall and Taylor, 1996).

In consideration of *gender blindness*, other scholars offer the enhancement of new institutionalism with feminist critique in order to build a further more inclusive form of institutionalism (Haastrup, 2017; Mullen and Bouris, 2025). The work of Mullen and Bouris titled *The Interrelationship between Gender and European Union foreign Policy: A Feminist Institutional Analysis of EULEX Kosovo, EUPOL COPPS and EUMM Georgia* presents such ideas, focusing on, EU’s foreign policy capability of recognizing institutional and practical challenges of the organizational understanding of gender and how those affect CSDP missions and the understanding of gender in local context (Mullen and Bouris, 2025). Similarly to the work of Haastrup (2017), the authors present a line of arguments displaying EU institutions as gendered systems of power, pointing to a feminist institutionalist frame of analysis, in order to understand the EU’s unintended gendered consequences in foreign policy (Haastrup, 2017; Mullen and Bouris, 2025). Moreover, in those gendered systems of power, norms are built upon assumptions about masculinity, femininity, and equality, creating gender hierarchies in EU foreign policy (Haastrup, 2017, p. 224; Mullen and Bouris, 2025, p. 8.).

Borrowing the concept of *logic of appropriateness* from March and Olsen (1984), Mullen and Bouris (2025) take this concept of new institutionalist literature, looking at it from a feminist institutionalist lens (Mullen and Bouris, 2025, p.4). In the new institutionalist perspective, the concept entails that hierarchies are present not only as a construction but as a continuum, shaped by the understanding of behaviors and identities are appropriate (March and Olsen 1984). However, embedding the logic of appropriateness in feminist institutionalism entails that gender hierarchies are as follows again, a continuous process, framing power relations between men and women in their role within institutions (Kenny and Mackay, 2009, pp. 273-278; Mullen and Bouris, 2025, p. 18).

Moreover, the continuity of gender hierarchies and their constant re-implementation into institutions, strengthens further the understanding of femininity, masculinity, and how the two ought to interact, so that there is a considered amount of equality constituted between them (Mullen and Bouris, 2025, p. 18). Feminist institutionalist analysis recognizes that gender is not

something that people *have* rather something that people *do*, a recurring choice being made (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126). However, simply placed a shortcoming of feminist institutionalism, recognized by some of the scholars in the field, is that the logic of appropriateness in feminist institutionalism creates a frame on how to *do gender correctly* through institutions, rather than opening for the exploration of the *ways gender can be done* (Kenny and Mackay, 2009, p. 278, Waylen, 2014, p. 93).

2.2. The missing element of Feminist debates on Institutionalism and Foreign Policy

2.2.1 Queering International Relations – Why and How?

Queer IR, although conceptually important is often overlooked in relation to the way institutions shape outcomes in the global arena. Many authors challenge that view and point to the formation of exclusionary IR (Peterson, 2014; Weber, 2015; Hagen, 2016; Richter-Montpetit and Weber, 2017; Richter-Montpetit, 2018; Locken and Hagen, 2022; Gifkins and Cunningham, 2023; Cooper-Cunningham, 2024). Introducing queer IR as a prominent new approach, building upon elements of feminist IR Scholars, while simultaneously challenging views on gender and power in feminist theory and stressing on the importance of bringing “any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlight the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations” (Browne and Nash, 2010, p. 4). In such way, queer theory could be understood as advancing the foundational feminist ideas in thinking further about concepts of masculinity, femininity, and their interaction beyond their immediate attribution to men, women and heteronormative forms of behavior as a frame of power balance (Peterson, 2014, p. 605-606; Langlois, 2015, p. 392). Such theoretical twist allows to bring the debate of sexuality, foreign politics and security within institutionalism and explore what outcomes masculinity and femininity could attribute to, beyond heteronormative resumptions imbedded in policy formation (Peterson, 2014; Weber, 2015; Hagen, 2016; Richter-Montpetit and Weber 2017; Thiel, 2018; Richter-Montpetit, 2018; Locken and Hagen, 2022).

A prominent work on queer IR theory is the paper by Richter-Montpetit, titled *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex (in IR) But were Afraid to Ask: The ‘Queer Turn’ in International Relations* (Richert-Montpetit, 2017). The author, inspired by the Weberian critiques of IR, introduces a central theoretical claim that queer scholarship profoundly challenges IR’s traditional boundaries by showing that power in international politics is unextractable from sexual norms and logic, differentiating from existing feminist

schools that focus on the role of gender alone (Richert-Montpetit, 2017, p. 222). The article, similarly to other scholars in the field (Sjoberg, 2012; Langlois, 2015), makes an important note that where LGBTQ perspectives typically ask how marginalized groups can gain rights within the system, queer IR interrogates how categories like *LGBT*, *heterosexual*, and the dichotomy of *male/female* are politically produced in the first place within IR and what barriers such construct for people, rather than how the people with the certain labels navigate institutional obstacles (Richert-Montpetit, 2017, p. 226).

2.2.2 Sexuality and Security – Queering Foreign Policy Framework

Furthermore, in queering foreign policy and the debate of security, Mühlenhoff takes the case of the EU's Strategic Compass, arguing that institutions operationalize security and sovereignty by strategically using gender and sexuality (Mühlenhoff, 2025). In her work, *Making European Union Sovereignty: militarism and figuration of sexuality in the strategic compass*, the author adopts the case of the EU's turn toward militarist strategies in recent times (Mühlenhoff, 2025). Mühlenhoff builds the case around the EU Strategic Compass, revealing how sexuality, among other elements such as race and gender, is used as a tool of legitimization of militarization of EU foreign tactics (Mühlenhoff, 2025, p. 106). Similarly, Langlois (2015), discusses the role of global LGBT sexuality politics in relation to security, focusing on and the building of a “range of power relationships that frequently sustain rather than ameliorate colonial, imperial, capitalist and other exploitative dynamics” within the international system, that aim to promote recognition and protection of diverse sexualities (Langlois, 2015, p. 395). Thereby, one of the main arguments brought forward by scholars, like Langlois and Mühlenhoff, is that through sexuality discourse in foreign politics, the EU creates the image of *the Other*, understood as existing primarily outside of the EU as “backwards in terms of sexuality and either able or unable to develop with the help of the EU” (Mühlenhoff, 2025, p. 122).

Such queer intersecting analysis of sexuality and security, provides a critical understanding of how queer theory could enrich foreign policy analysis and strengthen existing literature on feminist institutionalism. Taking from Mühlenhoff and her analysis on EU foreign policy, Langlois and his work on sexuality politics, together with Weber and her work on queer international theory, one could constitute that foreign policy institutions often conceptualize threats, and thereby responses, through binary oppositions- a civilized, heteronormative image of the *Self* versus a deviant, sexualized *Other* (Langlois, 2015; Weber, 2016; Mühlenhoff, 2025).

Similarly, in their work *Queering Gender-Based Violence Scholarship: An Integrated Research Agenda*, Loken and Hagen show that conflict-related gender-based violence (GBV) cannot be fully understood without accounting for violence based on sexual and gender presumptions (Loken and Hagen, 2022). Thereby, queering foreign policy is not only exclusively for adding another branch, but rather making sense of how processes of violence and protection are operationalized (Loken and Hagen, 2022). The authors focus on the binary of *man* and *woman* in relation to GBV, adding that sexual orientation and gender identity do not operate outside those usual categories in a separated vacuum, but within them placing Sexual and Gender Minorities (SGM) not as a distinctive separate group experiencing violence, rather than individuals “overlapping with and expanded beyond men and women” (Locken and Hagen 2022, p. 12). This important move in relation to GBV and sexuality politics calls for yet another main reason for queering IR: in order to move from “regulating gender and sexuality as a situational dimension of GBV” to “regulating gender and sexuality as a central dimension of GBV” (Locken and Hagen, 2022, p. 12). Similarly to Mühlenhoff’s work and the queer critiques of IR, this argument shows that sexuality becomes yet another axis along which it is decided which identities constitute as acceptable and thereby protectable, resulting in control or punishment of deviance, thus consolidating heteronormative assumptions in foreign policy in relation to response to violence (Langlois, 2015; Weber, 2015; Richert-Montpetit, 2017; Locken and Hagen, 2022, Mühlenhoff, 2025).

