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Why have there been no Founding Mothers of Europe?

Dlaczego nie było Matek Założycielek Europy?

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Why have there been no Founding Mothers of Europe?

Women seem strangely absent in the process of European integration, or rather, in the dominant narratives that shape our understanding of how a united Europe was created. The historiography of European integration is populated by founding fathers, but there are hardly any founding mothers in sight. Drawing on the famous essay by feminist art historian Linda Nochlin (*Why have there been no great women artists?* 1971), this article makes a threefold contribution to the literature: first, it outlines the pitfalls of the feminist urge to '(re)discover' women; second, it investigates the 'founding fathers' as a social construct; and, finally, it highlights the key role of institutional opportunity structures for women's participation in politics.

Dlaczego nie było Matek Założycielek Europy?

Kobiety wydają się dziwnie nieobecne w procesie integracji europejskiej, albo raczej w dominujących narracjach kształtujących nasze rozumienie tego, w jaki sposób powstawała zjednoczona Europa. Historiografię integracji europejskiej zaludniają ojcowie założyciele, a jest niezwykle trudno trafić na matki założycielki. Niniejszy artykuł, inspirowany słynnym esejem feministycznej historyczki sztuki Lindy Nochlin (*Why have there been no great women artists?* 1971), stanowi wkład do literatury przedmiotu w trzech wymiarach: po pierwsze, wskazuje na pułapki feministycznego pędu do „odkrywania” kobiet; po drugie, analizuje „ojców założycieli” jako konstrukt społeczny; po trzecie, podkreśla kluczową rolę instytucjonalnych struktur szans dla udziału kobiet w polityce.

“Women have been strangely absent in the making of European integration” write Gabriele Abels and Heather MacRae in the recently published seminal *Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics*.¹ Or rather, one might argue, women have been strangely absent from the making of history and social memory, from the stories we tell about the past – about how Europe was created. In this sense, the question of why have there been no founding mothers of Europe becomes the question of why women are largely absent from the myths and narratives that we choose to construct with the aim of aggregating the community around the meanings and values of the united Europe. Over 20 years ago, Alan Milward stated that ‘the historiography of European integration is dominated by legends of great men’ who – for Europe’s supporters – ‘have become saints’² (in 2021, Pope Francis started the process that may lead to Robert Schuman’s beatification, by officially recognising his ‘heroic virtues’³). Core books on the history of European integration, although published as late as the 2000s, do not mention women. In 2002, Jerzy Łukaszewski (1924–2020), lawyer, diplomat and Rector of the College of Europe (1972–1990) published nine essays on Europe’s (male) founders, from Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi to Johan Beyen.⁴ In a book published in 2008, Sylvain Schirmann, former director of the Institute of Political Studies in Strasburg, analysed the early days of European integration, while telling the story of the ‘fathers of Europe’.⁵ Desmond Dinan’s key text on the origins and evolution of Europe (2nd edition published in 2014) features a chapter on the historiography

- 1 G. Abels, H. MacRae, *Whose story is it anyway? Studying European integration with gender lens*, in: *Routledge Handbook of Gender and EU Politics*, eds G. Abels, A. Krizsan, H. MacRae, A. van der Vleuten, Routledge, London–New York 2021, p. 1.
- 2 A. Milward, *The european rescue of the nation-state*, Routledge, London–New York 2000, p. 281.
- 3 BBC News, *Robert Schuman: Pope puts father of modern Europe on sainthood path* [online], 19 VI 2021, [access: 3 I 2022]: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57534918>>.
- 4 J. Łukaszewski, *Cel: Europa. Dziewięć esejów o budowniczych jedności europejskiej*, Noir sur Blanc, Warszawa 2002.
- 5 *Robert Schuman et les pères de l’Europe. Cultures politiques et années de formation*, Bruxelles, dir. S. Schirmann, PIE-Peter Lang, Publications de la Maison de Robert Schuman, Bruxelles 2008.

of European integration, where no woman is mentioned, while the book's index includes 165 men and only four women.⁶

