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Towards Gender Balance:

Recommendations for
Enhancing Women's
Participation in Diplomacy
and International
Relations in the V₄

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Introduction

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In an increasingly fraught and challenging international environment, a spotlight has been thrown on the importance of constructive foreign policy engagement, and on understanding the various elements of international relations and negotiations. To do this, one would hope, we can draw on all available expertise. However, as the charts in this paper, as well as some of the statistics quoted below, suggest, the capabilities and skills of women in fields connected to foreign and security policy in Czechia, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary are woefully underutilized. Even though women possess the same degree of education and competence in these fields, due to persisting stereotypes, biases and structural obstacles, it is significantly more difficult for them to attain higher positions in political or administrative positions related to foreign policy.

This policy brief offers ideas on how to contribute to improving this and enable, if not gender parity, than at least more equitable participation of women in shaping and implementing foreign policy. The authors focus on four selected areas – how to use the potential of women networking, how to change the way women are represented in the media, how to foster gender sensitive thinking into education and finally, how to ensure that women diplomats have equal chances in foreign service as their male counterparts.

This text is one of the outputs of a shared project of four Central European think-tanks – AMO, SFPA, Casimir Pulaski Foundation and the Equilibrium Institute, conducted with the support of the International Visegrad Fund. The majority of the ideas and recommendations listed here have been thoroughly discussed by the participants of four study trips that we undertook to the capitals of the V4 states to facilitate building contacts among female professionals in the above mentioned fields.

While some of these ideas are quite easy to implement, some of them, admittedly, may face hurdles – political, financial or societal – remarkably, even in 2025. In many countries, outdated gender stereotypes not only persist but are actively reinforced by certain political actors. This makes the role of civil society, independent initiatives, women's networks, and the media all the more crucial in pushing back against efforts to undermine gender equality—an essential pillar of any functioning democracy.



Women's networks as a tool for empowerment in achieving gender equality

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Women's networking forums in various fields (business, politics, IT, marketing, science, the energy sector, architecture, as well as diplomacy)¹ have a proved track record of empowering and encouraging its members. Women's networks provide platforms and capacities to **connect women professionals** and industry leaders with one another and, despite existing structural disadvantages, to learn how to **penetrate predominantly masculine spaces**. The aim of these networks is to facilitate access to resources and **people who face similar challenges**. Generally there are three types of female networks:

- 1) Networks of women in **similar positions** which allow their members to share strategies with each other (e.g. leaders-level communities)
- 2) Networks of **diverse women** which create the opportunity to meet women who are unlike each other but could be helpful financially or politically (e.g. mentoring programs or career networks)
- 3) Networks that provide their members with **access to resources** they might find hard to acquire (e.g. a financial community for women).²

Some networks might be categorized as **hybrid**, falling into more than one category. Concrete examples from diplomacy in Czechia and Poland include Ženy (nejen) v diplomacii (Women (not only) in diplomacy) and Women in International Security (WIIS) Poland, an affiliate of the WIIS Global³, while it is worth mentioning that Slovakia and Hungary do not currently have an active network within diplomacy or the broader field of international relations, but rather single projects focused on the theme (e.g. Women in Diplomacy⁴ in Slovakia) or projects that support specific forms of networking (e.g. the mentoring programme for students Diplomatic Duo⁵ in Slovakia).

Women's networks can be a source of social capital via which their members may strive towards individual and common group goals.⁶ During regular sessions, women build new contacts and discuss relevant issues. The benefits materialize more specifically in **knowledge increase, sharing of opportunities and expertise**, building of **meaningful relationships** and **skills acquisition** which furthermore may be leveraged in women's careers.⁷

Additionally, women networks can help **increase the self-confidence of their members**, which is often significantly lower than that of their male colleagues due to gender

¹ Examples include Czechitas, Women in media, Women in architecture, Women in energy sector, Cyber Ladies, Women 4 Cyber, Women in business, Girls from marketing for Czech Republic, Hungarian Business Leaders Forum, Hungarian women lobby and Equalizer Foundation for Hungary, Women in International Security, NEWW Polska for Poland, Slovakian women lobby for Slovakia.

² Tanja Sternbauer, "Why Women's Networks Are Crucial." The Female Factor (blog), April 18, 2023, <https://www.femalefactor.global/post/why-women-s-networks-are-crucial>.

³ "WIIS Poland – Women in International Security," <https://wiispoland.eu/en/>.

⁴ "Ženy v diplomacii - Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí Slovenskej republiky," <https://www.mzv.sk/diplomacia/temy/zeny-v-diplomacii>.

⁵ "Diplomatic duo: Empowering young women to enter diplomacy through job-shadowing - Slovak Foreign Policy Association," <https://www.sfpa.sk/en/diplomatic-duo-empowering-young-women-to-enter-diplomacy-through-job-shadowing/>.

⁶ Vivien Lowndes, "Getting on or Getting By? Women, Social Capital and Political Participation," The British Journal of Politics and International Relations 6, no 1 (February 2004).

⁷ Sarah Barnard et al., "Using Communities of Practice to Support the Implementation of Gender Equality Plans: Lessons from a Cross-National Action Research Project," paper presented at the International Conference on Gender Studies, Loughborough, UK, July 2016, https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/conference_contribution/Using_communities_of_practice_to_support_the_implementation_of_gender_equality_plans_lessons_from_a_cross-national_action_research_project/9433439.

