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Amplifying Voices, Advancing Equality: The Role of the European Women's Lobby in Brussels

Rockow, Melissa

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**Amplifying Voices, Advancing Equality: The Role of the European Women's
Lobby in Brussels**

Student: Melissa Rockow

Supervisor: Dr. Maxine David

Second Supervisor: Dennie Oude Nijhuis,

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations	2
Chapter 1: Introduction	3
Chapter 2: Literature Review	5
2.2 <i>The Istanbul Convention</i>	8
2.3 <i>FEMM Committee</i>	11
2.4 <i>Interest Groups</i>	12
2.6 <i>The Commission</i>	14
2.7 <i>Theoretical Framework: Corporatist Theory</i>	15
2.8 <i>Relevance</i>	18
Chapter 3: Research Design	20
3.1 <i>Case Selection</i>	21
Chapter 4 Analysis and Findings	28
4.1 <i>The Proposal:</i>	28
Chapter 4 Analysis and Findings.....	29
4.1 <i>The Proposal:</i>	29
Chapter 5: European Women’s Lobby.....	30
5.1 <i>EWL: Violence Against Women:</i>	30
5.2 <i>Comparison of Proposed Amendments:</i>	34
5.2 <i>Femicide: an acknowledged phenomena?</i>	41
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	48
Bibliography	51

List of Abbreviations

COM/2022/105Final- proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and Council on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

DV- Domestic Violence

EWL- European Women's Lobby

EU- European Union

FEMM- Women's Rights and Gender Equality

FGM- Female Genital Mutilation

NGO- Nongovernmental Organisations

VAW- Violence Against Women

Chapter 1: Introduction

Gender-based violence, especially violence against women (VAW), is an ongoing and concerning issue globally. The European Union (EU) acknowledges the severity of this problem and highlights the issue of under-reporting of violence. Furthermore, the EU acknowledges the concerning prevalence of violence against women, emphasising that it is an issue that goes beyond national borders. The alarming statistics disclose that roughly one in three women worldwide, including those within the EU, have experienced physical or sexual violence ("Fight Violence Against Women", 2022). Alarmingly, one in five girls is a survivor of child sexual abuse, and gender-based cyber violence affects one in every two young women. These observations emphasise the need for effective policies to comprehensively address VAW and achieve gender equality (Fight Violence Against Women, 2022).

In view of this urgent matter, this thesis seeks to examine the interaction between the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and two significant EU bodies, the Commission and Parliament, and appraise its impact on the prevalence of femicide in gender equality and VAW policymaking within the 2020-2023 policy cycle. Femicide, which refers to the intentional killing of women because of their gender, is a distinct and concerning category of VAW that requires specific policy focus. This study's primary research question is: **To what degree does the European Women's Lobby have an impact on the formation and execution of gender equality policy within the European Union?**

Existing research on VAW often fails to address the specific dynamics and drivers of femicide adequately. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to understanding the influence of policy drivers on engagement in femicide policy, particularly within the context of gender equality. Therefore, this research seeks to address these gaps by analysing the engagement between the EWL and the Commission and Parliament and examining its impact on the incorporation of femicide in gender equality and VAW policymaking. This study uses a mixed-methods approach, comprising a comprehensive analysis of gender policy with a qualitative case study of the EWL's efforts with the European Commission and European Parliament on matters of VAW and Femicide from 2020 to 2023. Through a combination of David Easton's perspective, which prioritises interaction processes in the political system rather than solely focusing on institutions and behavioural structures, and a corporatist theoretical framework, this research investigates whether

the Commission and the European Parliament acknowledge and address the issues and preferences presented by the EWL. Additionally, it assesses whether the EWL has an impact on the formulation of gender equality policy in the EU. By doing so, it provides an examination of EU gender policies coverage of VAW and Femicide.

This paper tries to make a contribution to the existing literature by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of interest groups and the potential impact of the European Women's Lobby in achieving its member objectives/demands in the specific areas of violence against women and femicide at the EU level. By addressing existing gaps in the literature, this research deepens our understanding of the dynamics between interest groups such as the European Women's Lobby and EU institutions in addressing violence against women and femicide and advancing gender equality. The findings of this study hold significance for women, policymakers, interest groups and researchers, as they try to provide insights in the development of effective strategies and policies to combat violence against women and femicide and promote gender equality within the EU.

This study will be structured as follows. The following section will present key terminology defined by the literature, followed by an overview of EU institutions and interest groups relationships and policymaking processes. Then, the research design will be presented, where the methodology will be explained and the case selection will be established. The latter will clarify the materials used and the parameters overseeing the research process. The following section will set the results and provide an overview of the case study findings.

The last section will consist of a discussion of the results and any conclusions that will follow from these results.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The following section provides an overview of the literature on the EU and interest organisations. Firstly, the relevant terminology will be defined based on definitions provided by previous researchers. The second section addresses the literature revolving around the topics related to this study. Finally, the aims of this thesis and its hypothesis are presented as a result of the review of the existing literature.

Literature on gender equality policy in the EU has grown over time, incorporating various perspectives and becoming a significant area of research within European studies (Reis 2018).

Alison Woodward described the advocacy coalition formed around EU gender equality policy since the 1970s as a “velvet triangle” (Jacquot 2018). The concept combines the ideas of an ‘iron triangle’, which represents stable policy subsystems with identified stakeholders, and a ‘velvet ghetto’ referring to the horizontal segregation of women in business. The ‘velvet triangle’ consists of feminists within national and European bureaucracies, women politicians, NGO members, and gender studies scholars, all working together to promote gender equality policies within the EU. This analytical tool is valuable for understanding the function of the gender equality policy domain in the EU. The literature on the relationship between gender and the EU aims to understand the emergence and development of the EU gender equality policy, focusing on three key dimensions. (1) the formation of the EU gender regime, (2) the role of actors, and (3) the feminist critique. EU gender regime is focused on three levels - equality, difference and gender. Researchers examine different policy strategies for gender equality, such as equal treatment, equal opportunities and equal impact. They also discuss the policy instruments used, including legal, budgetary, cross-cutting and cognitive tools. The role of actors such as the Commission, the European Court of Justice, the European Parliament and the European Council is examined in the study of gender equality policy. It also looks at private actors, particularly women's and feminist movements, and their ability to build coalitions across institutions and social activities (Jacquot 2018).

2.1 Femicide: a form of VAW

This section discusses the history and definitions of the term "femicide". In 1976, Diana H. Russell, an American feminist, coined the term femicide, defining it as the killing of women by men because they are women. In doing so, Russell gave the term a critical political meaning and placed

it within the broader framework of feminist politics. Furthermore, Russell refined the concept as a 'misogynist killing of women by men and an extreme manifestation of sexual violence, emphasising the gendered nature of violence against women (Gryzb et al. 2018). In the 1990s, Marcela Lagarde y de los Ríos developed the concept of "feminicidio" to describe the dramatic rise in extreme violence against women and killings of women in Mexico. Lagarde's conceptualisation added the critical element of impunity, signifying a failure of state authorities to prosecute and punish perpetrators. This conceptualisation of femicide/feminicide portrays it as a state crime tolerated by public institutions and officials, a form of gender-based discrimination, and grounds for international accountability of states for human rights violations (Gryzb et al. 2018). Furthermore, the term "femicide" was used by the feminist movement to politicise and challenge male violence against women, encompassing various lethal forms of violence, including honour killings and killings of prostitutes. (Gryzb, Naudi & Marcuello-Servós 2018).

Scholars such as Dobash and Dobash (2015) have explored intimate partners as a distinct form of femicide. Dobash and Dobash (2015) focus on male perpetrators involved in intimate partner femicide within marital or similar partnerships, excluding dating relationships and non-marital family members (Dobash and Dobash, 2015). However, Fairbairn et al. (2017) note that defining 'intimate' in the context of 'intimate partner violence/femicide' has limitations, as it may exclude the killing of sex workers or individuals in dating relationships (Fairbairn, Jaffé, and Dawson, 2017). Gryzb et al. (2018) examined contributions¹ from different working groups. They found that while there was support for defining femicide as the killing of women because they are women, due to the limited information available, it was suggested to start with a broader definition and later extract specific categories where gender is a relevant factor, such as intimate partner killings, killings related to sexual violence, sex-selective abortions, honour killings, hate crimes against LGBTIQ people and against women and girls (Gryzb, Naudi & Marcuello-Servós 2018).

¹ Gryzb et al. mention the definitions from both the United Nations and the Vienna Declaration on Femicide as tools to raise awareness and create policies to combat femicide and violence against women in all forms. The UN documents define femicide as gender-related killings that can take various forms, such as intimate partner femicide, honor killings, killings in armed conflicts and more while acknowledging its scarce reporting and prosecution by official authorities. The Vienna Declaration on Femicide describes femicide as the killings of women and girls because of their gender, including domestic violence, misogynist killings, honor killings, and killings related to armed conflict, dowry, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other contexts.

The literature on femicide offers a valuable perspective by examining its association with culture and gender. Grzyb et al. (2018) working groups highlight the significance of culture, encompassing social norms, gender roles, and perceptions of femininity and masculinity. Their exploration of murder in specific cultural contexts cautions against oversimplifying or essentialising communities. While many femicide definitions focus on women killed by men or women due to their gender, it is essential to recognise that women can also be perpetrators of femicides, influenced by their entrenchment in patriarchal systems. Thus, limiting the definition to women killed solely by men would be inadequate. The groups advocate for a comprehensive understanding of culture, considering perspectives from both within and outside the cultural context, particularly in intercultural and transnational scenarios.