Where are the women? If there were fathers, where are the mothers? Were there any mothers and, if so, why are they excluded from the official telling of the European Union's (EU) history? Two types of answers to such questions can be found in the literature. First, it is argued that there were no women, no founding mothers, and for good reason: in the 1950s and 1960s women were given very little space in the national political life of the six founding states. After all, it was only between 1944 and 1948 that France, Italy and Belgium granted full voting rights to women, including the right to stand for election. Thus, 'even if a few women can be identified in the shadows of the founders behind the European project, none of these, however, had a deciding role'.⁷ This only started to change in the late 1970s and early 1980s, albeit with severe limitations. Second, it is also argued in the literature that 'integration, as a purely male project, was not true of the 1950s and 1960s. Rather (...) contributions of women have been written out of the history of integration (...) downplayed or rendered invisible in most accounts, contributing to the dominant masculinity of the contemporary EU'.⁸ It is thus the mission of the gendered reading of the history of European integration to '(re)discover' the women who have contributed to the making of Europe.

In many ways, the above is a false dilemma. The problem is very usefully illuminated by the famous essay published in 1971 by the pioneering feminist art historian Linda Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?*, which constitutes an important source of inspiration for this article, extending far beyond the title. Nochlin's contribution is threefold. First, she questions the standard feminist strategy of 'digging up examples of worthy (...) women artists (...) to rehabilitate rather modest, if interesting and productive careers' that are 'insufficiently investigated or

6 D. Dinan, *Origins and evolution of the European Union*, 2nd edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014; cf. G. Abels, H. MacRae, *Whose story is it anyway...*

7 Y. Denechere, *The female actors of european construction*, *Encyclopedie d'histoire numerique de l'Europe* [online], published 22 VI 2020, [access: 20 I 2022]: <<https://ehne.fr/en/node/12182>>.

8 G. Abels, H. MacRae, *Whose story is it anyway...*, p. 2.

appreciated'.⁹ Second, she reflects on the social construction of who a 'great artist' is and how a 'great artist' is made. Third, and most importantly, she insists on the crucial role of the social structure and institutions, be they art academies, systems of patronage or mythologies of the divine creator, and thus stresses the institutional (public) rather than individual (private) pre-conditions for artistic achievement. Building on Nochlin's approach and translating her insights into the world of European politics, this article discusses the pitfalls of '(re)discovering' women, that is, complementing 'historical' heroes with 'herstorical' heroines and thus consolidating the myths about history being made by great individuals. It also investigates the 'founding fathers' as a social construct and its usages in both European and American history telling. Finally, the article highlights the crucial role of institutional opportunity structures: formal access to institutional politics, critical actors exploiting institutional opportunities and the availability of new democratic channels of influence.

Founding mothers and EU studies

The field of EU studies is seen by feminist scholars as dominated by 'male researchers and *malestream* analysis'.¹⁰ But there is also a tendency in feminist EU studies to focus on European gender equality policies and gender mainstreaming, rather than on integration processes. Feminist contributions to European integration theory are scarce.¹¹ More scholarly work has recently been done on gender, party politics and democracy in the European Parliament (EP)¹² and on theorising feminist foreign

- 9 L. Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women artists?*, ARTnews: 1971 [online] May 30, 2015, 2015 [access: 3 I 2022]: <<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/retrospective/why-have-there-been-no-great-women-artists-4201/>>.
- 10 R. Guerrina, T. Haastrup, K. Wright, A. Masselot, H. MacRae, R. Cavaghan, *Does European Union studies have a gender problem? Experiences from researching Brexit*, "International Feminist Journal of Politics" 2018, no. 20(2), pp. 254–255, DOI: 10.1080/14616742.2018.1457881.
- 11 A. Kronsell, *The power of EU masculinities: A feminist contribution to european integration theory*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" 2016, no. 54(1), pp. 104–120.
- 12 J. Kantola, L. Rolandsen Agustin, *Gendering the representative work of the European Parliament: a Political analysis of women MEPs' erceptions of gender equality in party groups*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" 2019, no. 57(4), pp. 768–786.

policy.¹³ In 2020, the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy issued a report, commissioned by the EP's Green/EFA (European Free Alliance) group, outlining the way forward for feminist foreign policy of the EU. In 2009–2019, two women had responsibility for EU foreign policy – as High Representatives of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy: Britain's Catherine Ashton and Italy's Federica Mogherini. While a task force on Women, Peace and Security was established in 2009 and the European External Action Service drafted a Gender Equal Opportunities Strategy in 2018, women remain underrepresented in EU foreign policy-making.¹⁴ Obviously, there is more to feminist foreign policy than just equal representation.¹⁵ But it is telling that adequate female representation in foreign affairs was still an issue in 2020, especially as many 'fathers of Europe', notably Robert Schuman, Paul-Henri Spaak or Johan Beyen, gained their recognition as foreign affairs ministers.