Moreover, it is important to draw such literatures of sexuality and foreign policy, together with queer theory, since although many authors focus on sexuality in relation explicitly to race, colonialism and gender (Grosfoguel 2011; Sen, 2022; Marijn Huijstink et al., 2023), broad IR literature is so far lacking greater attention to queer IR in relation to security and sexuality (Langlois, 2015). Thereby, adopting similar understanding and applying it to queer theory, one can develop further the understanding of how is securitization, and IR, formed on preexisting assumptions of sexuality (Langlois, 2015, pp. 389-391). As pointed out by queer IR scholars, one of the threats of overlooking queer theory in global politics is the risk of denouncing the idea of queer to the physical manifestation of the queer body, rather than a new discourse of approaching IR (Sjoberg, 2012, p.341; Langlois, 2015, p. 396). Disregarding such threats means disregarding further understandings into the Foucauldian focus on discourses and their crucial legitimizing logics for creation of foreign policies within institutions, based on separation of sectors of appropriateness, created and re-generated by

gendered binary logic within the scholarship of IR (Thiel, 2018, p. 4; Mühlenhoff, 2025, p. 108).

2.2.3 Building Queer-Inclusive Institutionalism

As elaborated in the previous section, building on feminist IR requires systematically queering its core assumptions, thereby queering institutionalism would require integrating similar logic to institutional change in regard to established frames. By integrating queer perspectives, institutions can recognize not just the ways in which women are excluded, as suggested through feminist institutionalism, but also how binary gender norms and heteronormative practices reinforce patriarchal structures of response in foreign policy (Peterson, 2014; Weber, 2014; Mackay et al., 2010). Queering institutionalism would thereby entail re-examining standard institutional rules and identify where queer framework remains invisible or stigmatized across international relations (Sjoberg, 2012; Weber, 2014; Langlois, 2015; Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025).

Building on queer literature discuss above, this thesis adopts three interlocking analytic frames as a conceptual framework- inclusivity, heteronormativity and gender binaries, as guiding lenses for the analysis of EU foreign-policy institutions (Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025). Through the frame of inclusivity, this research illuminates how both formal mandates and informal norms within the EU scholarly field either open space for or systematically erase a spectrum of sexual and gender identities in external politics, and the outcomes this facilitates (Ayoub, 2022). The frame of heteronormativity directs attention to the patriarchal *logics of appropriateness* that privilege heterosexuality as the default ordering of relations, embedding gendered assumptions in policy design, as the ways in which CSDP missions choose to portray *women/men* (Kenny and Mackay, 2009; Waylen, 2014; Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025). Finally, the frame of gender binaries examines how this categorization is used as base line for security approach in foreign politics, marginalizing queer identities (Langlois, 2015; Locken and Hagen, 2022; Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025). By applying these three frames, the analysis will uncover the ways in which EU foreign-policy institutions reproduce exclusionary norms, contest them, or hold potential pathways toward a truly queer-inclusive institutionalism.

2.3 Situating the debate: On gender, inclusion and queer theory in EU foreign Policy

2.3.1 The initial formation of EU's Foreign Policy on Gender

In order to create a frame for the analysis of EU's construction and manifestation of gender, the debate of involving queer institutionalism ought to be situated within the practical involvement of EU foreign policy with gender. In order to analyze further EU's foreign intervention, it is essential to explore how the union is perceived, or expecting to be perceived, in regard to gender protection, gender mainstreaming, and FFP.

During the last quarter of the 20th century, the EU embarked on an ongoing effort to integrate gender considerations into all its operations, moving the emphasis towards the established systems and bodies that reflect its commitments. This strategy reflected ideas from the 1979 milestone, also referred to as the bill of rights of women - The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly (UN Women, 2020). A major outcome of the introduction of this document was the acknowledgment that these systems of governance, under which foreign policy operates, were not inherently gender neutral, and that ignoring their biases would only intensify gender disparities and fail to sustain development in the area (UN Women, 2020).

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for designing policies that consider the needs and interests of both women and men (Council of Europe, 2014). Originally, the concept was first introduced at the 1985 Nairobi World Conference on Women, gaining prominence as an international framework for gender equality with the Beijing Platform for Action at the 1995 Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women (Council of Europe, 2014). Since then, this approach has been broadly adopted as a tool to advance gender equality at every level. In 1998, the Council of Europe provided a formally recognized definition of gender mainstreaming.

“The (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies, at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.” (Council of Europe, 2014).

Following the importance of CEDAW, the EU had implemented such a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy across all sectors, part of which was the document implemented 2000, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (also referred as

the WPS Agenda) – a core principle of the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (EEAS, 2024). Central to the EU’s WPS agenda is the recognition that women are not merely victims of conflict but are essential agents of change whose contributions are crucial for building sustainable peace (EEAS, 2024). This change, according to the union, would be viable through the participation of women in peace processes, decision-making, and security policy formation, achieved through dialogue and policy measures (EEAS, 2024).

Moreover, evaluating and studying EU’s approach and integration to gender, is particularly important, due to *the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025* of the EU, situating the study in the crucial last year of the delivers on the von der Leyen Commission’s commitment to achieving a *Union of Equality* (European Commission, 2025). According to the approach taken by the EU, the main objective in regard to the strategy is to move and make significant progress towards a gender-equal Europe by the year of 2025 (European Commission, 2025).

2.3.2 Adoption of WPS and GAP III in relation to Gender mainstreaming in current EU foreign policy

Building on CEDAW, the UN Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda, it is essential to map out the creation of those ideas, and the way the EU aimed to implement them in order to understand the EU’s attitude towards foreign policy and the image it portrays for itself.

For a first time in 2008, with the adoption of the “*Comprehensive Approach to the EU Implementation of the United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325 and 1820 on WPS and the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 as reinforced by 1820 in the context of ESPD*” that the EU made the initial link between gender and security explicit (Haastrup, Wright and Guerrina, 2019, p. 66). This first important step outlined how the WPS agenda should be integrated into the EU external action (Haastrup, Wright and Guerrina, 2019, p. 66). Such is an important note, since the EU’s CSDP missions, one of which is exactly EUPOL COPPS, are considered to be an integral part of the EU's comprehensive approach towards international security, namely part of the EEAS (EEAS, 2021b).

Currently, under the commission of von der Leyen and the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, the EU policy framework on WPS consists of several vital components (EEAS, 2024). First and foremost, it is based on including the 2018 Council Conclusions on WPS, the EU Strategic Approach to WPS, the corresponding Action Plan (2019-2024), also referred as Gender Action Plan II (GAP II), or the preexisting documents the term of the current commission had started from, outlining exactly that strategic approach of WPS and what does it mean for the EU’s foreign interventions (EEAS, 2024).

The crucial document launched in 2020 and implemented by the current EU mandate is the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III) (European Commission, 2023). Moreover, through the years in 2022, the EU created the Council Conclusions on WPS (EEAS, 2024). In such, the EU evaluates its implementation of the Action Plan on WPS, which sets forth specific objectives and measurable criteria for success (EEAS, 2024). The GAP III is promised to be implemented in every aspect of EU external action “through a gender-transformative and intersectional approach both in terms of GAP III’s geographical coverage and areas of action, as well as gender mainstreaming in all areas of external action” (EEAS, 2025).

Altogether, with the implementation of WPS, GAP II, GAP III, and the overall agenda of a union of equality, the EU’s foreign policies must cohere to the principles of gender equality, creating a common frame of FFP (Guerrina et al., 2023).

2.3.3 Construction of Feminist Foreign Policy within the EU External Action

Following the adaptation of key documents in regard to gender development of the EU, political scholars of international relations argue that all of those compromise the construction of a general framework of action of the EU, in regard to gender equality – FFP (Guerrina et al., 2023).