Similarly, Kouta et al. (2018) adopt a cultural perspective when understanding and defining femicide, illustrating how Western and non-Western cultures shape attitudes towards male violence against women and influence public policies and state actions. They emphasise that understanding and preventing femicide and violence against women necessitate consideration of the sociocultural and ecological factors at play. The environmental model provides a practical approach to comprehending violence against women, acknowledging that no single factor explains violent behaviour and allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the problem. Specific cultural and social norms may enable different forms of violence, such as traditional beliefs granting men the right to control or discipline women, making women more vulnerable to violence by intimate partners (Kouta, Boira, Nudelman, & Gill 2018).

For this study, a decision was made to combine the definitions used in the literature and develop a single definition to be used throughout the study.

“Femicide refers to the misogynistic killing of women and girls by men, which is an extreme manifestation of sexual violence and highlights the gendered nature of violence against women. Femicide encompasses multiple forms of violence against women, such as intimate partner femicide, honour killings, killings in armed conflict and other contexts, including domestic violence related to dowry, sexual orientation and gender identity. Femicide is not limited to murder but includes any gender-related killing.”

The above definition establishes that femicide is not just the killing of women by men or of women and girls because they are women and girls. It shows that, through the inadequate prosecution and punishment of perpetrators by state or official authorities, femicide is an institutional problem. In other words, femicide is a state crime that public institutions tolerate through this inadequate response to forms of VAW. Femicide is also not only murder but also various other forms of VAW.

This definition incorporates key elements from various literature sources on femicide, ensuring a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the term. Russell's concept emphasises the gendered nature of violence against women, while Lagarde's addition of impunity highlights the state's role in allowing such crimes to continue. Drawing on the UN and Vienna declarations², the definition recognises the multiple forms and contexts of femicide beyond killings by men and emphasises its institutional dimensions. By considering femicide as an institutional problem and a state crime, the definition highlights the need for an effective state response, accountability and protection of women's rights. In addition, the report emphasises that femicide encompasses different types of violence against women, thus acknowledging its complexity and multifaceted nature. Overall, this definition provides a robust framework for understanding femicide in the context of the study and is in line with the most recent and inclusive perspectives on the phenomenon.

2.2 The Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is a critical legislative piece on VAW and femicide. It acknowledges VAW not only because of gender power imbalances but also as a root cause, recognising its deep-rooted connection to historical inequalities between men and women that perpetuate women's subordinate status (Allwood 2016). A core principle of the Istanbul Convention recognises that achieving gender equality is crucial in preventing VAW. It highlights the heightened vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence, particularly within domestic settings. Additionally, the Istanbul Convention adopts the definition of VAW as outlined in the 1993 UN Declaration on the

² “The first is a general definition drawn from the Vienna Declaration of the Academic Council on the UN Systems, emphasizing femicide as the killing of women and girls based on their gender by both private and public actors. The second definition, developed for statistical purposes, focuses on two specific categories: the killing of a woman by an intimate partner and death resulting from harmful practices against women. Intimate partner violence includes former or current spouses or partners, regardless of whether they share the same residence. Both definitions highlight the gender dimension of femicide and acknowledge that it can take different forms across the world.” **CITATIONS**

Elimination of Violence against Women, further aligning it with global efforts to combat VAW (Allwood 2016). The European Parliament has advocated for comprehensive EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, acknowledging VAW as an impediment to gender equality and underscoring the EU's jurisdiction to safeguard fundamental rights. The Istanbul Convention serves as a vital legislative framework addressing VAW and femicide, recognising the importance of gender equality in preventing VAW.

The Istanbul Convention calls for integrated policy and data collection. It requires designated official bodies in each State to coordinate the collection, analysis and dissemination of data, including data on femicide. These bodies must also implement, monitor and evaluate policies to prevent and combat VAW, including femicide. States must allocate adequate financial and human resources to implement comprehensive policies, measures and programmes to combat all forms of violence against women, including those of NGOs and civil society.

The Istanbul Convention places significant emphasis on prevention, recognising that effective measures against VAW and DV can yield life-saving outcomes and alleviate human suffering. To achieve this objective, the Convention advocates for comprehensive police intervention and protective measures, complemented by specialised support services, such as shelters and dedicated telephone hotlines. It outlines a range of standards designed to enhance the protection of victims, encompassing ensuring access to pertinent information, the establishment of easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers and with appropriate geographical distribution, and the provision of toll-free state-wide 24/7 helplines.

Moreover, the Convention prescribes criminalising the various forms of VAW and DV. For effective implementation, state parties must introduce new offences that are not existing, encompassing psychological and physical violence, sexual violence and rape, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced abortion, and forced sterilisation (Hester & Lilley 2014). Furthermore, the Convention stipulates that cultural norms, traditions, or so-called 'honour' must never justify any of the courses of conduct.

The Istanbul Convention's comprehensive approach sets forth a robust framework to combat VAW and DV, encompassing prevention, protection, and prosecution. By establishing explicit legal standards and obligations for state parties, the Convention aims to foster a society wherein violence

against women and domestic violence are unequivocally condemned and eradicated, underscoring its profound commitment to promoting human rights, gender equality, and a violence-free Europe.

The Convention acknowledges the essential role played by NGOs as intermediaries in connecting victims of VAW and DV to numerous services made available by member states, which NGOs or civil society organisations often execute. Furthermore, it recognises that these service providers often encounter funding and coverage challenges in specific geographical regions. The Convention reinforces backing for NGOs and civil society organisations through several provisions. Parties to the Convention have a duty to urge and make possible the work of these entities by leveraging their expertise, involving them as active partners in multi-agency partnerships and supporting their initiatives to raise awareness. Investing in NGOs and civil society organisations consists in enabling them to carry out their functions proficiently. This may require establishing collaborative frameworks between law enforcement agencies and shelters, increasing the exposure of NGO helplines and services in government informational materials, and securing relevant public and political support. By doing so, the Convention aims to strengthen the efficiency of these organisations in combating VAW and DV, advancing the overall response to such challenges within the framework of the Istanbul Convention.

The importance of this aspect to the study is highlighted by its association with the European Women's Lobby EWL Observatory on Violence against Women. It is worth noting that in 2013, the EWL collaborated with the Council of Europe to execute a comprehensive joint project. This project involved a series of public events across 28 European countries, all centred around the common theme "Act Against Rape!" The use of the Istanbul Convention during the sixteen days of activism against violence directed at women played a significant role in furthering grassroots women's organisations' advocacy campaigns for the Convention's endorsement, ratification, and implementation. Moreover, these events helped strengthen partnerships and collaborative initiatives with various NGOs. They also provided a platform through which women's organisations could engage directly with decision-makers, ensuring their efforts directly impacted local services to assist women victims.

The connection between the EWL Observatory and the joint project with the Council of Europe accentuates the significance of this aspect in understanding the multifaceted efforts and strategies

employed in addressing violence against women in Europe. By shedding light on the tangible outcomes and the profound influence of these collaborative initiatives, this connection serves as a crucial focal point in the study's exploration of mechanisms for promoting the protection and well-being of women in the face of violence.

2.3 FEMM Committee

Establishing the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) has played an essential role in putting gender equality on the EU agenda (Roggeband 2021). Although it lacks legislative power compared to its national counterparts, as gender equality is primarily a Member State competence, the FEMM Committee within the European Parliament has a significant role in gender equality policy. The committee's status is described as 'neutralised', meaning its members are full members of two committees, including FEMM, but without exclusive membership. This neutralised status partly explains the Committee's limited power and weak position within the European Parliament. However, it also contributes to the committee's institutional persistence because, unlike other committees, all FEMM members are full members of at least two other committees, giving them a broad knowledge of policy in different areas and enabling them to take swift and informed action (Ahrens 2016).

Despite not seeking mandatory status from its members, the FEMM Committee has gained acceptance from other committees and political groups while maintaining its role as a voluntary committee. This has fostered homogeneity among its members, strengthening the committee's position and facilitating a consistent stance on gender equality, which increases its ability to transfer policy concerns to other committees and gain broader support within the European Parliament (Ahrens 2016).

The work of the FEMM Committee is essential for this study of the EWL's involvement with the EU Parliament's gender policies for several reasons. Firstly, creating the FEMM Committee has been crucial in promoting gender equality on the EU agenda (Roggeband 2021). Although it has more limited legal authority than individual countries, the Committee's emphasis on women's rights and gender equality positions it as an essential stakeholder in shaping gender-based regulations and efforts at the European scale.

Additionally, the FEMM committee's voluntary nature and recognition and acceptance by other committees and political factions have bolstered its status and endurance as a pivotal voluntary committee. This bond between its members, especially regarding their dedication to gender equality, guarantees steadfastness on topics related to gender and simplifies the transmission of policy concerns to other committees to obtain more significant backing within the European Parliament. Furthermore, as the FEMM Committee is a 'neutralised' committee, its members can also be full members of at least two other committees. This grants them considerable insight into policies across multiple areas. This advantage in awareness empowers FEMM MEPs to make informed decisions when accommodating gender-related matters while bolstering the committee's force to pressure competing committees to tackle gender issues.

In conclusion, the unique characteristics of the FEMM Committee, its vital role in promoting gender equality policies and its interactions with other committees through voluntary membership and gender mainstreaming initiatives make it a relevant and essential subject for this study. Understanding the dynamics and functioning of the FEMM committee will provide valuable insights into the broader context of gender policymaking within the European Parliament and shed light on the strategies used by the EWL to influence gender-related decisions at the EU level.