The EU's website seeks to do justice to women's historic role in the European construction. It features 20 'EU pioneers' (a genderless version of fathers and mothers) or 'the visionary leaders [who] inspired the Europe that we know today'.¹⁶ A quick glance at this European pantheon makes three things clear. First, the representation is unequal, as women account for only 35% of the pioneers. Second, whereas male leaders are recognised for their political accomplishments in the 1940s–1960s, female leaders mostly made their mark only from the late 1970s onwards. Finally, the majority of male pioneers were heads of state or government or foreign affairs ministers. Female pioneers were members of parliaments, national or European, and often their presidents (Italy's Nilde Iotti, France's Simone Veil and Nicole Fontaine), or ministers for social work (The Netherlands' Marga Klompé), health (Veil) and culture (Greece's Melina Mercouri), with

13 K. Aggestam et al., *Theorizing feminist foreign policy*, "International Relations" 2019, no. 33(1), pp. 23–39.

14 CFFP, *A feminist foreign policy for the European Union*, The Greens/ EFA [online] VI 2020, [access: 20 I 2022]: <<https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/report-feminist-foreign-policy-for-the-eu>>.

15 M. Kopka-Piątek, I. Reichardt, *Czy kobiety uratują świat? Feministyczna polityka zagraniczna*, Heinrich Boell Stiftung, Warszawa 2020.

16 European Union, *EU pioneers*, [online], [access: 20 I 2022]: <https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/history-eu/eu-pioneers_en>.

one exception being the Swedish foreign affairs minister Anna Lindh, whose time in office tellingly started in the late 1990s.

Whereas the canon of the founding fathers has been stable for years, the composition of the founding mothers' construct remains fluid. For instance, a 2019 exhibition by the City of Venice featured Simone Veil and Louise Weiss, as well as Éliane Vogel-Polsky (Belgian lawyer and 'mother of social Europe' who fought for equal pay rights), Sofia Corradi (Italian pedagogue and 'Mother Erasmus') or members of the German and Italian anti-fascist movements: Sophie Scholl, Ursula Hirschman or Ada Rossi.¹⁷ Vogel-Polsky was also chosen as the 2021/2022 promotion patron at the College of Europe, precisely in an effort to highlight the hidden stories of contributions to European integration. As stated by the College's Rector Federica Mogherini: 'my choice is probably a surprise to many, as it concerns a woman that is not very well known to the wider public (...) I am confident that this choice will contribute to bringing more attention to the many founding mothers of our Union'.¹⁸ Indeed, it is only very recently that scholarly interest in the founding mothers has manifested itself in the form of research projects. A notable example is one entitled *Yesterday's EU Founding Mothers for Today's Women* (2022–2023), carried out by Simona Guerra at the University of Surrey and funded by the EUI (European University Institute) Historical Archives, the College of Europe, the House of European History and the European Parliament Research Service.¹⁹

One swallow does not make a summer

According to Linda Nochlin, the so-called 'woman question' (why have there been no great women artists, or philosophers, or politicians) can be an intellectual instrument, probing the 'natural' assumptions of the white Western

17 Citta di Venezia, *Exhibition – The founding mothers and fathers of the European Union* [online], 2019 [access: 20 I 2020]: <<https://www.comune.venezia.it/en/content/exhibition-founding-mothers-and-fathers-european-union-2019>>.

18 College of Europe, *Eliane Vogel-Polsky chosen as "patronne de promotion" 2021/2022*, [online]. [access: 20 I 2022]: <<https://www.coleurope.eu/fr/news/eliane-vogel-polsky-chosen-patronne-de-promotion-2021/2022>>.