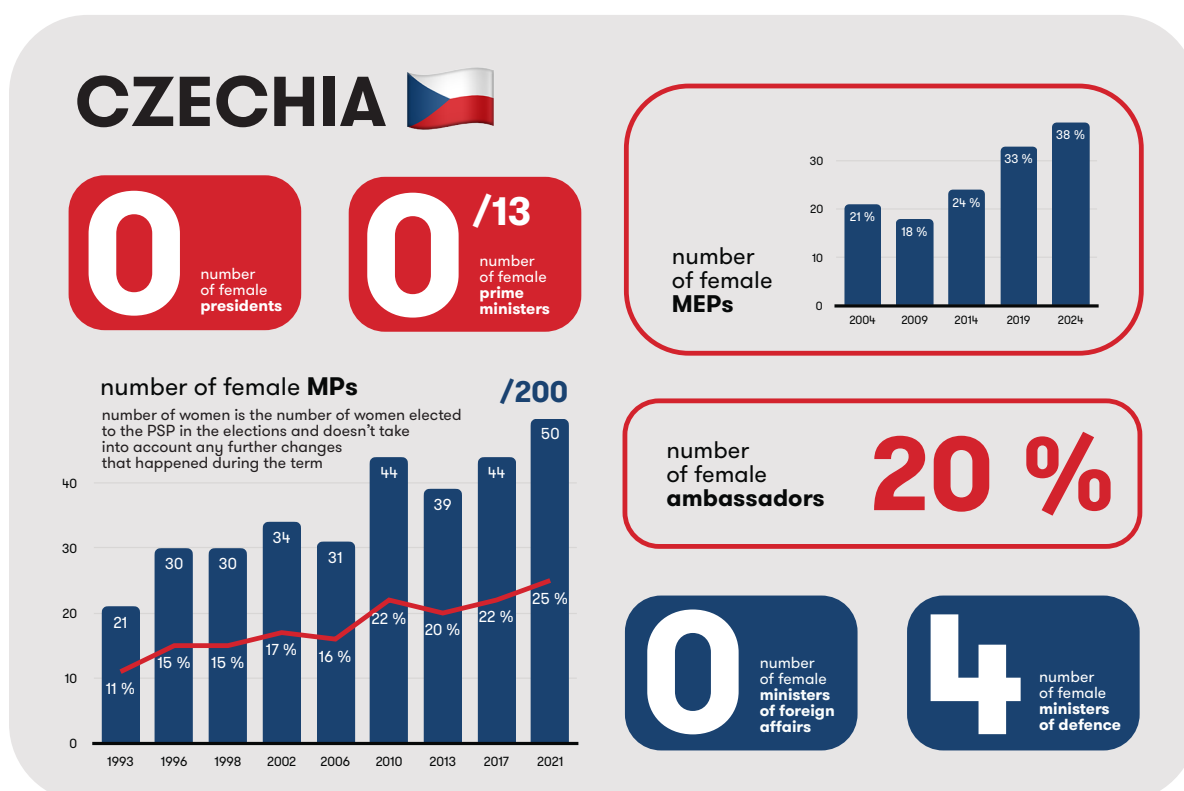


stereotypes fostering the notions that women are not suitable to become leaders or to specialize in certain portfolios (such as security or diplomacy).⁸ Female networks help counter this by offering **support** and **providing role models** for more junior women. In essence, these career enhancing networks **nurture a culture of mutual support and motivation, which, though in itself not sufficient, can significantly motivate many women on their career paths.**

Examples of good practices and activities within networks

Drawing from the experience in Czechia and Poland, there are many ways to achieve the benefits of women's networks described above.

Women's networks empower and increase the self-confidence of their members in various concrete ways. For example, AMO's experience of organizing the Women in Czech Foreign, European and Security Policy⁹ network meetings is that an expert debate is usually followed by a speaker **sharing her experience** of being a woman in her specific field, providing useful **advice** to her peers. According to feedback from members, open discussion highlighting that certain challenges are shared by all women at various career stages can foster a feeling of community, mutual understanding and support and can ultimately **counter imposter syndrome** that many women struggle with.



⁸ Andrea Pető. Why are there so few women in V4 diplomacy? Budapest: Visegrad Revue, 2015, <https://hal.science/hal-03232924/document>; Ann Towns, Anne-Kathrin Kreft, and Birgitta Niklasson, "The Empowerment of Women in Diplomacy," in Springer eBooks, (2017), 187–205, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64006-8_9.

⁹ "Women in Czech Foreign, European and Security Policy - Asociace pro mezinárodní otázky" <https://www.amo.cz/en/women-in-czech-foreign-european-and-security-policy/>.



Another important role of women's networks is **knowledge exchange**. During network meetings, guest speakers not only share their experience, but also provide an insight into their specific professional field. Based on the experience of the AMO network, an informal and open atmosphere allows the speaker to share information that would not be available to members from public sources.

It is also important to stress the role women's networks play in **expanding the social capital** of their participants. Acquiring contacts and forming meaningful relationships can help women advance in their career. A concrete practice related to this benefit is the possibility of forming mentoring relationships within women's networks which can be another key to career advancement. Furthermore, a **mentoring relationship** between two women, established e.g. within a network, provides space for **mutual understanding of gender-specific challenges**.

Mentoring can become a formalized part of women's networks, or it can also evolve organically between its members if both junior and senior women are included in the network and space for forming closer relationships is provided within the network meetings. A successful example of a mentoring initiative is that of Women in International Security Poland, which created a mentoring structure within its network.

Recommendations for networking groups:

- When facilitating / moderating network meetings, make sure to allow space for **an open discussion on topics related to self-confidence and gender-specific challenges** to ensure the empowering potential of the network is fulfilled. Additionally, **soft-skills and self-confidence workshops** can be offered if capacity allows it.
- Encourage **mentoring relationships** to form within the network. Specifically, make sure to include both junior and senior women in your network to allow exchange of experience and perspectives and the possibility of mentoring relationships to form organically. If there is capacity, a formalized mentoring structure can be created that will connect mentors and mentees and provide them with additional support.

"About us, without us"

We often witness what some describe as boys' or men's clubs¹⁰ in diplomacy,¹¹ a negative phenomenon related to groups (mostly consisting of men) creating spaces where deals and talks are done behind closed doors or off-the-record without women having access to participate in such spaces, conversations and decision-making.¹² This may be partially attributed to what we call affinity bias, the tendency to favour individuals who possess similar identity, goals or background.¹³ The lack of diversity may potentially lead to the views of members of these closed groups being misguided and mismatched with reality.¹⁴

¹⁰ Tanja Sternbauer. "Why Women's Networks Are Crucial." The Female Factor (blog), April 18, 2023, <https://www.femalefactor.global/post/why-women-s-networks-are-crucial>; "Diplomacie V Zemích V4: Stále Pánský Klub - Fórum 50 %," <https://padesatprocent.cz/cz/zpravodajstvi/diplomacie-v-zemich-v4-stale-pansky-klub>.