2.4 Interest Groups

To understand the role of interest groups in policymaking, it is essential to know where they began. National systems of corporatist concentration influenced the early design for interest representation at the European level. Early interest groups in Brussels were peak-level industry associations with no individual members but federations of national associations. Instead of developing hierarchal neo-corporatist structures, the interest group population at the EU level grew increasingly pluralist, with an estimated increase from 100 groups in 1960 to 800 groups in 1990 and continued growth since then. Measuring the interest group population is complex and uncertain due to its size and composition. Nevertheless, official registers, including the Transparency Register, estimate the number of lobby groups active at EU institutions, but they may need to be more comprehensive (Hofmann 2017). There is a bias in interest group politics that is not unique to the EU but is present in other political systems, favouring concentrated or exclusive benefits (Hofmann 2017).

Interest groups must decide who to lobby, whether regional, national or EU policymakers, at which stage of the policy cycle, and through what channels, such as direct lobbying, consultants or associations. These choices depend on their resources, internal organisation, collaboration with other groups, and the nature of the policy. The EU legal system has become essential for policy production, primarily due to private litigants shaping opportunities for interest groups (Hofmann 2017).

EU decision-making bodies are confronted with numerous lobbyists seeking access and influence. Various terminology describes lobbying and interest groups, such as 'organised interest', 'interest organisations', 'pressure group' and 'advocacy group'. Lobbying also has synonymous alternatives such as 'advocacy' and 'interest representation' (Hofmann 2017).

The primary interest of lobbying and interest group politics is determining who is successful in their lobbying efforts and why. The EWL secretariat pays close attention to the selection of rapporteurs and endeavours to establish early contacts with them. The European Women's Lobby may already be in communication with rapporteurs. Forming a relationship with rapporteurs responsible for drafting legislative proposals can be highly strategic for lobbyists and interest organisations. In the FEMM committee, rapporteurs often seek input and amendments from the European Women's Lobby for their drafts. They may also request meetings with EWL's policy officers responsible for specific dossiers.

In this study, the EWL is considered and characterised as an interest group. The EWL represents several women's organisations at the EU level and uses resources to influence policy outcomes. It aims to act as a two-way pipeline, conveying preferences and demands between national groups and EU institutions. Engaging with Brussels provides interest groups with opportunities for input (Allwood 2016; Lang 2021; Hartlapp, Müller and Ingeborg 2021; Rubio Grundell 2021; Roggeband 2021). As an intermediary, the EWL acts as a conduit, conveying preferences and demands between national groups and EU institutions. Understanding the role and strategies of interest groups such as the EWL is essential to understanding how women's movements engage with EU decision-making processes and influence gender-related policies.

In conclusion, the discussion of interest groups, particularly the EWL, is essential to this study of the EWL's engagement with the European Commission and the European Parliament in gender

policy-making. Understanding the strategies, challenges and resource allocation of interest groups provides a valuable context for understanding how women's movements influence EU gender policy and how the EWL effectively navigates its role as an advocacy group within the EU decision-making landscape. It also sheds light on the broader dynamics of lobbying and interest representation within the EU, which has implications for implementing and transforming gender equality policies at national and European levels.

2.6 The Commission

To comprehend the connection between interest groups and EU institutions, it is imperative to present a thorough outline of gender equality progression in EU institutions, encompassing the passage of VAW as a manifestation of gender inequality (Roggeband 2021). Hartlapp et al. (2021) exhibit how gender equality has undergone various stages in the EU (Hartlapp, Müller, and Ingeborg 2021).

In its initial phases, the EU prioritised gender equality in the work market by implementing directives and programmes to tackle wage parity and employment prospects. While these endeavours have been integral in moulding gender strategies at the European level, criticisms have surfaced asserting that they have a limited sphere of influence in addressing more extensive societal inequalities and structural factors (Hartlapp et al., 2021; Lombardo & Meier, 2008). While these efforts aimed to address workplace discrimination, scholars argue that they failed to consider systemic gender discrimination (Hartlapp, Müller, & Ingeborg, 2021; MacRae, 2010; Mazey, 1988).

Subsequently, the Commission adopted a gender mainstreaming approach influenced by the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action. The aim was to address gender discrimination across policy areas by using non-binding measures and new modes of governance, such as awareness raising and cooperation among policy actors. However, critiques point out the approach's dependence on non-binding estimates and its possible exclusion of reputable civil society actors, which raises concerns about policy effectiveness (Forest, 2021; Lang, 2021; Lombardo & Meier, 2008).

2.7 Theoretical Framework: *Corporatist Theory*

One distinct feature of EU institutions is the formalisation of organised interests as intermediaries between political community members and political authorities. The Commission supports and promotes the lobbying of interest groups, whether organised or unorganised, employing the theory of corporatism to analyse the relationship between political leaders and organised interests.

Corporatism arose as a counter to pluralist ideas of interest groups and their interplay with the political structure. According to corporatist theories, the interest group frameworks that emerged in Western Europe following World War II did not align with liberal democratic principles. These groups were not established independently but rather motivated and influenced by state actions. While both corporatists and pluralists recognise the increasing significance of formal associations and the enduring presence of opposing interests, they hold fundamentally different views. (Williamson 1989; Strid 2009)

In corporatist systems, the constituent units are not primarily individual citizens but are defined from above as political-economic needs and organised as interests. Organised interests are limited in number, hierarchically ordered, and functionally differentiated. In contrast, pluralist systems permit unlimited or unspecified numbers of voluntary, self-determining interest organisations that compete and interact. The corporatist theory proposes that political authorities grant, regulate, or subsidise these entities in return for a hegemonic role. (Williamson 1989; Strid 2009)

The EU's political system is distinct in its institutionalised representation of organised interests, which serves as the basis for the input and output of the European Commission. This system involves mobilising and organising social interests and lobbying efforts rather than individual or aggregated preferences. The European Women's Lobby also stands out for its focus on mobilising and organising claims specifically for women, distinguished from men. The European Commission and Women's Lobby are driven by gender-specific agendas underpinning their institutional foundations.

Only some people dismiss the ideas of interests or groups, including the classification of women as a unique group (Gunnarsson, 2008). There are varied approaches to comprehending and defining this commonality when considering whether women can be assumed to share common interests. Fundamentally, interests can be perceived as empirically generalisable individual

preferences or attitudes towards distinct political issues within specific contexts. Common interests emerge as provable generalisations established on these personal preferences (Strid 2009).

In this thesis's context, the framework's primary use is to identify and explore the functions and structures that shape the organisation and articulation of women's interests within the EU. The European Women's Lobby functions as an intermediary within the political environment by representing demands, lending support and providing feedback as an input and output mechanism. The position of the EWL in the EU system means it controls access to women's political interests. However, this control may sometimes exclude specific preferences that do not align with its representation. The EWL acts as a gatekeeper between political authorities and the environment.

The application of corporatist theory further refines the investigation, as the political authorities, the Commission and the European Parliament are viewed not only as a mediator between societal interest groups but also as active influencers and managers of these groups. Therefore, the relationship between the European Women's Lobby and the Commission and Parliament assumes great significance.

The decision-making system of the EU could be interpreted as partly corporatist. While this system can tackle and contest the under-representation of women in EU decision-making, it also imposes restrictions on the organisations participating in interest representation and their organisational structure. The Commission's structure encourages a particular type of corporatist interest representation to which the European Women's Lobby has adapted.

2.7.1 Input and Output Functions

To examine how organised interests, including those representing women, operate within the EU system, this thesis examines the concepts of David Easton and Gabriel Almond and Corporatist theory. According to Gabriel Almond (1960), a political system analyses the structures that perform political functions throughout societies. Almond (1960) identifies two essential functions in all political systems: input and output. The output functions involve creating rules, enforcing them, and judging them, while input functions include political socialisation, articulating interests, aggregation, and communication (Almond, 1960; Davies and Lewis, 1970).

A corresponding structure underpins each function. For example, interest organisations act as structures for interest articulation. Almond (1960) classifies these organisations into institutional interest groups, non-associational interest groups, anomic interest groups, and associational interest groups. Institutionalised interest groups exist within legislative bodies, bureaucracies, or political parties (Almond 1960).

Moreover, David Easton's ideas on the political system correspond with Gabriel Almond's concepts but prioritise the interaction processes in the political system instead of solely focusing on institutions and behavioural structures (Davies and Lewis 1970). Easton's perspective highlights the importance of feedback and responses within his terminology. He defines the political system as a set of interactions separated from overall social behaviour, where values are authoritatively assigned within a society (Easton 1965b)

According to Easton, the political system is the main object of analysis, and its basic unit is interactions (Easton 1965a). Individuals involved in these interactions are viewed as system members, functioning in their political roles. Easton refutes the notion of social systems being mere collections of individuals, positing that all social systems emerge from interactions among people. Easton's approach emphasises the dynamics of interactions and feedback within the political system, highlighting the importance of understanding how values are authoritatively allocated in society and distinguishing politics from other social processes (Easton 1965a; 1965b).

The political system is a process of transformation in which inputs are transformed into outputs. This implies that input and output functions are interrelated rather than entirely separate, creating a continuum of conversions. The information may comprise demands or supports. Supports enable the system to tackle needs efficiently. Easton outlines three supporting entities within the political system: the political regime, the political authorities, and the political community (Easton 1965b).

The political authorities comprise individuals in office who process and transform inputs into outputs. These authorities must ensure the commitment of relevant system members for adopting objectives or neutralising opposition. The political community refers to individuals, groups and organisations generating input into the system. Interactions between political authorities and the political community, in terms of input and output, define the system's openness. Gatekeepers regulate entry into the conversion process and serve as "structural regulators of the volume of

demands"(Eason 1965b). These entities - including interest groups, media, and political parties - act as institutional, cultural, and structural filtering mechanisms.