In the EU context, the FFP aspires to apply core feminist principles like inclusivity, intersectionality, and social justice to the union’s external relations, including its CSDP missions (Guerrina et al., 2023). At a basic level, this ought to involve moving beyond *adding women and stirring* to re-examine how a global power could influence peacekeeping and conflict resolution, while simultaneously respecting and cultivating gender equality. Crucially, FFP advocates argue that CSDP operations should be informed by a transformative rather than a technocratic vision of gender mainstreaming (EEAS, 2024).

Within the EU, this vision is often measured against the Union’s existing commitments to equality and its self-image as a gender actor (EEAS, 2024). However, basing on literature evaluating FFP in the EU’s, it is evident that the stance on global gender issues still reflects primarily liberal feminist ideals, where notions of empowerment, participation and access echo exactly the image, the EU themselves consider problematic – the mere inclusion of women as a solution to inclusion of gender (Guerrina et al., 2023). While these principles do hold ground for development and shall not be undermined, they do not fully align with the transformative ambition of the EU FFP, to move gender as a conception beyond binary of men/women, invisibility of queer rhetorics and setting heteronormative frame of action.

2.3.4 The problem of excluding Queer IR from WPS, GAP II, FFP of the overarching EU gender policies

A critique could be placed forward towards the EU FFP, *The Strategic Approach to WPS*, and the overall *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, introduced by the EU external politics. At a simple glance, the EEAS in their description of gender mainstreaming and the meaning of gender in foreign policy, refer to equality between women and men in their introductions, thereby framing the debate in these terms, arguably able to translate into concrete actions leading to possibility for gender-blind and inconsistent policies (EEAS, 2021b; EEAS 2024; EEAS, 2025).

Taking this critique from a queer critical approach, in their work Haastrup, Wright and Guerrina, recognize that in moving away from the conception of gender as women, the concept of gender is still strongly understood in the meaning of women and men and their interaction socially in terms of power relations within structures (Haastrup, Wright and Guerrina, 2019). Enhancing the debate of EU's Foreign Policy institutionalization and security in CSDP missions, it could be argued that such power relations within structures also translate the way violence and protection, thereby security is perceived in CSDP missions (Haastrup, Wright and Guerrina, 2019).

Adopting the work of Hagen, *Queering women, Peace and Security* as a main theoretical contribution, arguments show that focus should be placed on queering the WPS agenda, by applying a lens informed by queer and intersectional theories (Hagen, 2016). This would broaden our understanding of vulnerability, human security, and gender itself (Hagen, 2016). The author focuses on several main shortcomings of WPS in relation to queer IR and thereby by examining such work in relation to the EU, one could begin to grasp how FFB of the EU, as a byproduct of sexualized and divided WPS agenda fails to acknowledge further adaption of queer institutionalism. First, heteronormative assumptions within the WPS agenda create a default focus on cisgender, heterosexual women (Hagen, 2016). This focus fails to address violence directed at people due to their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, the intersection of security and sexuality, especially relevant to CSDP missions, where the role of the EU is to act as a supporting unit for the local development (Hagen, 2016; Mühlenhoff, 2025).

Analogously, new institutionalist concepts like logic of appropriateness implemented into feminist institutionalism, remains incomplete if they fail to consider how queer bodies are categorized as inappropriate or deviant under normative rules, rather than simply what outcomes such categorization has in practice (Richert-Montpetit, 2017). Consequently,

institutions create policy biases in CSDP missions, reestablishing heteronormativity and thereby compromise the effectiveness of foreign policy (Mullen and Bouris, 2025).

Elaborating on the previously mentioned binaries, such remain facilitated by feminist institutionalism, and can become instrumental if they treat women as resources for pre-existing aims, such as development or security, rather than recognizing gender justice as an end in itself (Mühlenhoff, 2017). By framing only women as a focus, and men as a contradiction, under the theme of gender, and ignoring queer understandings of the term, gender mainstreaming and FFP of the EU reproduces stereotypical roles of femininity and masculinity translating recognizably harmful patterns through institutions (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell, 2010).

3. Method Formation & Research Design

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methods incorporated in this thesis, as well as how such are constructed, why they fit the research best, and what implications those could have, regarding the choices made in the thesis. Firstly, the research question, together with the chosen sub-questions, is introduced. Second, the methods of analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Visual Content Analysis (VCA) are presented. Following the type of research, the selection of sources and primary data for analysis is presented and justified. Subsequently, the case of analysis, being the CSDP mission EUPOL COPPS, is presented, together with a brief outline of the mission, its main goals, and institutional structure. Lastly, the positionality of the researcher and the possible outcomes of that is discussed.

3.1 Research question and Sub-questions

The function of this research is to shed light on the way gender is placed into the European foreign policy and what implications does that hold for CSDP missions and thereby their conceptualization and deployment of gender practices within the missions. This is done through examining the specific case of EUPOL COPPS. Thereby, the following main research question is adapted in line with the research goals.

In what ways is gender constructed and operationalized in the planning and implementation of EU CSDP missions?"

In order to further develop the analysis of this question, following the theoretical background, three main sub-questions emerge.

How is visibility of different sexualities constructed and manifested through EU's Foreign Policy in EUPOL COPPS?

How are norms relating gender constructed and manifested through EU's Foreign Policy in the EUPOL COPPS?

Does, and if so how, the EU's Foreign Policy deploy a binary framework of understanding gender in EUPOL COPPS?

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis & Visual Content Analysis

This thesis aims to investigate not only policy implementation but also the power dynamics and underlying assumptions within EU missions, particularly those around gender. Thereby, CDA provides the conceptual and methodological tools to uncover how language, institutional practices, and social structures intersect to construct power relations, following a Foucauldian discourse (Van Dijk, 1993). By focusing on both content and context, CDA goes beyond simply describing policy documents. Rather, it illuminates the ways in which ideas about gender, development, and security are produced and maintained in policy texts, and how these notions travel and transform in specific cultural and political contexts of power (Van Dijk, 1993).

In practical terms, CDA is used in relation to reports of the European Commission, Council of the European Union, EEAS, and press releases of EUPOL COPPS. The construction of emerging frames in the documents is conducted manually. Based on previous research, in order to avoid personal biases and subjectivity, the frame construction is conducted in three separate rounds, juxtaposing results, reevaluating and adapting the themes and subthemes where needed (Bryman, 2012; Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025). However, although partially inductive in the creating of subcategories, the research remains predominantly deductive, since the process is conducted with the already established theoretical framework of invisibility, heteronormativity and binaries. Moreover, based on the literature review, the use and context of key concepts such as gender, gender mainstreaming, gender equality, and gender-based violence are analyzed.

Deploying a second method of analysis, being VCA, offers valuable insights into how the EU's FFP framework constructs gender dynamics through visuals (Rose, 2001, p.67). This choice is based on the amount of visual data presented in the press releases of EUPOL COPPS used in the research, since "visual images are never innocent; they are produced within economic, social and political contexts" in light of broader power structures (Rose, 2001, p.67). In this thesis, the context of the use of images is in a supplementary role to the text materials provided by the CSDP mission.

These photographs of mission activities can act as supporting evidence to emerging themes of the analysis, whenever possible, of how different gender roles are attributed to actors, as well as whether they are primarily depicted in active or supportive capacities. VCA is deployed as a supplementary tool since analysis based on queer theory, as this thesis, calls for a combination of methods and deploying untraditional analysis tools, in order to understand the multilayered meanings and “broaden the empirical scope of a study” (Cooper- Cunningham, 2024, Rose, 2001, p. 187, Locken, 2021). Practically, for conducting VCA, an online tool named Tropy is used. There each image is placed, together with the press release text it comes from, which is first analyzed through CDA. Following, a thematic tagging of each image is done, based on what is observable, or lacking in the image. The tags are then compared across all images and summarized into categories – inclusion/exclusion of women, inclusion/ inclusion of men, women/men in police uniforms, femininity/ masculinity traits of individuals, inclusion/exclusion of EU/EUPOL COPPS flag (central or background), active/passive role of depicted individuals, formal/informal setting.