19 University of Surrey, *Research Projects: Yesterday's EU founding mothers for today's women*, [online] [access: 20 I 2020]: <<https://www.surrey.ac.uk/research-projects/yesterdays-eu-founding-mothers-todays-women#about>>.

male viewpoint, unconsciously accepted as THE viewpoint of an art historian (or political scientist). She points out that the feminist's first reaction is to attempt to answer the question as it is put, that is, to come up with examples of forgotten 'flower-painters or David-followers and make out a case for them' or demonstrate that 'Berthe Morisot was really less dependent upon Manet than one had been led to think'.²⁰ Whereas such attempts certainly add to our knowledge of women's achievements, they do not question the assumptions lying behind the question, but tacitly reinforce their negative implications. Nochlin is very clear about the fact that, indeed:

... there have been no supremely great women artists, as far as we know, although there have been many interesting and very good ones who remain insufficiently investigated or appreciated (...) there have been no women equivalents of Michelangelo or Rembrandt (...) any more than there are Black American equivalents for the same (...) the fault lies in our institutions and our education (...) the miracle is, in fact, that given the overwhelming odds against women, or blacks, that so many of both have managed to achieve so much sheer excellence, in those bailiwicks of white masculine prerogative like science, politics or the arts.²¹

If we dig deep enough, we may find one single mother of the European Communities. She was Marga Klompé (1912–1986), a Dutch teacher with a PhD in mathematics and physics, an active member of the resistance during World War II, a member of the Dutch parliament (*Tweede Kamer*) from 1948 and, in 1956, became the Netherlands' first female cabinet minister. As a member of parliament, she was one of the negotiators of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights.²² In 1952, she became the only female delegate to the Common Assembly of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) which consisted of 78 members delegated by the national parliaments of the six founding member states. She truly was the only woman of the ECSC: the first European executive, the High Authority, had nine members, and until its merger with the Commission in 1967, saw the appoint-

20 L. Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women...*

21 Ibidem.

22 European Commission, EU pioneers: Marga Klompé, [online] [access: 21 I 2022]: https://european-union.europa.eu/system/files/2021-06/eu-pioneers-marga-klompe_en.pdf>.

ment of 19 men, but no woman, to lead it. At the time, nobody imagined a female member of the High Authority, or a female Director-General who would manage the European coal and steel sectors, whose workforce was 95% male.²³ It was only in 1958, after Treaty of Rome was signed, that four more women joined the Parliamentary Assembly, including Germany's Maria Probst, who later became the first female vice-president of the Bundestag, and Käte Strobel, who left the Assembly in 1967 to become the German health minister. Until the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, there were only 31 women MEPs in total and most of them entered only in the mid-1970s.²⁴ In 1972, only five of the 142 members were women.

There were hardly any women in the Parliamentary Assembly as there were very few women who were members of the national parliaments of the founding member states. In the Netherlands, women accounted for 4% of the lower chamber in 1946, 8% in 1952 and slightly over 13% in 1977. The situation looked far gloomier in France and Italy. After initially encouraging post-war figures (female deputies accounted for 7% of the French National Assembly elected in 1946 and almost 8% of the Italian Chamber of Deputies elected in 1948), the representation of women dropped significantly and remained below 5% well into the 1970s. The numbers were even worse for the upper chambers: female senators in Italy exceeded the threshold of 5% only in 1983, whereas in France, women accounted for 1.4% of the Senate in 1971 and exceeded the 10% threshold only in 2001.²⁵

What about the other institutions of the European Communities/EU? It was only in 1989 that women became members of the European Commission (under the presidency of Jacques Delors): Christiane Scrivener of France, who became commissioner for taxes, and Vasso Papandreou of Greece, who became commissioner for employment, industrial relations

23 M. Carbonell, *The founding fathers of Europe and the ECSC mother*, "Digital Encyclopedia of European History", published 20/06/20, [access: 21 I 2022]: permalink: <<https://ehne.fr/en/node/12427>>.

24 European Parliament, *List of the women delegates before 1979*, European Parliamentary Research Service: Historical Archives [online] [access: 21 I 2022] <<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/women-before-1979.pdf>>.