The outputs of a political system are policies that allocate items of value, decision-making, and implementation. Outputs generate backing by satisfying demands, and this support is reinforced through a feedback loop. Strain can develop if markets become too cumbersome or the license becomes insufficient (Easton 1965a).

The EU has a unique power structure spread across several levels. It is not a typical state, but it is a political system that assigns values with authority. Easton's approach highlights the distinctive characteristics of the EU's political system while outlining standard functions. This system clarifies how inputs, support structures, and links between authorities and organised interests work within the EU.

In the context of women's organisation and gender relations, Easton's framework is helpful as it includes gender relation analysis. Early feminist research found it beneficial for studying women's political participation. There has also been independent employment of a system-level approach by feminist theory, as demonstrated in the concept of the gender regime. This framework enables comparative analysis of gender relations across multiple domains.

2.8 Relevance

After examining the existing literature, a notable gap has been identified regarding the research on the EWL's activities with the recent EU institution's policymaking processes, specifically on matters of gender policy. Considering this, this thesis investigates whether the present Commission and the European Parliament acknowledge and address the issues and preferences presented by the EWL. Additionally, it assesses whether the EWL impacts gender equality policy formulation in the EU. Furthermore, this research examines any concessions made by the EWL to attain influence. Overall, this study investigates how the EWL mediates between its member organisations, the Commission, and Parliament on the specific issues of VAW and femicide. The study also analyses whether this interaction effectively advances women's interests within the EU's decision-making processes.

Moreover, in this study, it is crucial to acknowledge the significant development during the research period, namely the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention, which binds the entire EU to its international standards (Commission Statement 2023). The acquisition into the Istanbul Convention addresses the deficiencies in EU-wide definitions of VAW, as the EU now has an official international framework to refer to. This research considers this a significant development as it has implications for changes in EU gender policy.

Based on the theoretical framework and Easton's input/output concepts, this thesis hypothesises that *the European Women's Lobby functions as a gatekeeper in the EU's political environment, mediating between its organisation demands, EU decision-makers and the broader socio-political context, thereby contributing to the strengthening and legitimisation of current gender equality policies.*

Chapter 3: Research Design

To examine whether the present Commission and the European Parliament acknowledge and address the issues and preferences presented by the EWL, the research design for this study involves a mixed-method approach, including a policy analysis of gender policy, specifically the Commission’s proposal for a directive on combating VAW and DV (COM2022/105Final) and the European Parliament’s role, with a qualitative case study of the EWL’s work with the European Commission and European Parliament on specific matters of VAW and Femicide between 2020 and 2023. This design allows for a multifaceted examination of gender policy’s coverage of VAW and Femicide.

The first component of the research design involves a comprehensive policy analysis of the COM2022/105Final and European Parliament role in gender policy, which will be conducted through a systematic review of documents sourced from the European Parliament’s Research Services (EPRS) and EU reports, communications and official documents with specific focus on the Commission’s 2021 proposal. This study aims to comprehensively understand policymaking in Brussels and its alignment with the Commission and European Parliament through a qualitative examination.

The inclusion criteria are based on carefully examining the provided literature and theoretical framework (Table 1).

Table 1: Inclusion Criteria based on Easton’s input and output terminology.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>
Interrelationships	Efforts made by the European Commission and the European Parliament to engage with interest groups like the EWL in the implementation phase of gender equality policies, including interrelationships for program delivery or capacity-building.

Input	Participation in consultations and correspondence in policy areas.
Output	The implementation of EU programmes.

Through evaluation, guided by the inclusion criteria, the EU documents have been coded to determine the potential to provide valuable insights into the gender policymaking processes. These are then included in the analysis. The reliability of the research is guaranteed by applying the same criteria to different documents and analysing the same type of documents in other contexts.

By employing the comprehensive framework provided by the literature, the selection process ensures a focused approach to identifying patterns most relevant to the research objective of assessing the influences of the EWL in policymaking processes. This approach allows for analysing themes likely contributing to understanding gender policymaking processes. The inclusion criteria provide a systematic and targeted approach to identify the data from documents that align with the pieces, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the Commission's and European Parliament's policymaking processes.

3.1 Case Selection

The research design's second component involves a qualitative case study of the EWL's lobbying efforts for VAW in Brussels, specifically with the European Parliament and European Commission.

The EWL was selected as the leading actor in this case study due to its significant presence and influence in Brussels. As an umbrella lobby organisation, the EWL represents over 2000 European organisations at the EU level, aiming to achieve equality between women and men in all aspects of life. Over the past three decades, the EWL has driven transformative change for women's rights and gender equality, successfully translating feminist theories into practical action through their expertise and feminist analysis (EWL Strategic Framework 2022-2026).

The establishment of the EWL was driven by the recognition that a large membership contributes to the lobby's influence in EU decision-making. Size matters because it gives weight to the EWL's

presence and increases its ability to exert influence. Membership is about aggregating national demands at the European level and creating a political reality that can influence policy discussions and decisions. The EWL depends on attracting members from women's organisations and ensuring their active participation in events, meetings and conferences to create a platform for their voices to be heard.

The involvement of the European Women's Lobby with member states is a noteworthy aspect. With organisations across 26 EU member states, the European Women's Lobby functions as a crucial intermediary between its constituents and policymakers at the national and international levels. The EU has transformed into an autonomous political entity where choices emanate from the interactions among its bodies; hence, advocacy groups must operate at both EU levels. Issues that exceed national borders, such as concerns around gender equality (like trafficking and labour migration), call for lobbying efforts at both national and supranational levels. The European Women's Lobby stands out owing to its worldwide perspective on gender equality and the framing of gender inequity as a universal issue with localised objectives. This approach allows for customised actions to encourage gender equality while considering national and cultural specifics.

In addition, the European Women's Lobby was selected because it uses a variety of strategies such as lobbying, campaigning, research, publications and information dissemination to achieve its goals. While it doesn't provide services directly, it does provide information to its member organisations at the national level, which often offer services such as rape crisis centres and support for refugees. Despite being part of the EU institutional landscape, the EWL also focuses on building independent institutions. In particular, its relationship with the European Commission is characterised by a cooperative approach to mainstream policy. The EWL receives direct funding from the European Commission, including its Policy Action Centre on Violence Against Women, supported by the Commission's DAPHNE programme (EPAC-VAW, 2009).

3.1.1 Commission:

Understanding the positions of the Commission in policymaking is essential to understanding the policymaking processes and how the EWL factors into and influences them. The Commission holds a considerable influence over initiating and shaping policies within the EU. It chooses the decision-making procedure when proposing new legislation, which impacts how laws are amended

and passed. This control extends beyond the initiating legislation; the Commission also determines how proposed regulations are modified and adopted by various EU institutions.

Focusing on the divisions of powers between the Commission and the European Parliament at the policy-initiating level is valuable in the context of interest organisation and their representation. Additionally, relations between interest groups such as the European Women's Lobby and the Commission and European Parliament are crucial. To influence policy initiation and shaping effectively, interest groups must develop formal institutional structures and build individual relationships within the Commission and European Parliament. This strategic approach allows them to influence the political agenda at the EU level.

The Commission's focus moved away from addressing gender inequality towards fighting discrimination on various fronts that extend beyond gender, including underrepresented and minority groups. This transition resulted in the development of programmes such as the Roadmap for Equality, Strategy for Equality between Women and Men and Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality. Critics contend that the Commission's methods lack precision and depend on soft governance techniques, which feminist scholars regard as unhelpful in dismantling inequality (Ahrens, 2019; Jacquot, 2015; Woodward, 2012).

Furthermore, the Commission represents and advances the collective interest of the EU. As the EU's executive body, it instils policies, offers legislative proposals, executes decisions, and maintains the EU treaties.

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3.1.2 Parliament:

The European Parliament is often seen as the most democratic, transparent, and publicly accessible institution among EU bodies. Unlike member state parliaments, it is directly elected by citizens of EU member states. However, it needs to hold complete legislative authority. Instead, it offers political signals, controls the EU budget, and generates its reports. It assesses Commission proposals, organises public hearings, and establishes budget priorities. Despite being a central institution, the European Parliament's decision-making power is limited due to the Commission's exclusive right to initiate legislative proposals.

Furthermore, the European Parliament operates through committees, rapporteurs, and inter-groups. Legislative proposals from the Commission are sent to the Parliament's political groups rather than national affiliations. For preparatory work, Parliament members are divided into specialised standing committees responsible for amending and adopting legislative proposals and initiating independent reports.

Within the European Parliament are key policymakers, rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs, elected by MEPs when one of the Parliament committees is assigned to draft a report on a legislative proposal, another document from the European Commission or a particular subject. Shadow rapporteurs are allocated to party groups to monitor the rapporteur's work and find compromises within the committee. Both rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs form negotiating teams, which can disproportionately influence the content of legislation and decision-making in the EP. Shadow rapporteurs are the primary negotiating partners of the rapporteur within the committee and provide information to their party colleagues (Häge & Nils). The rapporteur's critical tasks are to analyse the project, consult with specialists in the field and with those who may be affected, discuss with other committee members and recommend the political 'line' to be followed. Rapporteurs can shape decisions in the European Parliament, especially when other MEPs follow their party groups' rapporteur or shadow when voting. Party group membership in the responsible committee indicates their interest in covering specific reports. If multiple MEPS want the same information, the committee coordinator makes the final determination based on expertise, activity level, and group composition.