¹¹ Tjaša Cankar, Tine Rus, Dr Erla Hlín Hjálmarsdóttir, "Empowered Diplomacy: Bridging the Gender Gap Final Report of a Joint Iceland-Slovenia Study." (November 2020). https://www.norwaygrants.si/wp-content/uploads/Final-report-of-a-joint-Iceland-Slovenia-study_Empowered-diplomacy.pdf.

¹² Tetiana Klynina, "Female Face' of American Diplomacy," Skhid, no. 6 (164) (December 2019): 70–74, [https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2019.6\(164\).186918](https://doi.org/10.21847/1728-9343.2019.6(164).186918).

¹³ Jonathan H. Westover, "Affinity Bias: An Overlooked Threat to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts," Human Capital Leadership Review, (2024), <https://doi.org/10.70175/hclreview.2020.15.2.13>.

¹⁴ Ibid.



While this phenomenon of gender segregation in the workforce is predominantly observed to disadvantage women, it is not exclusively the case. Attestations from men to feeling excluded from women's circles and networking events are on the rise as well.¹⁵ It is however important to highlight that this critique of women's networks is not without its problems since they emerge as **reactions to impenetrable male circles**. Given the fact that women's networks can provide women with **a safe space to develop strategies to break through these closed male circles** and reach for high positions, they ultimately contribute to work places where career advancement is determined by merit. With women's networks also providing a space to discuss gender-specific or sensitive issues,¹⁶ they will remain meaningful and necessary for the foreseeable future.

Recommendations for ministries and other relevant institutions:

- Allow and support informal women's **networks to be naturally developed** and institutionalized. Allocate funding and offer space for such events to take place. A good example is Spain's Women's Association of Diplomats created from informal meetings.

Recommendations for networking groups:

- While women's networks are primarily targeting women, it is viable to **include men by opening up the meetings where possible**. This may in turn provide a bridge to necessary conversations and understanding whilst enhancing the purpose of the networking groups.
- Seek male **allies and champions of the gender equality agenda** to advocate for the cause in male dominated circles.

Funding

A key concern for women's networks, as for activities supporting gender equality in general, is the **political and socio-cultural backlash** worldwide (e.g. DEI programs)¹⁷ with direct effects on activities in V4 countries (e.g. Women in media).¹⁸ In 2023, out of the total budget of 8.5 billion Czech crowns of state funding to civil society organisations (CSOs), only 0.08% was allocated to the topic of gender equality – in contrast 50% was directed towards activities related to sport.¹⁹ When it comes to private fundraising within business circles, networks and other projects focused on issues related to gender equality often encounter challenges in articulating its broader societal benefits, as the topic is often, and especially by men, perceived as lacking relevance, especially in comparison to other causes.

¹⁵ Greatheart Leader Labs, "The Study on White Men Leading Through Diversity & Inclusion", (January 2013) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fa09c714da1e52de477c6bf/t/5fdd0946955ca97240f961ff/1608321355340/Executive+Summary.pdf>.

¹⁶ Faith Borland, The 100% Club: Collaboration over Competition: Demonstrating the Power of a Gender-Based Network, The 100% Club, 2022, <https://the100percentclub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The-100-Club-Collaboration-over-Competition-Final.pdf>.

¹⁷ Nicquel Terry Ellis, "What Is DEI, and Why Is It Dividing America?" CNN, January 23, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/01/22/us/dei-diversity-equity-inclusion-explained/index.html>.

¹⁸ Ženy v médiích. "Stop podpoře novinářek." LinkedIn, 2025, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/%C5%BEeny-v-m%C3%A9di%C3%ADch_dei-rovnost-zenyvmediich-activity-7290668937464225793-PWGO?utm_source=social_share_send&utm_medium=member_desktop_web&rcm=ACoAAC4AQWoBgRpgvMI3vosEwg6X2pjuaVYPac.

¹⁹ Jan Blažek, Petr Lebeda, "Key Societal Trends, Challenges and Opportunities for the Civil Society in the Visegrad Region," Glopolis, 2022, https://glopolis.org/site/assets/files/1352/analyza_v4_eng.pdf.



Recommendations for networking groups:

- **Diversify sources** of funding across international / European / governmental and private/ corporate donors and individuals. Use **differentiated financial models** (crowdfunding, grants, memberships) to ensure sudden cuts do not affect your activities and members negatively.





The Role of the Media in Gender Equality in Diplomacy – A Polish Perspective

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The media, which is often referred to as the fourth power, plays a key role in shaping public perceptions of gender roles in diplomacy and politics. In Poland, coverage of women diplomats and politicians tends to **reinforce traditional gender stereotypes**, influencing both public opinion and institutional structures.

Media Representation and Visibility

Female diplomats and politicians in Poland receive far less media attention than their male counterparts, making their voices and achievements less visible in the public debate.²⁰ Studies indicate that women are underrepresented in political news.²¹ In 2020, women accounted for only 20% of those mentioned as subjects or sources in political news.²² Gender traditionalism is relatively high in Poland and gender-based occupational segregation has increased.²³ Women are **less often invited to participate in news programs and public debates**,²⁴ including on international relations. Transnational media also perform poorly in terms of including women as sources and subjects. Women accounted for only 13% of sources and subjects in monitored TV news and 21% in digital news and encrypted tweets from Al Jazeera, BBC World News, CNN International, France 24, Reuters, TeleSur and the New York Times.²⁵ The lack of female representation in foreign policy discussions and media coverage contributes to the **perpetuation of gender biases and limits the diversity of perspectives** in public discourse. When women are underrepresented as experts and commentators, policymaking and public opinion are shaped primarily by male voices, significantly reinforcing the perception that **international affairs and security are a field better suited for men than for women**. Moreover, the exclusion of women from media discussions **reduces the visibility of female professionals and role models**, making it more difficult for young women to seek role models in their own careers. The gender imbalance in media coverage ultimately undermines democratic debate by excluding the experiences and insights of half the population, leading to blind spots and **less comprehensive and inclusive policy discussions**.

Furthermore, rather than in terms of their professional expertise, policy contributions, and leadership, women are often portrayed with an emphasis on their **appearance, personal lives, or emotional disposition**.

²⁰ Sonia Rojeska. "Gender Imbalance in the Political Landscape and Mainstream Media Discourse in Poland." *Civitas Hominibus* 14 (2019): 115-119.