Moreover, enriching the study methodologically, CDA used together with VCA contributes to existing literature, since it combines two methods of analysis, used in a complementary fashion.

3.3 Data Sources for Analysis

All data sources are chosen within the time frame of 2019-2025 since that is the approximate scope of the *Gender Equality Strategy* of the EU. Thereby, if focusing on the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, the research could present the current stage of the EU gender rhetoric and how such is practically translated into CSDP missions, in particular EUPOL COPPS (EEAS, 2024).

Thereby, the data is divided into two different categories. First, the data used to analyze the EU’s self-perception, in relation to how the institution views itself within the scope of gender in foreign policy, focuses on five reports from the past five years, each under the main themes established in the theoretical framework. Those reports focus on the broader image the EU creates about itself, in terms of foreign policy regarding gender. The five reports analyzed are: (1) *EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)* (Council of the European Union, 2019); (2) *EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III- An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in EU External Action* (European Commission, 2020a); (3) *Union of Equality: LGBTQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025* (European Commission, 2020b); (4) *Strategy and Action Plan to Enhance Women’s Participation in Civilian CSDP Missions 2021-2024*

(EEAS, 2021a); (5) *Joint Report to the European Parliament and the Council: Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III)* (European Commission, 2023). Although not explicitly mentioning EUPOL COPPS, such reports build an important part of the study, looking into EU's tactics regarding gender in foreign policy— what language is used and how is it operationalized, what goals are set to achieve in the direction of equality, and how are these goals approached.

Moreover, in terms of EUPOL COPPS, a report from the year 2023 is taken as a guiding document for the analysis, due to its extensive summary of the missions' achievements. The choice of one document is due to the lack of publicly accessible non-confidential documents available, together with the extensive length of the report in comparison to those used for the analysis of the EU on a broader scale. However, the report is complemented with press releases from the official website of the EUPOL COPPS mission – a total of eleven releases. Those are chosen with consideration of key terms to the research, such as gender, gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender-based violence, in order to reflect the mission's side on the implementation of EU foreign policy, WPS, and GAP III.

By combining a report with extensive mission press releases, the thesis creates a direct comparison with the official documents of the EU's self-portrayed image. It is important to note that a limitation of the data sources is present. The press releases chosen are part of the official promotion of the mission and hence might not disclose a completely unbiased knowledge of the activities of the CSDP mission, in terms of gender. However, this is taken into account, since the releases, although created under potential biases still illuminate what parts of gender rhetoric the mission and the broader EU frame, considers as key and actively chooses to highlight in its achievements, offering insights into what aspects of gender the mission and the EU prioritize (Mullen and Bouris, 2025).

The press releases of EUPOL COPPS are analyzed both linguistically and visually, where the text of each press release is analyzed, together with the first image in the release. The press releases chosen are a substantially higher amount compared to the official reports on the EU, due to the shorter volume and length of such. Moreover, the quality of all data analyzed is high, considering it had been retrieved from official EU institutions, external bodies of the EU (EEAS), and the mission itself (EUPOL COPPS) – sources of high credibility.

3.4 The case of EUPOL COPPS

In order to examine how gender is constructed through EU's foreign policy, a specific CSDP mission is taken into account – EUPOL COPPS. The mission was established at the end of

2005, launched officially on the 1st of January 2006 with the prime goal of supporting and strengthening the Palestinian Authority (İşleyen, 2018, p. 321; Tartir and Ejodus, 2017, p.1). It is important to note that, since in 2007, following Hamas taking of governance in Gaza, EUPOL COPPS becomes a mission exclusively focusing on the West Bank, thereby this thesis does not account for any implementations outside of the geographical scope of the West Bank (Sundin & Olsson, 2014, p. 9). Initially, the mission was deployed as a mission of civil character, supporting only the Police Advisory Section of the Palestinian Authority (Tartir and Ejodus, 2017, p. 2; EUPOL COPPS, 2025a). Later, in 2008, the mission joined a second prominent sector, focusing on the Rule of Law and creating two main operational pillars – the Security Section and the Justice Section (Bouris, 2014, p. 122). An image presenting the complete structure of the mission is shown below for a clearer visualization.

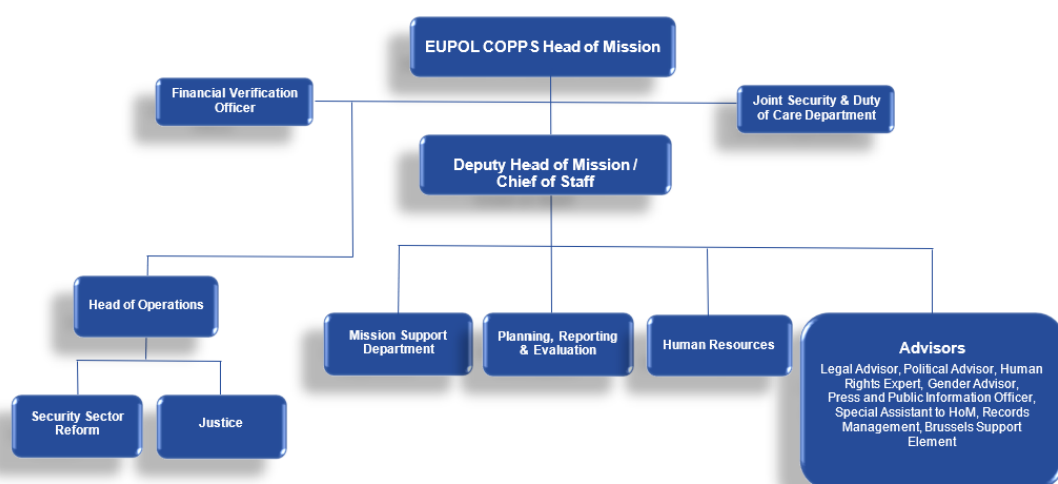


Figure 1. Image of the Mission Structure (Source: EUPOL COPPS, 2025)

Since the research focuses on gender and its manifestation through the mission, the two operational pillars are taken into account. This methodological choice is made due to the nature of the topic, where in the two operational sectors, the implementation of gender in foreign policy, in specific the WPS and the GAP III, could be varying therefore, both are needed to grasp the case in its completeness.

The first sector of the mission, the Police Advisory Section is primarily composed of Policy advisors whose role is to guide and support the Palestinian Civil Police unit and the Ministry of Interior in building effective policing structures, capable of lasting and assisting the Palestinian Authority in its functions (Sundin & Olsson, 2014, p. 9). Moreover, some of the domains of

work of Policy advisors focus on Community Policing, Criminal Investigation, Frontline Policing, Accountability and Oversight (EUPOL COPPS, 2025b).

The second operational sector of the mission, the Rule of Law Sector, is focused on the advisory part to the Palestinian counterparts of the Justice Sector (Sundin & Olsson, 2014, p. 9). The Rule of Law Sector appoints experts, whose main task in relation to the mission is providing legislative advice during the process of drafting policies and documents for the Ministry of Justice, in order to help with strengthening the judiciary system in Palestine (Sundin & Olsson, 2014, p. 9), since such is considered to be the weakest branch (Bouris and Reigeluth, 2012, p.183). Moreover, such experts provide further advice, mentoring and legal support, from legal experts of EU Member States (EUPOL COPPS, 2025c), making the sector very tightly operating with EU capacities and further a good case study for examining EU's influence in CSDP missions (İşleyen, 2018, pp. 333-334).