The European Parliament and the EU differ from traditional parliamentary systems. For instance, the Commission is not a government, and commissioners are not drawn from a legislature. They are not accountable to the Parliament like ministers in parliamentary setups. Only the Commission President is individually responsible to the Parliament. The composition of the Commission does not depend on the majority party in the Parliament, unlike the linkage between majority parties and cabinets in national systems. The Parliament cannot easily dismiss the Commission, and commissioners are not directly accountable to the European people. Article 192:3 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) empowers the Parliament to request the Commission to create proposals on specific Treaty-covered matters through a majority vote. The complex power distribution, combined with the style of EU policymaking, contributes to the involvement of numerous lobbying groups in EU policy processes. Many lobbying firms in Brussels exist to monitor competitors' interactions with European Parliament members and ensure they maintain influence.

The study aims to comprehend the impact and arrangement of interest organisations, such as the European Women's Lobby, within the decision-making process of the EU.

The key institutions of interest are the European Commission and the European Parliament, which hold the power to initiate and shape policies. The power distribution within these institutions suggests that practical impact by interest groups requires organisation on multiple levels and the provision of necessary resources.

The research explores whether the Commission and European Parliament acknowledge and address the issues and preferences put forward by the EWL, assessing whether the EWL influences gender equality policy formulation in the EU.

3.1.3 Data Collection:

Using a targeted sampling approach, documents from the EWL were carefully selected for examination. The selection of materials was based on two primary criteria: the topic under investigation, namely VAW and femicide, and the specified time frame from 2020 to 2023.

These documents included position papers, research publications, policy documents and press releases. Policy documents and position papers were analysed to understand the EWL's stance on

gender equality issues. The records were analysed using the coding software Atlas.ti. Using the inclusion criteria, predetermined codes derived from the literature and theoretical framework, an open coding process was applied to assess the input criteria within the EWL documents.

The coding process aimed to identify themes related to the inclusion criteria. The resulting pieces were then further analysed compared to the European Parliament's recent draft of the proposal on COM2022/105Final to identify interrelationships and key findings regarding the impact on gender equality policymaking.

The simultaneous analysis of the European Parliament's gender policy processes and the EWL VAW lobbying allows for assessing whether the gender policy processes of the European Parliament address issues of VAW and femicide. The comparison provides insight into the potential impact of EWL lobbying efforts in Brussels on the specific case of VAW and the inclusion of measures to address the growing phenomenon of femicide. This research contributes to the literature by analysing the policy area of VAW and femicide in the most recent EU legislature documents.

The intentional inclusion of these predetermined cases permits an evaluation of the Commission and the European Parliament's effectiveness in incorporating violence against women (VAW) into gender policy, as encouraged by the European Women's Lobby, which is the objective of this thesis. The selected cases concentrate on persistent VAW issues and offer a representative assortment for analysing the institutions' capacity to recognise and tackle distinct VAW issues through efficient policy. This approach ensures that the sampling criteria align with scholarly standards and contribute to understanding the impacts of interest groups on policy-making in Brussels. More specifically, the combined process of comprehensively analysing the Commission and the European Parliament, coupled with a qualitative case study of the EWL's lobbying efforts on Violence Against Women (VAW) within these institutions, enhances this research's ability to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these institutions address issues of VAW within their gender policies.

The study will employ a descriptive approach to analyse qualitative data gathered from examining the work of the European Parliament and Commission and the EWL's initiatives regarding VAW and Femicide. This method involves a comprehensive review and consolidation of data obtained

from sources to grasp the research questions fully. The explanatory analysis will provide a direct and understandable means of interpreting the findings, with a clear and concise presentation of the data. This method enables a clear interpretation of the gathered data and aids in examining the institution's capability to tackle VAW, as advised by the EWL.

The qualitative data collected from the EU documents and the case study analysis will be analysed using thematic analysis techniques. Themes and patterns related to interrelationships, VAW issues coverage, and the effectiveness of the EWL in achieving its objectives. By adopting a descriptive analysis method, this research design aims to provide a simple yet effective means to understand the role of the European Women's Lobby.

Chapter 4 Analysis and Findings

The following chapter provides a detailed analysis of this study. It will first present an overview of the COM2022/105 Final. Then, it gives the case study's findings, which mainly concentrate on the European Women's Lobby and their actions to influence policymaking related to VAW. It analyses and summarises the EWL's evaluation of the Commission's proposal, centred on the sections tied to VAW. After that, it discusses the EWL's participation with the European Parliament and compares the proposed changes with the Parliament's latest proposal draft.

4.1 The Proposal:

On International Women's Day 2022, the European Commission presented a long-awaited proposal for a directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence (COM2022/105Final). Based on Articles 82(2) and 83(1) TFEU, this proposal aims to combat such violence across the European Union effectively (European Women's Lobby, 2022).

It responds to a long-standing request by the European Parliament, which has been calling since 2009 for a directive to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women and girls in the Union. In particular, the EU currently lacks a binding instrument to protect women and girls from violence. Violence against women and girls is alarmingly prevalent in the EU, with one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence. Shockingly, domestic violence claims the lives of around 50 women every week. The scope of the problem also extends to the workplace, where 75% of women report experiencing sexual harassment. The digital world is not exempt either, with an estimated one in two young women experiencing gender-based cyber violence (European Women's Lobby, 2022).

The Commission's assessment of the criminalisation of gender-based violence against women in European States, including technology-facilitated violence, clearly underlines the urgent need to address this issue at the European level. The proposal serves as a firm call to end these appalling crimes within the Union and emphasises the need for immediate action.

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Chapter 5: European Women's Lobby

The EWL was selected as the leading actor in this case study due to its significant presence and influence in Brussels. As an umbrella lobby organisation, the EWL represents over 2000 European organisations at the EU level, aiming to achieve equality between women and men in all aspects of life. Over the past three decades, the EWL has driven transformative change for women's rights and gender equality, successfully translating feminist theories into practical action through their expertise and feminist analysis (Andrasek, Staznik, Baselovic, Paradiso, & Vardarmatou 2022).

Furthermore, the European Women's Lobby has made significant progress in combating violence against women and promoting gender equality. It has successfully lobbied 13 more EU Member States to sign, ratify and implement the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women. In addition, the EWL Observatory on Violence against Women and Girls has conducted and published a report on implementing the Istanbul Convention in Europe. The Observatory serves to identify emerging violence trends at national, European, and global levels and facilitates the. Comparison of data across the EU. It operates as a resource centre for comparative research, enabling the exchange of ideas, best practices, and collaboration among women active in the field. This structural and power analysis of women's rights issues provides a solid foundation for their work, making the EWL an essential actor for the examination.

The focus of the European Women's Lobby in the policy area of gender equality policy and legislation is the monitoring and evaluation of the adoption of new or amendments to existing EU gender equality policies and directives. A comparison was conducted between the proposed amendments and the European Parliament's recent proposal draft. This comparison aimed to evaluate the extent to which demands from the EWL were acknowledged and implemented into the Proposal.

5.1 EWL: Violence Against Women:

The European Women's Lobby's analysis of the Commission's proposal provides a comprehensive assessment of the proposal's ability to recognise and address VAW issues within the broader framework of gender equality. This analysis focuses on the power of the Commission's proposal to address VAW in its various dimensions. A vital concern of the European Women's Lobby is the

lack of provisions for criminal offences related to VAW and the insufficient coverage of the diverse range of violence, particularly concerning sexual exploitation.

The European Women's Lobby's analysis is aptly illustrated by the following excerpts, which show these concerns:

One such excerpt highlights the lack of a clear definition of 'sexual exploitation of women' in Article 4, even though this form of violence is prominently identified in Eurocrime and serves as the legal basis for the proposal. The European Women's Lobby expresses its unease at this omission. It proposes a comprehensive definition in line with the purpose of sexual exploitation used in the European Commission's Explanatory Memorandum to the Directive. This definition is inspired by the precedent set by Directive 11/93/EU, which refers to the sexual exploitation of children and child abuse (European Women's Lobby 2022, p. 9).

In addition, the analysis highlights another crucial aspect not addressed by the current European Commission proposal - the commercialisation of women's bodies for financial or other gain. This exploitation occurs through third parties' involvement in activities such as prostitution, procuring, sexual servitude and various other sexual or reproductive services. The European Women's Lobby raises this point as an essential consideration omitted from the existing proposal and underlines its importance in the overall discourse on VAW (European Women's Lobby 2022, p. 16).

In conclusion, the European Women's Lobby's analysis of the Commission's proposal on VAW emphasises the overarching theme of gender equality and the need for comprehensive approaches to address different forms of violence. The study highlights the lack of specific provisions and definitions. It illustrates these concerns with excerpts highlighting the nuances of the proposal's content and its potential impact on women's rights and safety.

The European Women's Lobby has a proactive and consistent communication approach that effectively influences and advocates for the European Commission and the wider public. Their comprehensive strategy includes different aspects that reflect their commitment to combatting VAWG, which is the core mission.

The EWL consistently urges the European Union to ratify the Convention, which it has done for eight years. This ongoing effort reflects the EWL's steadfast conviction that the Convention is the

most comprehensive means of tackling the complicated problem of VAWG. By continuously stressing the importance of the Convention, the EWL effectively conveys the urgent requirement for its endorsement, appealing to officials within the Commission and disseminating its message to a broader public.

“For the last eight years, women rights organisations and other human rights CSOs have been working together relentlessly asking for the EU to ratify the Convention: the most comprehensive tool that we all have to date to address the phenomenon adequately” (European Women Lobby 2023 p. 1).

The supplied quotation summarises this unwavering appeal and exhibits the combined dedication of women's rights groups and civil society organisations in promoting this objective (European Women Lobby 2023, p. 1).