²¹ Joanna Ostrouch-Kamińska, Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska. "Masculinity, Intergenerational Relations in a Family and Care: Men Learning Care in Adulthood." In *Contemporary Issues and Perspectives on Gender Research in Adult Education*, edited by Maja Maksimović et al., 163–172. Belgrade: Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, ESREA, (2016).

²² Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). *Who Makes the News? Global Report 2020*. Toronto: GMMP, (2020).

²³ Kinga Wysieńska-Di Carlo, Zbigniew Karpiński, "Status and Just Gender Pay Gaps: Results of a Vignette Study," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, (February 2024). <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231241227158>.

²⁴ Joanna Ostrouch-Kamińska, Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska. "Masculinity, Intergenerational Relations in a Family and Care: Men Learning Care in Adulthood." In *Contemporary Issues and Perspectives on Gender Research in Adult Education*, edited by Maja Maksimović et al., (Belgrade: Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, ESREA, 2016) 163–172.

²⁵ Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). *Who Makes the News? Global Report 2020*. Toronto: GMMP, (2020), pp.5.

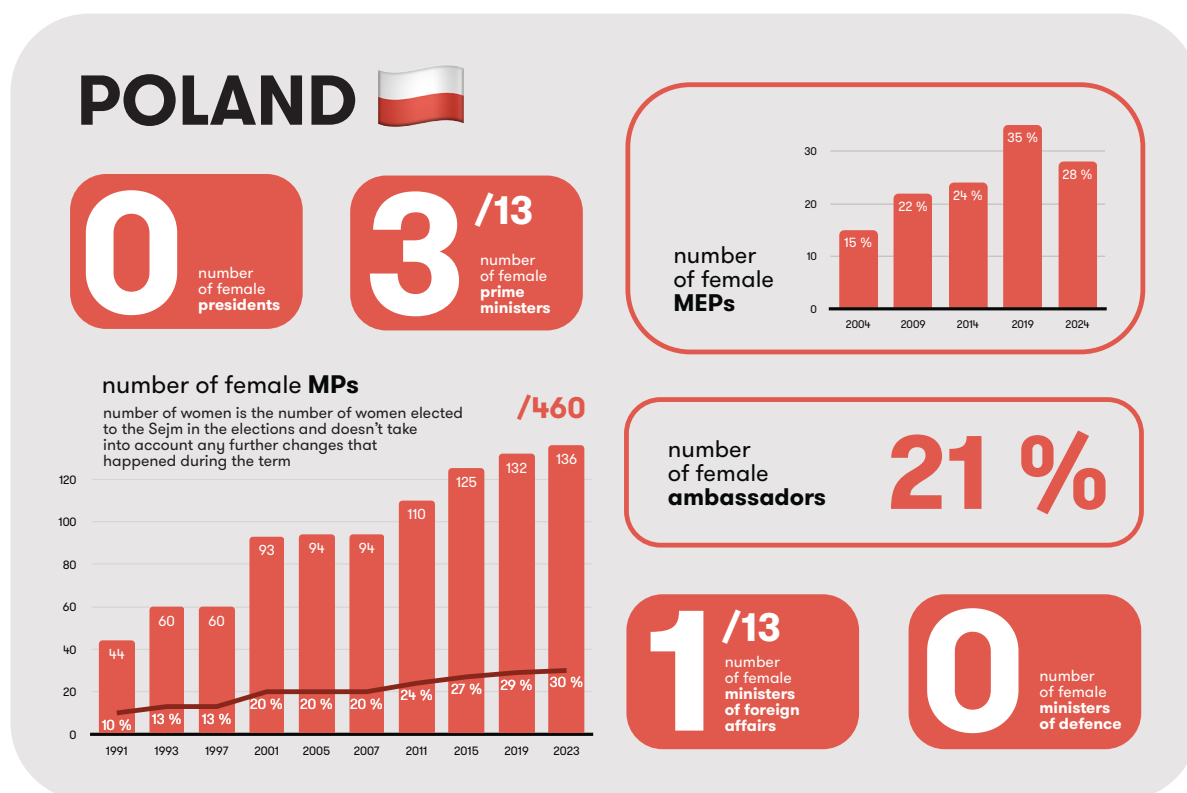


Recommendations for Media Organizations:

- Implement and actively enforce **gender-sensitive editorial guidelines** and training for journalists and editors to **avoid gender-biased language and stereotypes in reporting** and ensure that headlines, photographs, and interview questions reflect **a professional rather than personal focus**.

Gendered Language and Framing

The language used by Polish media often reinforces gender bias. Women in senior positions are sometimes described as “soft” leaders, which emphasizes their **emotional approach**, or alternatively, as “too assertive”, which suggests that **leadership qualities are inherently masculine**. Since gender beliefs are linked to social perceptions of status and shape expectations of achievement and rewards,²⁶ it is likely that the way Polish media portray women in high positions reinforces gender biases. This double standard thus may discourage women from pursuing leadership roles, especially in politics or diplomacy. Stereotypes about women in politics largely coincide with stereotypes about women in general. Women in politics are seen as **more empathetic, trustworthy, consensus-oriented and interested in caring for others**. These traits do not correspond to perceptions of politics, which is commonly seen as a sphere of conflict and ruthless competition.²⁷



²⁶ Kinga Wysieńska-Di Carlo, Zbigniew Karpiński, "Status and Just Gender Pay Gaps: Results of a Vignette Study," Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World, (February 2024) <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231241227158>.

²⁷ Agnieszka Joanna Turska-Kawa, Agata Agnieszka Olszanecka-Marmola, "Stereotypes determining perceptions of female politicians: The case of Poland," Politics in Central Europe 3 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2018-0016>.



Recommendations for Journalism Schools:

- Implement **gender sensitivity training in journalism programs**. By integrating courses that focus on recognizing and avoiding gender bias in media coverage, future journalists can develop a more balanced and fair approach to reporting on female politicians and diplomats. These training programs should include case studies, discussions on gender stereotypes, and practical exercises on framing news stories in a more equitable manner.

Recommendations for Media Regulators:

- Strengthen **regulatory standards** to ensure unbiased reporting. Media regulators should incorporate specific **gender equality provisions** into their frameworks, requiring news organizations to actively monitor and promote adequate representation of women in political and diplomatic coverage. This could include **regular assessments** of gender balance in reporting, guidelines for neutral language use, and mechanisms for addressing complaints related to biased or discriminatory coverage.