In terms of the implementation of gender within the mission, EUPOL COPPS further extends its gender protection through the Police Gender Adviser, who is responsible for ensuring practices enhancing gender equality under the Security Sector Reform Section and the Rule of Law Sector (Sundin & Olsson, 2014). Moreover, although initially not having established a Gender Focal Point, for support of gender mainstreaming within the mission, EUPOL COPPS had a Gender Task Force, which although not explicitly stated, served as a Gender Focal Point for the mission (Sundin & Olsson, 2014, p. 20; Mullen and Bouris, 2025, p. 17). In continuation of the Gender Task Force, in 2018, the mission officially established a Gender Focal Point and appointed further personnel of the mission, who had completed base level gender training, establishing a common framework for gender mainstreaming initiatives (EUPOL COPPS, 2018). Therefore, the efforts presented in the structure and practices of the mission make it a viable case for exploring how is EU's gender perception is manifested in CSDP missions under the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*.

3.5 Positionality

In relation to this work, although methodologically and theoretically diverse, a partial limitation, outside of the scope of methodological control, should be taken into account. This limitation constitutes in the positionality of the researcher. In regard to CDA, language and the way it is perceived by a researcher plays a key role into the position of the analysis – inherently CDA can never be neutral nor innocent, due to the essential engagement of the researcher's interpretation of words, and meanings attributed to them (Van Dijk, 1993; Durmaz and Yoğun,

2022). In regard to VCA, positionality is especially important to be recognized as well. As noted by other scholars, adopting visual analysis as a method heightens the plurality of possible readings for any given image due to the specific knowledge that viewers bring to its interpretation (Cooper-Cunningham, 2024).

In this light, as a white, queer, cisgender female researcher, born in a Western context, combined with enhancing personal experience and time spend in the West Bank, I hold a specific understanding into how I read each text and see each image, what knowledge I attribute to it. I recognize that I am unable to truly understand the experience and the challenges coming from being a marginalized group in an already extremely troubled, marginalized society of an unsovereign state. However, I aim at engaging with literature, discourses, techniques and scholars offering insights into further understanding and illuminating this positionality, such as feminist and queer critiques on heteronormativity and gender perception of the common Western frame of analysis. However, as concluded by Gillian Rose (1997), a scholar working on situated knowledge, it is important to note that [...]

“We cannot know everything, nor can we survey power as if we can fully understand, control or redistribute it. What we may be able to do is something rather more modest but, perhaps, rather more radical: to inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands.” (Rose, 1997, p. 319).

Following Rose’s thought, I recognize possible shortcomings of my work, due to my situated understanding on how to approach queer critique in terms of EU foreign policy implementation. I hope and urge future scholars to continue the debate on queering institutionalism, in order to broaden the field and situate queer theory in a central position of IR studies.

4. Discussion & Analysis

4.1 Institutionalized Typologies of Gender

The first prominent theme recognized in the analysis is the different typologies of gender within the reports and press releases gathered. While in some cases on the EU side, gender is conceptualized as an all-incisive term, referring to wording such as *human beings* (Council of the European Union, 2019, p. 10), the overall impression on the side of EUPOL COPPS seems to suggest gender is understood only in the conceptualization of *women and girls* (EUPOL

COPPS, 2020-2025). The next section will discuss such different typologies of gender, and how do they impact queer existence and deviance in EU's foreign policy and the case of EUPOL COPPS. Under EUPOL COPPS, the press releases and the report are looked at under the Rule of Law Sector, since such is predominantly responsible for the way in which EU Foreign Policy is translated into local policies of the CSDP mission (EUPOL COPPS, 2025c).

4.1.1 Invisibility of Gender as Sexual Differentiations & Expression

The first prominent typology of gender that could be found is that of sexuality and sexual orientation. On the side of the EU's understanding, the only document referencing sexual differentiation, on the basis of including terms such as *gay*, *lesbian*, *bisexual*, and *transgender* is the *LGBTQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025* (European Commission, 2020). For example, the *Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III)* and the *EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)*, on many instances use the word *sexual*, however all of those times are conceptualized, not in regard to identity, but in relation to terms such as *sexual reproductive health of women*, *sexual exploitation of women and girls*, *sexual abuse* etc. (European Commission 2023, Council of the European Union, 2019). This poses a possible disregard of the topic of sexual differentiations by the EU.

Moreover, what is striking is that, although extremely important for sexual differentiation, the *LGBTQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, seems to exist in a vacuum, solidifying the EU's lack of focus on sexual differentiation. All of the documents draw insights on once from previous years, through cross referencing, however, the only document left out and unreferenced by any of the following is the *LGBTQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*. In contrast, documents such as *the Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III* and *EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)* are cross-referenced on multiple occasions. This leads to the belief that the conceptualization of different deviant sexualities is not feasibly highlighted as key principle of the EU foreign policy, despite claims made on multiple instances in the *LGBTQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, such as [...]

“The EU conducts political dialogues with partner countries to address discriminatory laws, policies and practices against LGBTIQ people, and decriminalize same-gender relations and trans identities. It will lead by example, showing solidarity and building resilience in the protection and advancement of LGBTIQ people's rights around the world, and contributing to a global recovery which empowers all to thrive socially, economically and politically and leaves no one behind.” (European Commission 2020b, p. 18).

In the EUPOL COPPS reporting and press releases, gender is almost exclusively rendered as instrumental, following the lack of a clear understanding of gender, from the EU foreign policy bodies and their reports. The *EUPOL COPPS Six-monthly Report 2023* highlights that the latest cadet cohort achieved a 30 percent female enrolment (150 cadets) while simultaneously noting that only female officers “are allowed to deal with female inmates” (Council of the European Union, 2023, p. 4). The report highlights on many occasions the importance and inclusion of female officers, however uses the word female or feminine only in relation to women, automatically attributing femininity to women and thereby excluding other sexual deviant individuals, capable of expressing feminine traits (Council of the European Union, 2023, p. 4).

Moreover, in a similar fashion to the EU reports, the press releases from EUPOL COPPS’ official channel indicate no acknowledgments of sexual orientation or gender diversity present (EUPOL COPPS, 2020-2025). Following the frame established from the EU, EUPOL COPPS focuses the notion of gender exclusively on women and girls as a group, not taking to account not only queer inclusivity and sexual deviances, but also lacking of visibility to boys and men, even in articles published towards the end of the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025* timespan (EUPOL COPPS, 2025).

This is also a clearly noticeable pattern in the analysis of images, where on four images, there is visibly present only women, and on the rest, women are the predominant group pictured, in central or leading positions within the images (EUPOL COPPS, 2020-2025). Such clear way of centering gender dialogue around women and focusing femininity exclusively to women, points to the translated typology of gender, in EU foreign politics, both on official documents in regard to gender in EU foreign policy, but also in the case specific example of EUPOL COPPS – the most prevalent typology of gender, in relation to expression, is that gender is about women.

Overall, the idea of sexual differentiation remains vague and far-fetched periphery to the frame of the EU on gender expression. This is because institutionalism fails to accommodate to sexual deviances, and thereby the outcome, as in the case, is the focus on women, when looking into gender (Richter-Montpetit & Weber, 2017). If injected into current state of IR, where institutionalization moves furthest to feminist institutionalism, queer theory could open the space of EU foreign policy and CSDP into thinking further about concepts of femininity, and possibly masculinity, not only in relation to their immediate attribution to men and women as gender typology (Richter-Montpetit & Weber, 2017).

4.1.2 Heteronormativity & Binary as Gender typology – the Notion of Family in relation to Gender

Second theme present within the analysis of EU Foreign policy and construction of gender, is the theme of heteronormative representation of *gender* and the perpetuation of binary frame in CSDP missions, specifically EUPOL COPPS. Although not explicitly mentioned in any reports of the EU, including the *LGBTQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, notions of heteronormativity, and binaries exiting out of it are often identifiable as underlying assumptions of gender, specifically in relation to discussion of family. The EU reports fail to consider heteronormativity as a guiding principle of their work, however acknowledge that *gender* “means the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men”, a limited definition excluding queer identities, such as non-binary and fluidity of gender, leading to further exclusion of deviances (European Commission, 2020a, p. 1).