Furthermore, the EWL actively engages with the European Commission through clear and well-informed communication strategies. The EWL compiles a detailed document with its views and recommendations ahead of the European Commission's proposal. This proactive effort aims to present the EWL's perspective in an easily understandable way, encouraging the European Commission to propose practical solutions for tackling VAWG. This plan shows that EWL is committed to communicating well with decision-makers and shaping policies by contributing knowledge and opinions during policy development.

The EWL's communication efforts aim to influence policy development and implementation within the Commission. Through intelligent campaigning, the EWL uses its expertise and initiatives to promote solid legal measures against VAWG in the EU. This shows a strategic coherence between communication and practical objectives, emphasising the EWL's determination to convey its message effectively and use its power to achieve real progress.

In brief, the EWL uses a focused and persistent communication strategy to promote the ratification of the Convention while actively working with the European Commission. By advocating consistently, producing detailed policy papers, and proactively engaging, the EWL communicates its central message, influences policy agendas, and contributes significantly to the ongoing struggle against VAWG.

During the investigation into the EWL's work with Parliament, a clear and enthusiastic strategy emerges that aligns with the EWL's fundamental aim to champion gender equality and confront VAW. The EWL uses advocacy, collaboration and articulation in a purposeful way to navigate the parliamentary landscape and achieve the objective of shaping agendas and driving policy outcomes that align with its mission.

Central to the EWL's plan is its active and strategic cooperation with MEPs and other relevant parties. This varied engagement is essential for creating alliances, enhancing the EWL's influence, and cultivating partnerships to support the successful implementation of policies tackling VAW. By collaborating with MEPs committed as rapporteurs, the EWL guarantees its message is heard at critical moments. The EWL has praised and commended political leaders and influential figures such as the EU Commissioner for Equality and the President of the European Commission. This shows collaboration and shared goals (European Women Lobby 2023 p.1).

One of their significant achievements was the successful effort to combat VAW, a historic accomplishment of these partnerships. By honouring the two MEPs, who acted as rapporteurs for different committees, the EWL recognises these individuals' vital role in advancing their mission. This recognition highlights the EWL's proactive stance in standing with parliamentarians who support their cause.

“Thank you to all involved, to the partners in the European Coalition to end violence against women and particularly to the political leaders. We congratulate the two rapporteurs, **MEP Arba Kokalari** (Sweden, EPP, FEMM Committee) and **MEP Łukasz Kohut** (Poland, S&D, LIBE Committee), on this historical achievement. The EWL also congratulates **EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli** and **President Ursula von der Leyen...**” (European Women Lobby 2023 p.1)

The EWL's work is not just a matter of congratulations. The organisation takes a vital role by urging leaders, particularly at a national level, to demonstrate bravery and put in place measures to tackle VAW. This proactive call to action mirrors the EWL's dedication to pushing for change across various levels of governance. Their focus on a solid overall agreement regarding the suggested Law on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence highlights their belief in the relationship between instruments such as the Istanbul Convention. This Convention, which aims

to eliminate violence against women, is seen as an additional tool that, combined with the previously mentioned directive, can help to ultimately put a stop to violence against women and girls throughout Europe (European Women's Lobby 2023 p.1).

The EWL has shown strategic determination, cooperation, and advocacy throughout their engagement with Parliament. They express appreciation, acknowledge efforts, and actively call for action. This aligns them with decision-makers, strongly impacts policy agendas, and facilitates the implementation of measures to combat VAW. This approach shows that the EWL is firmly dedicated to creating a fairer and safer society for women.

5.2 Comparison of Proposed Amendments:

The European Parliament resolution reinforces and builds upon the original European Commission proposal in alignment with many European Women's Lobby recommendations. The amendments encompass a wide array of measures aimed at addressing VAWG.

In their proposal, the European Women's Lobby explicitly addresses defining specific VAW forms. Based on Article 83.1 TFEU, "the current Directive proposes to fill in a crucial gap in criminal EU legislation by proposing definitions of specific forms of sexual exploitation of women and online violence, using as a legal basis reference to "trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children" and "computer crimes" in the list of Eurocrimes in Article 83.1 TFEU". While EU directives cover the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children,³ the sexual exploitation of women is not covered efficiently. Therefore, the European Women's Lobby proposed amendments to Article 4 of the directive, adding to the list of definitions and further calling on the Parliament to do the same.

"We call on the European Parliament and the European Council to endorse the proposed legal basis and to adopt a comprehensive definition of sexual exploitation of women and online violence against women that allows for the addressing the structural dimension of these human rights violations (see our proposals to strengthen these aspects in Chapter II.2 of this paper)." (European Women's Lobby 2022)

³ EU anti-trafficking Directive 11/36/EU) and sexual exploitation of children (Directive 2011/93/EU)

The resolution of the Parliament recognises the European Women's Lobby's contribution to providing comprehensive definitions for particular types of sexual exploitation of women, such as rape, sexual violence, workplace sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, forced sterilisation, and forced marriage. Furthermore, it strengthens the protection and support provided to victims, emphasising prevention and early intervention. This can be seen in Figure 1 through the EWL's amendments side by side with the European Parliaments, colour-coded in bold purple.

Figure 1. EWL and Parliament definition amendments

EWL Proposed Amendments	European Parliament Amendments
<p>Ad hoc Article 6 - Sexual Harassment</p> <p>NEW</p> <p>Member States shall ensure that the following intentional forms of conduct are punishable as criminal offences:</p> <p>(a) any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.</p>	<p><i>Article 4 – paragraph 1 – point g</i></p> <p>(g) “sexual harassment <i>in the world of work</i>” means any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where it occurs in the course of, linked with, or arising in matters of employment, occupation, self-employment, <i>informal and undocumented work, job seeking or training, including in public and private work spaces, places where the worker is paid, takes a rest, break or a meal, or uses sanitary, washing or changing facilities, during work-related trips, travel, training, events or social activities, through work-related communications, including those enabled by information and communication technologies, in employer-provided accommodation, or when commuting to and from work,</i> with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of the victim, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, <i>including where a person’s rejection of, or submission to, such conduct is used explicitly or implicitly as a basis for job-related decisions;</i>”</p>
<p>Article 5 – Sexual violence, including rape and stealthing</p> <p>Proposed amendment</p> <p>1. Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conduct is punishable as the criminal offence of <i>sexual violence</i>:</p>	<p><i>Article 5a Sexual assault</i></p> <p>1. Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conduct is punishable as a criminal offence:</p>

<p>a) engaging in other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a person;</p> <p>b) causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person.</p> <p>2. Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conduct is punishable as the criminal offence of <i>rape</i>:</p> <p>c) engaging with a woman in any non-consensual act of vaginal, anal, or oral penetration of a sexual nature, with any bodily part or object; or</p> <p>(d) causing a woman to engage with another person in any non-consensual act of vaginal, anal, or oral penetration of a sexual nature, with any bodily part or object.</p> <p>3. Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conducts are punishable as the criminal offence of <i>stealthing</i>:</p> <p>a) intentionally and secretly ceasing to use any method of prophylaxis or reproductive control during a sexual act without the consent of the victim.</p> <p>42. Member States shall ensure that a non-consensual act is understood as an act performed without the woman's consent given voluntarily or where the woman is unable to form <i>or express</i> free will due <i>to her physical, mental or/and socioeconomic condition or due to an unequal balance of power</i>; thereby exploiting her incapacity to form or express a free will, such as in a state of fear, unconsciousness, intoxication, chemical submission, sleep, illness, bodily injury, disability, precarity or intimidation.</p>	<p>(a) engaging with a woman in any non-consensual act of a sexual nature, other than acts as referred to in Article 5(1), point (a);</p> <p>(b) causing a woman to engage with another person in any non-consensual act of a sexual nature, other than acts as referred to in Article 5(1), point (b);</p> <p><i>2. Member States shall ensure that a non-consensual act is understood as an act which is performed without the woman's consent given voluntarily or where the woman is unable to form free will due to her physical or mental condition, and her incapacity to form free will is exploited, such as being in a state of fear, intimidation, unconsciousness, intoxication, sleep, illness, bodily injury or disability or being in an otherwise particularly vulnerable situation;</i></p> <p><i>3. Consent can be withdrawn at any moment during the act. The absence of consent cannot be refuted by the woman's silence, verbal or physical non-resistance or past sexual conduct or existing or past relationship with the offender, including marital or any other partnership status. Consent shall be given voluntarily as the result of free will and it shall be assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances.</i></p>
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<p>5. Consent can be withdrawn at any moment during the act. The absence of consent cannot be refuted exclusively by the woman’s silence, verbal <i>or physical non-resistance or past sexual conduct or relationship with the perpetrator. Consent is needed for each separate sexual act.</i></p> <p>6. <i>The provisions of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 apply to acts committed against former or current spouses or partners as recognised by internal law.</i></p>	
<p>Article 76 - Female genital mutilation</p> <p>Proposed amendment</p> <p><i>(b) coercing a woman or a girl to undergo any of the acts referred to in point (a) and any type of dangerous elective surgery such as aesthetic vaginoplasties (“designer vaginas”) or labiaplasties, “virginity repair” surgery known as hymenoplasty, vaginal dilations, hormone treatment, etc.</i></p> <p>(c) coercing or procuring a woman or a girl to undergo any of the acts referred to in point (a) and (b).</p>	<p><i>Article 6a Intersex genital mutilation</i></p> <p><i>Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conduct is punishable as a criminal offence:</i></p> <p><i>(a) performing any medically unnecessary surgical or medical procedure or hormonal treatment on the sex characteristics of a healthy woman or child born with variations of sex characteristics, without obtaining prior and informed consent and without the woman or child understanding the procedure or treatment, with the purpose or effect of altering those sex characteristics to align them with sex characteristics considered typically female or male;</i></p> <p><i>(b) coercing a healthy woman or child to undergo a procedure or treatment as referred to in point (a).</i></p>