Recommendations for networking groups, NGOs, think-tanks:

- **On-line databases on female experts** (Brussels Binder, AMO)²⁸ in international relations and related fields make it easier for media and event organizers to identify qualified women to increase gender diversity of public as well as expert discussions.

Social Media and Alternative Platforms

Social media and alternative platforms can offer a **more inclusive space** for women experts and politicians compared to traditional media, which still reflect traditional gender biases.²⁹ Women in diplomacy are increasingly using platforms such as X and LinkedIn to directly engage with audiences, counter stereotypes and advocate for gender equality.³⁰ However, these women are more likely to experience **higher levels of online harassment** than their male counterparts.³¹ Women in politics, media and foreign policy often face higher levels of online harassment due to deep-seated gender biases and social stereotypes. This harassment often stems from attempts to **discredit and silence** women who challenge traditional power structures. In many cases, women experts and policymakers are targeted with **sexist, misogynistic and even violent rhetoric** that questions their competence and legitimacy, rather than engaging with their ideas. The anonymity and accessibility of social media platforms further exacerbate the situation, enabling coordinated attacks, threats and cyberbullying with little accountability. Acts of violence in cyberspace, including **disinformation campaigns** aimed at discrediting, humiliating and intimidating women in public office, are embedded in a social structure based on gender inequality and power relations.³² This violence is used as a tool to silence individuals and restrict freedom of expression.³³

²⁸ "Find a Woman Expert – The Brussels Binder," <https://experts.brusselsbinder.org/find-a-woman-expert/>; "Databáze expertek," <https://www.databaze-expertek.cz/>.

²⁹ Agnieszka Joanna Turska-Kawa, Agata Agnieszka Olszanecka-Marmola. "Stereotypes determining perceptions of female politicians: The case of Poland." *Politics in Central Europe* 3 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.2478/pce-2018-0016>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Artur Adamczyk, Goran Ilik, Mehmedin Tahirović, Kamil Zajączkowski, eds. "Poland's Experience in Combating Disinformation: Inspirations for the Western Balkans." (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2023).

³³ Ibid.



Recommendations for Social Media Platforms:

- Implement stricter policies to combat online harassment targeting female politicians and experts. This includes enforcing **clear guidelines against cyberbullying, hate speech, and gender-based discrimination**, ensuring that women in public roles can engage safely in online discussions. To further protect users, platforms must introduce effective measures to **limit the spread of misinformation** and harmful content that may incite cyberviolence.
- Strengthen **content moderation** and use **advanced detection tools** to help mitigate the impact of digital attacks.
- Streamline the process for **reporting harassment** and ensure swift responses to such reports. Providing accessible and transparent mechanisms for users to **flag abusive content** will enhance digital safety.
- Invest in **awareness campaigns** that highlight the consequences of cyberviolence and promote a culture of respect and inclusivity online.



Recommendations for Enhancing Gender Parity in Diplomacy through Targeted Educational Initiatives

Ivana Uličná, SFPA

This part of the text presents a series of recommendations aimed at increasing gender parity within the field of diplomacy, focusing on interventions at the educational and ministry levels. It builds upon a foundational understanding that **education on gender equality must begin early**, be **inclusive** of all age groups, and be **comprehensive** across educational and professional settings. The educational environment plays a pivotal role in the **early socialization** of gender norms and expectations.

Integration of gender equality modules in the curriculum

The pervasive nature of gender stereotypes and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, particularly in diplomacy, necessitate an educational approach that promotes gender equality from the earliest stages of academic training. Research indicates that gender stereotypes can significantly influence career choices, engagement in public life, and personal development.³⁴ Integrating gender equality modules into university curricula can play a critical role in reshaping perceptions and preparing students to contribute to a more equitable society. By mandating the integration of gender equality modules in university curricula, particularly within fields related to diplomacy and international relations, educational institutions can significantly contribute to the cultivation of a new generation of leaders who are well-prepared to promote and implement gender-inclusive policies in their professional and personal lives.

Recommendation for Universities:

- Develop and integrate **compulsory gender equality modules** across all fields of study. The modules should address **historical gender dynamics** to provide a context for understanding current challenges and disparities. They should also explore **contemporary issues in gender equality**, including **barriers to female participation** in leadership and diplomacy, and **practical strategies** for overcoming these challenges. It is crucial that these modules are not optional or targeted solely at female students but are **mandatory for all students**.
- **Engaging young men** is particularly important in these discussions, to challenge and change traditional perceptions and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequalities.
- The teaching methods used should be **interactive**, employing **case studies, debates, and role-playing exercises** that allow students to engage critically with the material.
- Incorporating **mentorship opportunities** with experienced female diplomats can provide students with real-world insights and networking opportunities. These relationships can be instrumental in breaking down barriers by providing students with role models who exemplify the possibilities for women in diplomacy and international relations.

³⁴ Jill A. Cassidy, "Gender and Diplomacy" (London: Routledge, 2017).