For example, *the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III* and *the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2019-2024* repeatedly frame empowerment of women and girls in terms of improving access to education, health and livelihoods for women and girls, incorporating the terms collectively, without recognizing possibility for such to exist without direct correlation to each other (European Commission 2020a; Council of the European Union, 2019). In such a way the general frame of gender, not only in relation to the individual but moreover in relation to family, echoes heteronormativity, implicitly placing the role of women as wives or mothers in intact heterosexual families. Moreover, not only does such framing of the nuclear family portrays certain care-related roles, placing women within the image of mothers, but it translates implicitly an immediate binary to the opposed men and boys, although rarely mentioning such in the documents, specifically not in relation to families at all (European Commission, 2020a; Council of the European Union, 2019). This is not only creating an issue due to the assumed role divisions within each established separation of gender (woman/ girl and man/ boy), but moreover since it excludes the topic of familiar structures different to the heteronormative one. The EU frame of gender in relation to families, by its nature of binary separation, leaves deviant families, also known as *rainbow families*, out of the scope of its foreign policy, and thereby out of importance for the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025.

This exclusion is also evident by the fact that the only report that explicitly mentions deviant familial structures is the *LGBTQ Equality Strategy* (European Commission, 2020b).

“There is a wide range of family models in the EU, including rainbow families with one or more LGBTIQ members.” (European Commission, 2020b, p. 14)

Even here, however, rainbow families are bracketed as an exception, rather than integrated into the broader human-rights and protection frameworks. All other documents on EU foreign policy imply a general frame that family is equivalent to a father, mother, and their (biological) children. This gap in recognizing diverse families undermines the EU’s own commitments to inclusivity and intersectional non-discrimination and the failure to include queer families, in its approach to foreign policy, ultimately translates into the construction of family rhetoric in CSDP missions as well, particularly in the case of EUPOL COPPS.

In consideration of the family norms and binaries translated into EUPOL COPPS, the EUPOL COPPS Six-monthly Report 2023 offers an interesting differentiation to the EU Foreign Policy on Gender. The report focuses on family, only in regard to the progress of the mission in its support to the Family Protection Juvenile Department (Council of the European Union, 2023, p. 26). As the report notes [...]

“The Mission’s on-the-job coaching helps to consolidate the capacities of the Family Protection Juvenile Department in its Ramallah Centre but also by indirect impact on its phone help line. The coaching, which is the Mission’s main activity in this area, aims at enabling staff to report complaints, collect hard evidence and open a judicial case after reaching the survivor’s consent when appropriate or advise otherwise facilitating mediation and/or reconciliation. Cultural habits hamper the protection of females and children as survivors of violence.” (Council of the European Union, 2023, p. 26).

Unlike in the case of the frame created by general reports of the EU in relation to *the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, the report of EUPOL COPPS broadens the frame of women and girls, shifting it to women and children. Although this is still not a notable change in relation to queer family structures being involved, it sparks for an interesting case of mismatch between top level norms, and their translation into documents relating to case specific CSDP missions, such as EUPOL COPPS.

Moreover, this change can be further seen in regard to the press releases issued by EUPOL COPPS. Although across all eleven EUPOL COPPS press releases, family consistently appears as a heterosexual unit, in the release on the topic of Help Hotline 106, there is a broadening of the women and girls frame to substitute the term *girls* with *children*, similarly to the reports note (EUPOL COPPS, 2024d).

“The Help Hotline 106# is a telephone service managed by the Family and Juvenile Protection Department (FJPD) of the Palestinian Civil Police (PCP), dedicated to callers, particularly women and children [...]” (EUPOL COPPS, 2024d).

However, although that shows that civilian CSDP missions are capable of non-direct complicity to strictly EU foreign policy frames, the releases still fail to name husbands or fathers, or parents in supportive roles of familial structures or at all indicate and discuss roles of single-parent family structures, extended-family arrangements, rainbow families, or any structure not directly following the heteronormative familial arrangement.

4.2. Institutionalized typology of Security, Violence and Protection (of Gender)

The second main theme under which the three frames are discussed is the different typologies of security in relation to gender within the reports and press releases gathered, both on the EU foreign policy level and in the case of CSDP missions, specifically EUPOL COPPS.

The next section will discuss the different implementations on security, such as protection from gender-based violence, and how do they impact the security policies placed around people, in relation to queer in EU’s foreign policy and the case of EUPOL COPPS. The general EU reports are treated all the same, since all of them touch upon elements of security, violence and protection. Under EUPOL COPPS, the press releases and the report are looked at under the Police Advisory Section, since such is predominantly responsible for the way in which EU Foreign Policy is institutionalized in terms of what is locally prioritized and implemented in security in the CSDP mission (EUPOL COPPS, 2025b). However, it is important to note that a few of the press releases touch upon both pillars of the Rule and Law Section and Police Advisory Section, hence why such are used in both thematic discussions accordingly.

4.2.1 Invisibility of Security – Action towards marginalized identities in security

Contrary to general understandings of marginalization, where more often women are considered to be a primary marginalized group, in security talk often identities that are considered outside of the scope of vulnerability, such as men and boys, remain excluded from the conversation of protection (Locken and Hagen, 2022). Another group, often remaining invisibly when discussion security in terms of vulnerability are LGBTQ people and queer identities (Locken and Hagen, 2022). This phenomenon is problematic, especially towards grounds of intersectionalities, where gay men and boys are often unrecognized as subjects of GVB within common IR security studies (Locken and Hagen, 2022). Similarly, lesbian and trans women fail to be recognized due to the heteronormative conceptualization of women in

CSDP missions and their inherent role exclusively in family obligations (Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025, p. 13).

The research on the EU level shows overall invisibility of the security theme in relation to deviant identities. In the *Joint midterm report on the implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan* the term *gender-based violence* is mentioned over 30 times in a 24-page document, and in *the EU GAP III*, on more than 50 instances through the total of 23 pages (European Commission, 2020a; European Commission, 2023). However, the majority of instances mentioned of the cases the term is mentioned in close relation to women, either directly mentioning women in heteronormative conceptualization, or including them in the context of the topic under which GBV is discussed (European Commission, 2020a; European Commission, 2023). In cases where there is no explicit mentioning of women, violence is referred through a common frame of *protection from gender-based violence* or *freedom from gender-based violence* (European Commission, 2020a; European Commission, 2023).

It is important to note, that in the *Joint midterm report on the implementation of the EU GAP III* on a single occasion mention of *men and boys* is included, however such is done ambiguously, placing men and boys not in the light of potential vulnerable group of GBV.

“For instance, the EU 4 Gender Equality programme¹⁴ and the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls involved men and boys and traditional and religious leaders in the fight against gender-based violence.” (European Commission, 2023, p. 6)

Thereby, in the common frame of EU foreign policy, security in terms of vulnerability fails to consider going beyond the acceptance that GBV is not an exclusive phenomenon affecting cis, straight women and girls only. In similar light, surprisingly in contrast to the first theme of typologies of gender, the EU LGBTQ strategy 2020-2025, also fails to address properly GBV outside the scope of *women and girls*, where the only occasion the document refers to specific call for actions against GBV, in a form of security, it is in the context of bodily protection of LGBTQ people, where the document specifically acknowledge that [...]

“Forced abortion and forced sterilization and other harmful practices against women and girls are forms of gender-based violence [...]” (European Commission, 2020b, p.14).

Despite being the oldest, the only document referring to *men and boys* as possible victims of GBV, however still excluding queer people and their protection, is *the EU Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) 2019-2024*, shows that the EU foreign policy frame

is inconsistent and unable to properly address security of LGBTQ citizens (Council of the European Union, 2019, p. 6).