	<p><i>2. Member States shall ensure that the prior and informed consent of a woman or child to undergo a procedure or treatment as referred to in paragraph 1 cannot be substituted by the consent of the woman or child's legal guardian.</i></p>
<p>Ad hoc article -10- Forced sterilisation</p> <p>NEW</p> <p><i>1. Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conduct is punishable as a criminal offence:</i></p> <p><i>performing surgery which has the purpose or effect of terminating a woman's capacity to naturally reproduce without her prior and informed consent or understanding of the procedure.</i></p> <p><i>2. Member States shall ensure that the prior and informed consent of the woman to undergo surgery as referred to in Paragraph 1 cannot be replaced by the consent of a parent, legal guardian or court decision</i></p>	<p>Article 6b Forced sterilisation</p> <p><i>Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conduct is punishable as a criminal offence:</i></p> <p><i>(a) performing surgery which has the purpose or effect of terminating a woman or child's ability to naturally reproduce without obtaining prior and informed consent and without the woman or child understanding the procedure, including as a prerequisite for other medical procedures;</i></p> <p><i>(b) coercing or procuring a woman or a child to undergo the surgery referred to in point (a).</i></p> <p><i>2. Member States shall ensure that the prior and informed consent of a woman or child to undergo the procedure referred to in paragraph 1, point (a), cannot be substituted by the consent of the woman or child's legal guardian.</i></p>
<p>Ad hoc article 8- Forced marriage</p> <p>NEW</p>	<p>Article 6c Forced marriage</p>

<p><i>Member States shall ensure that the following intentional forms of conduct are punishable as criminal offences:</i></p> <p><i>a) forcing an adult or a child to enter into marriage.</i></p> <p><i>b) intentional conduct of luring an adult or a child to the territory of a member State other than the one she or he resides in with the purpose of forcing this adult or child to enter into a marriage.</i></p>	<p><i>Member States shall ensure that the following intentional conduct is punishable as a criminal offence:</i></p> <p><i>(a) forcing a woman or a child to enter into a marriage;</i></p> <p><i>(b) luring a woman or child to the territory of a country other than the one in which the woman or child resides in order to force that person to enter into a marriage.</i></p>
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Moreover, the definition of freely given consent has been improved to align with the language used in the Istanbul Convention. The resolution recognises that women may be limited in their ability to give consent due to fear, intimidation, or vulnerable circumstances. It specifically addresses the issues of marital rape and rape in non-marital partnerships.

The resolution adopted by the European Parliament demonstrates a recognition of the invaluable contributions made by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) in shaping comprehensive definitions for specific forms of sexual exploitation targeting women. These definitions include rape, sexual violence, workplace sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, forced sterilisation, and forced marriage. This acknowledgement underscores the EWL's role in advancing precise and inclusive language to encapsulate these deeply concerning matters, effectively highlighting the severity of these violations within the realm of gender equality and women's rights.

Within this resolution, an emphasis on fortifying the protection and support mechanisms provided to victims takes centre stage, focusing on the importance of prevention and early intervention strategies. This reflects a commitment to proactively address the aftermath of such violations and curtail their occurrence through strategic measures and proactive support.

The EWL notes a significant difference in the existing EU laws that see harassment and sexual harassment as discrete issues rather than human rights violations. Considering the fact-based evidence that the current EU laws have been ineffective in dealing with these problems, it becomes apparent that we need more vital legal actions that can more comprehensively address this issue. The EWL and the European Parliament propose expanding the conceptual framework beyond the

workplace, in line with the comprehensive approach supported by the Istanbul Convention. Several countries have already gone beyond the current legal framework of the EU by forbidding harassment and sexual harassment in all areas of life. This difference indicates that these countries agree that the current EU system is insufficient in dealing with these concerns.

The EWL is urging the extension of these rules to cover all areas of life, including work, which is already regulated by directives like Recast Directive 2006/54/EC, Directive 2004/113/EC, and Directive 2010/41/EU. These directives target equal employment opportunities for men and women, access to goods and services, and self-employment. By suggesting the use of rules in these fields, EWL's revisions aim to establish a more coherent and extensive legal basis that tackles sexual harassment and exploitation in different situations.

In brief, the resolution from the Parliament recognises the EWL's input. It prioritises strong protection for victims, preventative steps, and extended legal provisions to tackle sexual exploitation and harassment using an all-inclusive and effective process. The amendments recognise the requirement for more comprehensive legal actions and utilise current guidelines to establish a more integrated and comprehensive legal structure.

Finally, the resolution addresses EWL's desire for an EU coordinator to conclude violence against women. It guarantees a harmonised and gender-sensitive strategy to implement the Directive and Istanbul Convention at the EU level. It expands data collection mechanisms, including the requirement for regular surveys and prevention measures compared to the original Commission proposal.

5.2 Femicide: an acknowledged phenomena?

The EWL is committed to preventing and fighting femicide in the EU. The EWL takes an active role through its Observatory on Violence against Women, underscoring its dedication to addressing these vital concerns. While the suggested changes do not directly mention femicide, a hidden tone communicates the EWL's support for preventing and fighting it. The EWL's efforts gain an implicit spotlight because of its focus on conforming with the standards set out in the Istanbul Convention, a noteworthy law that unambiguously confronts femicide.

Figure 2. The reinforcement of penalties and aggravating factors

EWL Proposed Amendments	European Parliament Amendments
<p data-bbox="203 329 683 359">Article 13 20 - Aggravating circumstances</p> <p data-bbox="203 407 451 436">Proposed amendment</p> <p data-bbox="203 558 683 678"><i>(p) the offence followed previous threats made to the victim, their loved ones or relatives ;</i></p> <p data-bbox="203 800 683 877"><i>(q) the offence generated a profit or had the intention of creating a profit.</i></p>	<p data-bbox="711 329 1263 359">Article 13 – paragraph 1 – point ob, oc, od (new)</p> <p data-bbox="711 407 850 436">Amendment</p> <p data-bbox="711 480 1385 558"><i>(ob) the offence brought profit or gain or had the intention of bringing profit or gain;</i></p> <p data-bbox="711 680 1385 758"><i>(oc) preserve or restore the so-called “honour” of a person, a family, a community or another similar group;</i></p> <p data-bbox="711 879 1385 1041"><i>(od) the intention of the crime was to punish victims for their sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity, sex characteristics, skin colour, religion, social origin or political beliefs.</i></p>

In Figure 2, the suggested changes make penalties and aggravating factors more vital, by the Commission's recommendation.

The changes cover different levels of wrongdoing, including abuse, barbaric and disgraceful actions, and crimes motivated by financial gain or misguided beliefs surrounding "honour". This increase demonstrates our dedication to preventing actions that harm individuals and our cultural principles. It's important to note that crimes committed against public officials, journalists, and human rights defenders are seen as severe offences and treated as such. This indicates a commitment to protecting those individuals who play vital roles in the overall welfare of society.

Under these amendments, the notion of "honour"-driven crimes is addressed. Based on the definitions of femicide, honour-related killings or crimes constitute such. Signs of the EWL's advocating for the prevention and combating of femicide in the EU are visible in the work of the Observatory on violence against women. When looking at amendments for the proposal, it is not explicitly stated. However, the EWL emphasises establishing the guidelines of the Istanbul Convention, a piece of legislation that expressly covers femicide. By integrating this notion of "honour"-driven crimes, the legal framework addresses crimes motivated by misguided perceptions of preserving family honour. This represents a critical stride toward acknowledging and countering a deeply entrenched issue.

The EWL is committed to preventing and fighting femicide in the EU. The EWL takes an active role through its Observatory on Violence against Women, underscoring its dedication to addressing these vital concerns. While the suggested changes do not directly mention femicide, a hidden tone communicates the EWL's support for preventing and fighting it. The EWL's efforts gain an implicit spotlight because of its focus on conforming with the standards set out in the Istanbul Convention, a noteworthy law that unambiguously confronts femicide.

Furthermore, the EWL's analysis stresses the need to incorporate all types of VAWG in the Directive to enhance its comprehensiveness. This move will improve the situation of women and girls across the EU. The expanded scope covers femicide, physical violence, psychological abuse, and stalking, including cyberstalking, as the current Directive does. The comprehensive approach of addressing all aspects of VAWG in the Directive could enable a more holistic strategy.

The comparison of the EWL's proposed amendments and the European Parliament shows that. The EWL's analysis of the Commission's proposal provides a comprehensive assessment of the proposal's ability to recognise and address VAW issues within the broader framework of gender equality. This analysis focuses on the power of the Commission's proposal to effectively address VAW in its various dimensions. A vital concern of the EWL is the lack of provisions for criminal offences related to VAW and the insufficient coverage of the diverse range of violence, particularly sexual exploitation.

One such excerpt highlights the lack of a clear definition of 'sexual exploitation of women' in Article 4, even though this form of violence is prominently identified in Eurocrime and serves as the legal basis for the proposal. The EWL expresses its unease at this omission and proposes a comprehensive definition in line with the definition of sexual exploitation used in the European Commission's Explanatory Memorandum to the Directive. This definition is inspired by the precedent set by Directive 11/93/EU, which refers to the sexual exploitation of children and child abuse (European Women's Lobby 2022, p. 9).