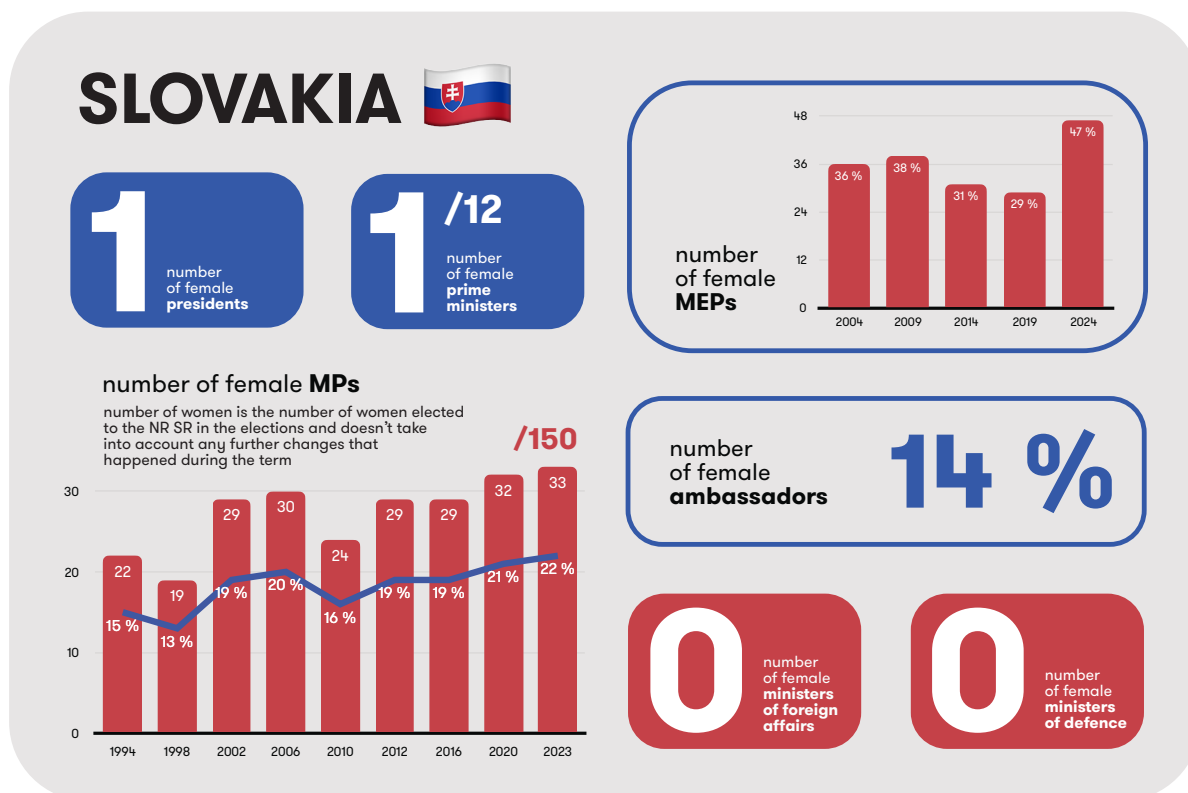
- The impact of these gender equality modules should be **systematically evaluated** to ensure they meet educational objectives.

Promotion of gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches

In increasing the level of inclusion and diversity in diplomacy, lecturers are influential as they **directly and indirectly communicate** values and attitudes towards gender roles to their students. Educating faculty about the importance of inclusion and diversity is crucial in shaping a supportive educational environment.

Recommendations for universities and other educational institutions:

- Implement training sessions for educators **on gender-sensitive teaching methods**. Educators should be trained to recognize their own **implicit biases** and understand how these biases can influence their teaching practices and interactions with students.
- Training should also empower educators to develop and utilize curricula that **reflect diverse perspectives** and promote gender equality. Lecturers must also learn to create classroom environments that do not privilege any gender over another. Training should include methods for fostering classroom discussions that encourage all students to participate, techniques for grouping students in ways that promote inclusivity, and strategies for addressing gender-related issues sensitively.





Mandatory gender sensitivity training for staff at the Ministries of Foreign Affairs

Incorporating gender sensitivity within the **operational culture of the MFA** is not just a matter of social justice but also **strategic advantage**. Training in gender sensitivity helps create a workplace that respects and understands diverse perspectives, leading to **better decision-making processes** and improved international relations.³⁵ Research indicates that organizations with robust gender equality practices see improved workplace culture and **enhanced performance metrics**.³⁶

Recommendations for ministries and other relevant institutions:

- Implement mandatory gender sensitivity training for staff, ensuring that all employees, regardless of their role, receive **foundational training on gender issues**. Gender sensitivity training should not be a one-time event but an **ongoing process**. Incorporating this training as part of the onboarding process for new hires ensures that all incoming staff are immediately aligned with the ministry's policies on gender sensitivity. This practice helps maintain a **consistently informed workforce** over time. The development of these training programs should involve experts in gender studies and international diplomacy to ensure that the content is relevant and impactful.
- Organize **regular conferences** with a specific focus on gender equality within diplomacy. Organizing conferences that aim to gather experts in the field to discuss possible solutions for improving gender equality can serve as a platform to promote gender equality and share best practices. These conferences should be designed to open discussions, raise awareness, and promote policy development. They should include sessions aimed at developing or **refining policies that support gender equality** but also broader **inclusion and diversity in diplomacy**. Make provisions for remote participation of diplomats posted abroad to increase the effectiveness and reach of the event.

Institutionalized Mentoring and Sponsorship Programs

Effective talent development in diplomacy requires more than just formal training; it necessitates **personalized guidance** and support through mentoring and sponsorship. While mentoring offers the benefits of experience sharing and personal support, sponsorship extends this support into **professional advancement and visibility** crucial for career progression. Institutionalizing these practices can mitigate gender biases that typically disadvantage women in less structured environments. Formalized mentoring programs **create equitable opportunities** and reduce biases, allowing women to benefit equally from professional guidance without facing undue scrutiny or skepticism.³⁷

³⁵ "Multilateral Diplomacy - Enhancing Women's Leadership and Mentoring Capacities - United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)," <https://www.unitar.org/about/news-stories/stories/multilateral-diplomacy-enhancing-womens-leadership-and-mentoring-capacities>.

³⁶ Tjaša Cankar, Tine Rus, Dr Erla Hlín Hjálmarsdóttir, "Empowered Diplomacy: Bridging the Gender Gap Final Report of a Joint Iceland-Slovenia Study," (November 2020). https://www.norwaygrants.si/wp-content/uploads/Final-report-of-a-joint-Iceland-Slovenia-study_Empowered-diplomacy.pdf.

³⁷ Andrea Pető. Why are there so few women in V4 diplomacy? Budapest: Visegrad Revue, 2015, <https://hal.science/hal-03232924/document>.



Recommendations for ministries and other relevant institutions:

- Implement a structured program that **integrates both mentoring and sponsorship** to support and advance the careers of its staff, especially women. The institution should create **formal mechanisms** to pair young diplomats and staff members with more experienced colleagues who can provide guidance, share knowledge, and offer support in navigating both professional challenges and work-life balance. This formalization ensures that all mentees have equal access to mentorship opportunities, irrespective of gender or other personal characteristics. Extend the mentoring program to include sponsorship, where senior staff do not just advise but also actively advocate for and support the career advancement of their mentees. This involves using their influence to enhance the visibility of the mentees, recommending them for high-profile projects, and supporting their candidacy for promotions.
- Ensure that the pairing strategy for both mentoring and sponsorship is **inclusive**, deliberately involving women and other underrepresented groups in these relationships to prevent the perpetuation of existing disparities within the diplomatic service.
- Provide **training to mentors and sponsors** on how to effectively support their mentees and protégés, focusing on understanding and overcoming unconscious biases, promoting equality, and fostering a supportive, inclusive work environment.