In regard to how this EU understanding is translated into the mission, across all the EUPOL COPPS press releases and the mission's *Six-monthly report 2023*, security is also narrowly framed around the protection of women and girls, not including any reference to the safety or specific vulnerabilities of men, boys, or LGBTQ people (Council of the European Union, 2023). Press releases on initiatives such as the one focusing on the *Family Protection Bill* and the *Help Hotline 106* repeatedly invoke security in the context of safeguarding women from domestic or gender-based violence, placing them explicitly as passive beneficiaries of policing interventions within the realm of family obligations (EUPOL COPPS, 2025b). The report similarly emphasizes reforms in Policing Sector Reform such as measures of community policing, information-led policing, penitentiary sentence planning, however still remaining under the frame of protection and inclusion of women and girls in society (Council of the European Union, 2023). Additionally, it discusses on many occasions supporting female cadet recruitment, using *women* and *female* interchangeably, with no discussion of male victims of violence or the distinct security concerns of LGBTQ people (Council of the European Union, 2023).

Moreover, the imagery accompanying the press releases reinforces this one-dimensional view of security. Photographs of Palestinian Civil Police uniformly depict male officers at the center of security work, placed in light of authority, with EU and/or EUPOL COPPS flags often visible in the image surrounding them (EUPOL COPPS, 2020-2025). In cases where women appear, they are silent figures on the periphery, rarely depicted in a power role of speakers or presenters (EUPOL COPPS, 2020-2025). Only in the most recent press release of March 2025 is a female officer shown in uniform as the focal point, however, without any further imagery context, lacking a broader picture frame including any flags of the mission or the union (EUPOL COPPS, 2025b). This image, however, being the only one of a woman alone in an active role, appears to be in direct contrast to the overall frame. This could be attributed to possible tactical representation, to illustrate EUPOL COPPS's commitment to gender quotas, as seen in a similar light from the EUPOL COPPS report, rather than to acknowledge the professional autonomy of the officer (EUPOL COPPS, 2025b).

This attributes to the overall understanding and framing of women as in need of protection and men and boy, especially queer men and boys as absent. Not only does this framing echo a binary understanding of gender (which will be further discussed in the final subsection), but moreover it excludes any consideration of queer bodies, including queer female

identities in terms of protection, as discussed in literature, placing on the importance of advocating for queering institutionalism even further (Locken and Hagen, 2022).

4.2.2 Heteronormativity of Protection

Queer individuals often must conform to prevailing cis-heteronormative norms to feel secure in public life, using passing as a tactical shield against stigma and violence (Cooper-Cunningham, 2024). Heteronormative family models, as discussed in the second subsection of the typology of gender, further reinforce this dynamic, offering accepted channels of safety, legal recognition, social support, and inheritance rights, such that are largely inaccessible to non-traditional *rainbow* families (European Commission, 2020b, p. 14). This is also prominent in discussions on the EU level of the topic of security and protection of families, often regarded only to nuclear families.

A common factor between EU Policy documents is that all of them often mention action towards *gender perspective*, *gender analysis*, *gender mainstreaming* and *gender protection*. However, since previously established in the chapter *Invisibility of action towards marginalized identities*, although often mentioned, such concepts remain hollow for the efforts the EU practically places towards protection of queer communities, but rather using the concepts as empty signifiers in relation to gender. This is easily explained as a strategy based on the different typologies of gender, presented in the first section of the analysis. When gender, is conceptualized in relation to specific identities (in the case women and girls) by the majority of EU reports, the practical protection of people outside of this heteronormative frame of who is to be protected by mainstreaming, remains impossible to be contextualized into concrete measurements. An example of that could be observed at the beginning of *EU Action Plan for WPS*, where GAP III goals are discussed as [...]

“The success of the implementation of the new Action Plan on WPS requires first and foremost: (i) gender-responsive leadership at all EU levels, from political to managerial, (ii) sufficient in-house capacity and capability to systemically integrate a gender perspective and conduct gender analysis, and, (iii) close dialogue and cooperation with EU Member States and the engagement of civil society and other partners, such as multilateral and regional organizations, academia, think-tanks and the private sector.” (Council of the European Union, 2019, p. 4).

This shows that as a byproduct of a lack of clear understanding of what the EU constitutes as gender, there is a lack of clear understanding of what and for whom integration of gender perspective and gender analysis truly are.

This translates into CSDP mission, practically EUPOL COPPS, since although on multiple cases the mission brings up protection of gender and gender perspective, it does not on a single stance (neither in the report nor in the press releases analyzed) discuss protection of gay men, lesbian women, queer or non-binary people, since it borrows a created frame of heteronormativity from its mother institution, the EU. This is due to the typology of gender adopted by both institutions, since until deviant sexualities are explicitly mentioned as present (which they are currently not, as discussed in the first theme), there will be lack of any measurements in terms of protection to deviance. By equating family solely with protection from male violence and positioning women and inherently vulnerable, these communications reinforce a strict heteronormative notion of security and protection.

Consequently, queer people face a form of dual insecurity. First, they must constantly assess when to mask their identities to access protection afforded by conventional nuclear family structures, and even then, remain vulnerable, as the very norms that grant safety to cisgender, heterosexual families simultaneously marginalize and endanger those who fall outside them.

4.2.3 Binaries of Violence

As previously established in the section on typologies of gender, the EU often presents a binary within familial structures (2020a, Council of the European Union, 2019), translating into CSDP missions. Moreover, there is a strict role division attributed to women depending on specific settings. While in family settings, women are portrayed in an active role as caregivers (Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025), outside of family, they are often related as care receivers, especially in the topic of security and GBV in foreign policy and CSDP missions. For example, the *EU GAP III* and *EU Action Plan on WPS 2019-2024* discuss women in terms of GBV in the following manner [...]

“Based on the GAP III, the EU and its Member States have supported partner countries in achieving further gender equality. They have thus contributed to increase protection against gender-based violence and harmful practices, promoted women’s and girls’ participation in public and political life and improved access to quality education, health and social protection for women and girls” (European Commission, 2023, p. 1).

“The EU actively promotes the protection and safeguarding of women's and girls’ rights as well as the increase in women's and girls’ access to justice at local, national, regional and international levels” (EEAS, 2019, p. 5).

However, within this understanding of who constitutes as a care receiver, there is an intricate subtheme appearing in relation to GBV, although not explicitly acknowledged by all EU reports analyzed. In such, there is a second binary appearing – that of *victim* and *survivor*; establishing differently who falls into each category, and thereby attributing different qualities.

Where usually the term victim is more often used in relation to a strict *victim/ predator* dichotomy, *survivor* is commonly seen when discussing a neutral setting, without strict implications of gender roles or juxtaposition to a secondary term. Moreover, on most occasions, the victim/ predator dichotomy is heavily gendered, as seen in the *Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU*.

“Promoting prevention – by challenging harmful gender norms, working with all relevant stakeholders to ensure a victim-centred approach and measures that end recidivism by perpetrators, also engaging men and boys, traditional and religious leaders [...]” (European Commission, 2020a, p. 11).

This could also be seen as translating in the case of EUPOL COPPS, where use of binary, explicitly referring to women and girls in terms of victims is often present, up until the most recent press releases.

“The meeting highlighted the impact of child marriages and gender-based violence that is increasingly affecting Palestinian girls.” (EUPOL COPPS, 2025b).

On the other hand, again in the *Joint mid-term report on the implementation of the EU*, where *victim* is heavily gendered, in the same context, *survivor*, as a term is used in neutral manner, lacking specific profiling.

“[...] increasing protection of survivors also by supporting access to life-saving social and justice services with a survivor-centred approach, particularly in fragile and conflict/post-conflict settings or when survivors face intersecting discrimination [...]” (European Commission, 2020a, p. 11).

Contrary to the general EU rhetoric, in the analysis of sources, specifically addressing EUPOL COPPS, the subtheme of *survivor* is notably absent. None of the press releases mention *survivor/s*, although many focus on GBV, however, such is only in relation to *victim/s* (EUPOL COPPS, 2020-2025). In terms of the *EUPOL COPPS Six-Monthly Report 2023*, the term is only mentioned twice, in two separate contexts, one time in a gender-neutral frame, one time in relation to women and girls, proving the insufficient translating from the EU level to EUPOL COPPS mission level (EEAS, 2023, pp. 26-27). This, however unfortunate, is a highly expected outcome, due to the lack of clear formulation from the side of the EU, the mission simply is

unable to focus on a topic, not placed forward as a key element by the EU general frame on GBV.