In addition, the analysis highlights another crucial aspect not addressed by the current European Commission proposal - the commercialisation of women's bodies for financial or other gain. This exploitation occurs through third parties' involvement in activities such as prostitution, procuring, sexual servitude and various other sexual or reproductive services. The EWL raises this point as an essential consideration omitted from the existing proposal and underlines its importance in the overall discourse on VAW (European Women's Lobby 2022, p. 16).

In conclusion, the European Women's Lobby's analysis of the Commission's proposal on VAW emphasises the overarching theme of gender equality and the need for comprehensive approaches to address different forms of violence. The study highlights the lack of specific provisions and definitions. It illustrates these concerns with excerpts highlighting the nuances of the proposal's content and its potential impact on women's rights and safety.

The EWL has a proactive and consistent communication approach that effectively influences and advocates for the European Commission and the wider public. Their comprehensive strategy includes different aspects that reflect their commitment to combatting VAWG, which is the core mission.

The EWL consistently urges the European Union to ratify the Convention, which it has done for eight years. This ongoing effort reflects the EWL's steadfast conviction that the Convention is the most comprehensive means of tackling the complicated problem of VAWG. By continuously stressing the importance of the Convention, the EWL effectively conveys the urgent requirement for its endorsement, appealing to officials within the Commission and disseminating its message to a broader public.

“For the last eight years, women rights organisations and other human rights CSOs have been working together relentlessly asking for the EU to ratify the Convention: the most comprehensive tool that we all have to date to address the phenomenon adequately” (European Women Lobby 2023 p. 1).

The supplied quotation summarises this unwavering appeal and exhibits the combined dedication of women's rights groups and civil society organisations in promoting this objective (European Women Lobby 2023, p. 1).

Furthermore, the EWL actively engages with the European Commission through clear and well-informed communication strategies. The EWL compiles a detailed document with its views and recommendations ahead of the European Commission's proposal. This proactive effort aims to present the EWL's perspective in an easily understandable way, encouraging the European Commission to propose practical solutions for tackling VAWG. This plan shows that EWL is committed to communicating well with decision-makers and shaping policies by contributing knowledge and opinions during policy development.

The EWL's communication efforts aim to influence policy development and implementation within the Commission. Through intelligent campaigning, the EWL uses its expertise and initiatives to promote solid legal measures against VAWG in the EU. This shows a strategic coherence between communication and practical objectives, emphasising the EWL's determination to convey its message effectively and use its power to achieve real progress.

In brief, the EWL uses a focused and persistent communication strategy to promote the ratification of the Convention while actively working with the European Commission. By advocating consistently, producing detailed policy papers, and proactively engaging, the EWL communicates

its central message, influences policy agendas, and contributes significantly to the ongoing struggle against VAWG.

During the investigation into the EWL's work with Parliament, a clear and enthusiastic strategy emerges that aligns with the EWL's fundamental aim to champion gender equality and confront VAW. The EWL uses advocacy, collaboration and articulation in a purposeful way to navigate the parliamentary landscape and achieve the ultimate aim of shaping agendas and driving policy outcomes that align with its mission.

Central to the EWL's plan is its active and strategic cooperation with MEPs and other relevant parties. This varied engagement is essential for creating alliances, enhancing the EWL's influence, and cultivating partnerships to support the successful implementation of policies tackling VAW. By collaborating with MEPs committed as rapporteurs, the EWL guarantees its message is heard at critical moments. The EWL has praised and commended political leaders and influential figures such as the EU Commissioner for Equality and the President of the European Commission. This shows collaboration and shared goals (European Women Lobby 2023 p.1).

One of their significant achievements was the successful effort to combat VAW, a historic accomplishment of these partnerships. By honouring the two MEPs, who acted as rapporteurs for different committees, the EWL recognises these individuals' vital role in advancing their mission. This recognition highlights the EWL's proactive stance in standing with parliamentarians who support their cause.

“Thank you to all involved, to the partners in the European Coalition to end violence against women and particularly to the political leaders. We congratulate the two rapporteurs, **MEP Arba Kokalari** (Sweden, EPP, FEMM Committee) and **MEP Łukasz Kohut** (Poland, S&D, LIBE Committee), on this historical achievement. The EWL also congratulates **EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli** and **President Ursula von der Leyen...**” (European Women Lobby 2023 p.1)

The EWL's work is not just a matter of congratulations. The organisation takes a vital role by urging leaders, particularly at a national level, to demonstrate bravery and put in place measures

to tackle VAW. This proactive call to action mirrors the EWL's dedication to pushing for change across various levels of governance. Their focus on a solid overall agreement regarding the suggested Law on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence highlights their belief in the relationship between instruments such as the Istanbul Convention. This Convention, which aims to eliminate violence against women, is seen as an additional tool that, combined with the previously mentioned directive, can help to ultimately put a stop to violence against women and girls throughout Europe (European Women's Lobby 2023 p.1).

The EWL has shown strategic determination, cooperation, and advocacy throughout its engagement with Parliament. They express appreciation, acknowledge efforts, and actively call for action. This aligns them with decision-makers, strongly impacts policy agendas, and facilitates the implementation of measures to combat VAW. This approach shows that the EWL is firmly dedicated to creating a fairer and safer society for women.

The European Parliament resolution reinforces and builds upon the original European Commission proposal in alignment with many European Women's Lobby recommendations. The resolution encompasses a wide array of measures aimed at addressing VAWG.

In their proposal, the EWL explicitly addresses the issue of defining specific forms of VAW. Based on Article 83.1 TFEU, “the current Directive proposes to fill in a crucial gap in criminal EU legislation by proposing definitions of specific forms of sexual exploitation of women and online violence, using as a legal basis reference to “trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children” and “computer crimes” in the list of Eurocrimes in Article 83.1 TFEU”. While EU directives cover the trafficking and sexual exploitation of children, the sexual exploitation of women is not covered efficiently. The EWL, therefore, proposed amendments to Article 4 of the directive, adding to the list of definitions and further calling on the Parliament to do the same.

“We call on the European Parliament and the European Council to endorse the proposed legal basis and to adopt a comprehensive definition of sexual exploitation of women and online violence against women that allows for the addressing the structural dimension of these human rights violations (see our proposals to strengthen these aspects in Chapter II.2 of this paper).”

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis investigates whether the Commission and the European Parliament acknowledge and address the issues and preferences presented by the EWL. Additionally, it assesses whether the EWL impacts gender equality policy formulation in the EU. Furthermore, this research examines any concessions made by the EWL to attain influence.

Overall, this study investigates how the EWL mediates with the Commission and Parliament on the specific issues of VAW and femicide. The study also analyses whether this interaction effectively advances women's interests within the EU's decision-making processes.

The potential for the EU to challenge and transform gender relations is more extensive than commonly believed.

The EU has played a progressive role in advancing gender equality across various policy domains beyond just the economic sphere. This study suggests that the EU has promoted gender equality by creating and sustaining a platform for women to pursue their social and political interests through funding, support and policy input. The EWL, the Commission and the Parliament maintain an institutional relationship serving as this platform. Additionally, the EU has integrated gender equality demands voiced by women's organized interests into its policies, explicitly combating VAW whilst extending funding to organisations operating beyond the EU's legal framework in areas relating to women's lives.

The EWL is notable as the foremost women's organisation at the EU level, which effectively built and maintained a forum for promoting women's concerns in European politics.

Organisations like the EWL play a crucial role in policymaking processes, functioning as the primary representation of the EU institution. They give their input, validate policies, and bridge the divide between EU institutions and citizens, working as intermediaries for national-level organised interests.

Under the corporate theory, interest groups seeking influence must adhere to organisational requirements and maintain control over their members and their requests. An organisation must be representative and able to combine, articulate, and advocate the interests of its members to decision-making bodies. This entails dedicated resources and organisational structures, such as a

presence in all EU member states, mechanisms for transferring goods between national and EU levels, and the capacity to aggregate and articulate interests.

The EWL is well-equipped to meet these needs, with a secretariat based in Brussels, paid staff, a general assembly, national-level assemblies, procedures for proposing and adopting motions, and member organisations in EU member states. When a national coordinating women's organisation was absent, one was created to meet the EWL's requirements for national membership. This organisational structure allows various levels to exchange demands and interests. The EWL's detailed analysis, followed by non-stop advocating for desired changes to the proposal, led to noted proposed amendments by the European Parliament—a representation system of interests running parallel to those seen in Parliament and the Council.

The study has comprehensively investigated the research question, "To what extent does the European Women's Lobby influence the development and implementation of gender equality policies in the European Union?" by conducting a detailed analysis of the EWL's operations, involvements and dialogues with EU bodies. Throughout this investigation, it is apparent that the EWL performs a crucial role as an intermediary, proficiently conveying the demands of its constituents and promoting a dialogue between political authorities and the wider environment. As a means of transmitting requests and feedback, the EWL is both an input and output mechanism, influencing the discourse surrounding gender equality policies.

Furthermore, based on the findings of this thesis, the proposed hypothesis of *the European Women's Lobby functions as a gatekeeper in the EU's political environment, mediating between its organisation demands, EU decision-makers and the broader socio-political context, thereby contributing to the strengthening and legitimisation of current gender equality policies*, is shown to be true. The EWL's role as a gatekeeper is solidified through its channeling demands from its members while significantly strengthening the EU gender policies. The Parliament's inclusion of the EWL's amendment proposals provides a significant example of this.

In conclusion, this research has provided valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between the European Women's Lobby and EU gender equality policy. By demonstrating that EWL's activities conform to the framework proposed by Easton, this study has comprehensively explained the organisation's role as a catalyst for change. The efforts of the EWL not only improve the

formulation and implementation of gender equality policies within the EU but also strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of the EU's political system.

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