Utilization of diplomatic academies to enhance inclusion and diversity in Ministries of Foreign Affairs

Diplomatic academies play a crucial role in shaping the competencies and perspectives of future diplomats. As the environments in which emerging diplomats are trained, these academies provide a unique opportunity to **embed principles of inclusion and diversity** at the foundational level of a diplomat's career. Inclusion and diversity training, workshops, and other educational activities are now common practice in many European countries. The effectiveness of these training programs in promoting inclusion and diversity can significantly **influence the diplomatic culture and practices** of an MFA. Regarding initial professional training, Greece has included subjects related to human rights and leadership in its Diplomatic Academy, such as human resources, decision-making and managing people at work. Germany focuses specifically on women, offering courses in leadership and communication, and France organizes basic training for all staff aimed at improving sensitivity to issues of equality between women and men. The Netherlands has a sophisticated education system that includes issues of women's empowerment in training programs generally concerned with improving the quality of life for employees so that they have equal opportunities and that principles of inclusion and diversity are adhered to. Since 2022, the Netherlands has been training all new employees and future directors on gender equality. The Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs develops an annual training plan for the entire staff. This plan, among other things, includes training related to the development of soft skills, primarily focusing on how to properly lead people. In addition, the Ministry provides educational seminars on gender budgeting for various public administration sectors.³⁸

³⁸ Alexandra Madaraszová, Ivana Uličná. "Recommendations for Enhancing the Level of Gender Equality and Inclusion in Diplomacy." Bratislava: SFPa, 2022. Based on MFA's internal research from representative offices of the SR in respective countries.



Recommendations for MFAs:

- Use **diplomatic academies as strategic tools** for increasing the level of inclusion and diversity within the ministry. The training can be tailored exactly to the needs of the respective institution, the level of seniority, or other needs of both female and male employees. It can focus on both skill enhancement, and awareness. The V4 countries can draw much inspiration from other EU states.





Gender Equality in Diplomatic Careers

Borbála Tállai, Equilibrium Institute

By the mid-2020s, in Hungary there are still significant inequalities in the field of gender equality. As The Economist's glass-ceiling index comparing working conditions for women across the OECD shows, Hungary came in 24th place out of the 29 OECD states in 2024. The Czech Republic ranked 25th on this list, while Slovakia and Poland ranked 17th and 13th, respectively.³⁹ **The situation is somewhat different in diplomacy than in the general political field.** In 2024, Hungary was ranked 29th in the Percentage Share of Women Ambassadors list published by the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, with 23%. Currently, still less than a quarter of the ambassadors serving abroad are women, 22 out of 95.⁴⁰ In the same list, Poland was ranked 30th, Czechia 35th and Slovakia 42nd.

Situation in Hungary

Leadership roles within the diplomatic scene in Hungary remain predominantly occupied by men. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade operates on a declaredly merit-based system for recruitment and promotion without specific policies to ensure gender balance. However, experience shows that women start with **considerable structural disadvantage**, so merit-based appointments merely **preserve existing structures**.

The issue is not the presence of legal obstacles but rather the **absence of a structured support system** that ensures women have the same opportunities as men to be posted abroad. Challenges such as **childcare, school or nursery placements**, and access to children's **health care**, e.g. the necessary vaccinations often remain financially challenging to navigate when a family is abroad.

In general, the availability of support depends on the goodwill of fellow diplomats and embassy colleagues rather than an established framework, making it harder for women to take on diplomatic assignments. Furthermore, in contrast to other V4 countries, in Hungary foreign employees are not covered by insurance in the country of their diplomatic assignment. Consequently, diplomats needing any medical treatment abroad must initially cover the costs themselves and may later apply for reimbursement from the ministry. Additionally, the Hungarian Foreign Ministry introduced a system of combining all expenses into the salaries for foreign posting. While this means a visible immediate increase in salaries, diplomats also face **higher personal costs**, including the requirement to pay relocation as well as health care expenses upfront, which makes moving with family and children even harder and financially more challenging - rendering diplomatic service less attractive especially for women.

The transparency of the merit-based selection process is also uneven among the target countries. In fact, most **appointments - similar to other countries in Europe - are based on political decisions** and are often seen as a compensation for example for the loss of a previous political position. Since men outnumber women in politics across all V4 countries, and definitely in Hungary, the appointment of men into diplomatic positions is also more frequent. This not only mirrors the situation in politics, but expands it into another field (diplomacy) and deepens the negative trend, further reducing the chance to reverse the trend.

³⁹ "The best places to be a working woman in 2025," The Economist, March 5, 2025 https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2025/03/05/the-best-and-worst-places-to-be-a-working-woman-in-2025?giftId=g8ff971c-c3de-45ba-841c-0199654958b1&utm_campaign=gifted_article.

⁴⁰ Sarah Chehab. 2024 Women in Diplomacy Index, Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, 2024 <https://www.agda.ac.ae/docs/default-source/2023/2024-women-in-diplomacy-index-2.pdf>.