Similarly to the chapter of *Institutional Typologies of Gender* in relation to violence in relation to gender, the only EU document focused on queer protection in the *LGBTQ Equality Strategy 2020-2025*.

“The Commission will continue to promote a safe environment in which LGBTIQ victims can report crime, and better protection and support for victims of gender-based violence, domestic violence and anti-LGBTIQ hate crime” (European Commission 2020b, p. 12).

However, although a step towards providing a more inclusive frame, the report is in a unique positionality of a vacuum, thereby inevitably lacking substantial relevance in the EU frame on GBV protection on a broader scale applicable to CSDP missions. In this note, as a byproduct of such separation, the document although important remains away from the EUPOL COPPS agenda, since none of the press releases or the report of EUPOL COPPS, include any understanding of GBV targeted towards deviant sexualities and queer people in the region (EUPOL COPPS, 2020-2025).

On the level of discussion of binaries of GVB in relation to security, the EU definition of gender, as proven, remains extremely ominous. The overall constant change present between various understandings of GBV and roles of actors within violence, in some cases in a binary sense, in others in gender neutral, inclusive terms, provides that, although there is some recognition of existing identities beyond a binary frame, such are used inconsistently. This makes the efforts of the EU in promoting gender in foreign policy, such of minimal impact, due to a lack of a clear stand on the side of the frame the union provides in regard to what GBV is and to whom it is targeted.

Thereby, the ominous conceptualization of gender could be stipulated by the unwillingness of the EU to create a clear frame in its foreign policy regarding queer identities, and to have to thereby uphold to such. Rather the presentation of the queer body, in documents specifically targeting LGBTQ, aim to convey an understanding that the union takes into account protection and violence exerted upon deviances, however the research shows that it often fails to implement it, placing it in a separate unit, disconnected to general discussion of GBV.

This broader disregard of protection of queer people in foreign policy translates into the mission itself. As presented, while highly taking in account GBV, the mission strictly operates on the base of binary mechanisms, failing to specifically address any account of protection or

violence towards deviant sexualities and queer people, although such is unquestionably a present issue within CSDP missions (Locken and Hagen, 2022).

5. Conclusion

Over the last two decades, the EU has gone through many changes in efforts to establish itself as a guiding power in terms of gender equality, embedding crucial commitments like the WPS agenda, the GAP II and III across its internal and external politics (EEAS, 2024). However, when those high-level commitments translate into concrete practices, particularly regarding civilian CSDP missions, the EU's discourse and practice reveal a far narrower construction of *gender* than the union's ambitions suggest (Mullen and Bouris, 2025).

This work investigated precisely how *gender* is constructed and operationalized in the planning and implementation of EU CSDP missions, using the case of EUPOL COPPS. Drawing on a Foucauldian understanding of discourse and power, it combined CDA and VCA as methods of analysis, situating such within a feminist institutionalist framework, enriched by queer IR insights, building a new frame of queer institutionalism and its essential need in EU foreign policy.

Within the theoretical debate, feminist institutionalists have shown how entrenched *gender hierarchies* and *logic of appropriateness* dynamics shape policy outcomes (March and Olsen, 1984; Mullen and Bouris, 2025; Waylen, 2014). While feminist institutionalists have exposed that gendered power plays a significant role within EU foreign policy, there remains gap a on how institutional discourses in EU CSDP missions normalize patterns of heteronormativity, binaries and thereby marginalize queer subjectivities in the practical field. Queer IR scholars have broadened the theoretical debate of international relations, focusing on how rhetorics of gender are often exclusionary and weaponizing towards security of deviant bodies (Richter-Montpetit, 2017; Langlois, 2015; Bouris, Kenny and Mühlenhoff, 2025).

The key finding is that, despite formal commitments to *gender-mainstreaming*, EU discourse in CSDP, equates *gender* almost exclusively with *women and girls*, thereby reproducing three interlocking dynamics on the level of *gender construction* and *gender operationalization*: (1) the invisibility of sexual differentiation and thereby lack of security of queer people, (2) the reinforcement of heteronormativity through familiar arrangements and the byproduct of dual insecurity on queer people; and (3) an ominous insufficiently developing understanding of GBV.

Building on these contributions, future research can focus on leveraging this work. Ethnographic or interview-based work with EU Gender Focal Points, mission leadership, and

local partners could bring up the internal power dynamics that privilege cis-heteronormativity. This could further develop any frames that the research is unable to cover, focusing on the perception of gender inclusion from within CSDP missions' personnel, since discourse on gender could also be studied in the ways people talk, interact with each other, what topics they deem relevant, their tone, and mannerism.

On that note, a recognized limitation of this research is its strong foundation EU's official materials, focusing explicitly on the EU institutional narrative and the translation into the structure of EUPOL COPPS. Thereby, potential future work could alternatively focus on institutionalism and the perception of such from an outside perspective, completely unaffiliated to the EU role, such as local voices, particularly those of queer Palestinians, and LGBTQ organizations in Palestine. This would ground the analysis in lived experience, but moreover reveal resistance strategies, and challenge the Eurocentrism, not only in literature discussion, but also further methodologically.

This thesis concludes that the EU's construction of gender in CSDP missions remains anchored in cis-heteronormative logics, producing a significant gap between normative aspirations, and operational practice in EUPOL COPPS. Moreover, in regard to normative aspiration although outlining gender mainstreaming as one of the key aspirations for the *Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*, the union often fails to provide a broader frame of gender inclusivity, even within its own narrative. Moving forward, it will be crucial for both scholars and practitioners to question the presence of gender-sensitive language, together with the deeper premises that underlie any claim to promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the realm of truly transformative power, both on the EU level and in its foreign policy involvement.

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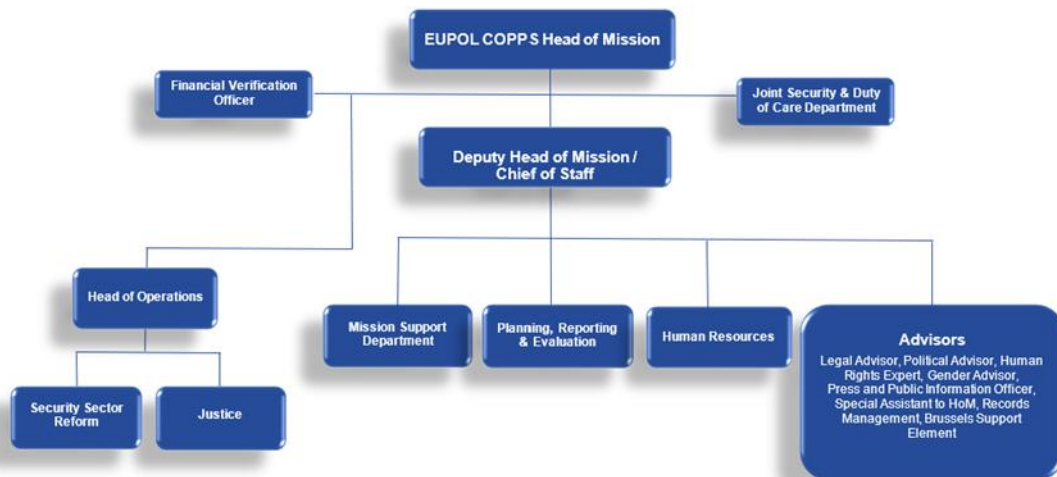
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Appendix 2. Figures

Figure 1. Image of the Mission Structure: EUPOL COPPS (2025). The EU Mission for the Support of Palestinian Police and Rule of Law | Mission Structure. [online] The EU Mission for the Support of Palestinian Police and Rule of Law. Available at: <https://eupolcopps.eu/page/structure/en>



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