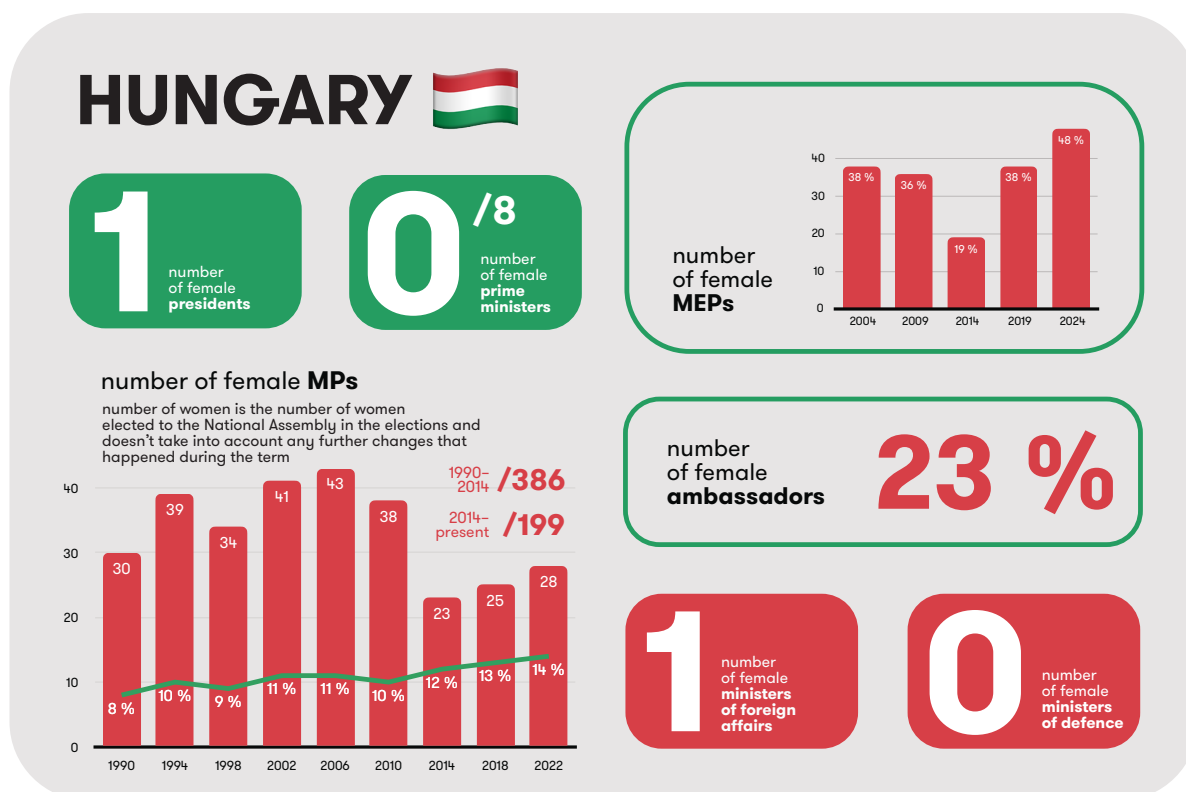
Towards Gender Balance

So the result is that the diplomatic sphere reflects the existing inequalities in politics, strengthens it, expands it and perpetuates gender disparity.

Recommendations for MFAs:

- Establish a **comprehensive support system** for female diplomats and their families to ensure equal opportunities. This includes **support for children's education** and **childcare health services**, all of which can facilitate greater participation of women in diplomatic missions.
- When both spouses serve in the diplomatic corps, a stated policy of the Foreign Ministry's HR department should be to prioritize **assigning them to a common posting**.

Various countries have established institutional frameworks to boost the nominal representation of women in this field, e.g. by programming, budget development, monitoring and evaluation, and management and training.⁴¹ Introducing gender quotas in politics is an approach often discussed as a way of achieving equality of representation of men and women (most **prevalent in areas with robust frameworks for gender equality** (Norway, Western Europe, and parts of Latin America)⁴², however, the direct application of gender quotas within the diplomatic sphere itself remains a less commonly explored concept. Several countries



⁴¹ Jamille Bigio, Rachel Vogelstein. Understanding Gender Equality in Foreign Policy (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2020) https://genderandsecurity.org/sites/default/files/Bigio_Vogelstein_-_Understandg_G_Equality_in_FP.pdf.

⁴² Karin Aggestam, Ann Towns, (Eds.). "Gendering Diplomacy and International Negotiation." (Lund: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).



however declare a commitment to achieving gender equality among diplomats, including in the top positions – examples can be drawn from **Canada** or **Norway**.

Regarding the **political sphere** in the V₄ countries, only Poland has a legal gender quota (35%) for candidate lists in elections, while the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia have no mandatory quotas. However, some political parties in all four countries have **voluntary quotas**, in which parties decide for themselves whether to introduce any rules about the proportion of women among their candidates.⁴³ Although the quota system is at times controversial even among women, experience from countries that have successfully implemented quotas shows that **overcoming a minority status is not feasible** without them.⁴⁴

Recommendations for all relevant actors and institutions:

- There are many arguments for and against quotas. Yet the very **concept of a gender quota should be redefined**. It may be helpful if understood more as a means to initiate and then strengthen a trend, rather than a rigid numerical target to achieve. It is essential to recognize that quotas can be very helpful and serve their purpose as an interim measure. They may be necessary and important in the short term, they should not be regarded as a permanent solution.

Recommendations for women leaders

- Women appointed into leading positions, either in politics or in business, culture, science or diplomacy should maintain **a visible presence, serve as mentors**, and actively support young women by **sharing their networks**, inspiring, and encouraging the next generation of diplomats.

⁴³ "Women in politics are progressing in the EU, in Hungary they are not - European Data Journalism Network EDJNet." https://www.europeandatajournalism.eu/cp_data_news/women-in-politics-are-progressing-in-the-european-union-in-hungary-they-are-not/.

⁴⁴ Rohini Pande, Deanna Ford, Gender Quotas and Female Leadership (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012) <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/9120>;

Fernández, Juan J., Celia Valiente. "Gender Quotas and Public Demand for Increasing Women's Representation in Politics: An Analysis of 28 European Countries." *European Political Science Review* 13, no. 3 (2021): 351–70. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773921000126>.



Association for International Affairs (AMO)

AMO is a non-governmental not-for-profit Prague-based organization founded in 1997. Its main aim is to promote research and education in the field of international relations. AMO facilitates the expression and realization of ideas, thoughts, and projects in order to increase education, mutual understanding, and tolerance among people.



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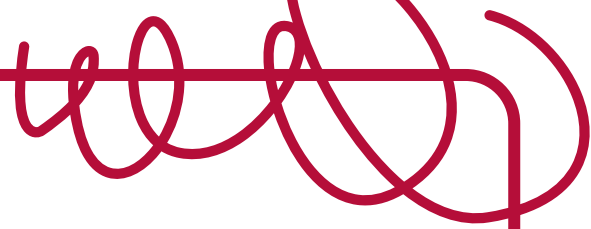
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