25 Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Women in Parliaments 1945–1995. Worldwide Statistical Survey*, Geneva 1995, pp. 191–192, [access: 30 XII 2021]: <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/women45-95_en.pdf>; Senat, *Les femmes sénateurs depuis 1946*, [access: 30 XII 2021]: <<http://www.senat.fr/evenement/archives/D25/prop.html>>.

and social affairs.²⁶ As for the Court of Justice, female judges accounted for 13 out of 133 (less than 10%) nominations in the years 1953–2015. The first woman (from France) was appointed in 1981. However, all other appointments of female judges took place from 1999 onwards. Until 2015, only 11 of the 28 member states had appointed women.²⁷

Unsurprisingly, there were hardly any women on the Council, as very few women were cabinet ministers until the 1980s. In 1947, Germaine Poinso-Chapuis became the first full cabinet minister of France, responsible for health. She was followed only in 1974 by Simone Veil, who was also entrusted with the health portfolio (in the meantime, seven women were appointed as under-secretaries of state).²⁸ In the years 1957–1977, the Netherlands saw only one woman per cabinet as a full minister and that was Marga Klompé for most of the period.²⁹ The first woman to hold a ministerial position in Italy was Tina Anselmi, responsible for labour and social security in 1976–1978 and health in 1978–1979. Neither the Netherlands nor Italy have had a female prime minister.³⁰ Against this background, the United Kingdom (UK) constitutes an interesting case. In 1945–1983, women may have accounted for less than 5% of the House of Commons, yet in 1929 Margaret Bondfield had already become the UK's first female cabinet minister,³¹ while Margaret Thatcher became the leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and prime minister in 1979.

26 Y. Denechere, *The female actors of european construction...*

27 R. D. Gill, Ch. Jensen, *Where are the women? Legal traditions and descriptive representation on the European Court of Justice*, "Politics, Groups, and Identities" 2020, no. 1, p. 133, DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2018.1442726>.

28 C. Bard, *Les premières femmes au Gouvernement (France, 1936–1981)*, "Revue électronique du Centre d'histoire des Sciences Po" 2007, no. 1 (mai-juin), [online], [access: 24 I 2022]: <<http://www.histoire-politique.fr/documents/01/dossier/pdf/premiere-sFemmesAuGvt.pdf>>.

29 Rijksoverheid, *Kabinetten sinds 1945*, [online], [access: 24 I 2022]: <<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/regering/over-de-regering/kabinetten-sinds-1945>>.

30 Giorgia Meloni, the leader of the far-right Brothers of Italy, may become the first female prime minister of Italy as a result of parliamentary elections held on 25 September 2022.

31 Parliament.uk, *Women in the House of Commons*, House of Commons Information Office, Factsheet M4 Appendix C: Women MPs who have held Ministerial office, [online], [access: 24 I 2022]: <<https://www.parliament.uk/>>.

The (re-)making of the wise men making history

How is a great artist or a great politician made? Nochlin makes a point about the naïve, distorted and uncritical conception of a 'great artist' as 'one who has Genius', who has been 'intrinsic to a great deal of art-historical writing'.³² Stories that shape our understanding of great art rarely investigate the social conditions of artistic production, while typically stressing the 'apparently miraculous, non-determined and a-social nature of artistic achievement'.³³ Interestingly, it seems that equally distorted assumptions have shaped common perceptions of how the united Europe or the United States of America (USA) came about. Whereas the dominant historical accounts focus on 'high politics' and 'history-making events', such as treaty negotiations, more critical and dissident accounts have sought to investigate social groups, structures and institutions, power relations and the political work of social movements. Their goal was to deconstruct the myth of the 'founding fathers', a group of wise men who came up with a vision on how to raise Europe from the ashes of World War II.³⁴

The narrative about the founding fathers of Europe constitutes a direct reference and a purposeful analogy to the narrative about the founding fathers of the USA (notably George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison – the list is not definitive). The latter were described as 'the most prominent statesmen of America's Revolutionary generation, responsible for the successful war for colonial independence from Great Britain, the liberal ideas celebrated in the Declaration of Independence and the republican form of government defined in the United States Constitution'.³⁵ A more nuanced and socially-oriented view of the achievements and failures of the American 'founding fathers' was pioneered by Howard Zinn in his *People's History of the United States*,

32 L. Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women...*

33 *Ibidem*.

34 A. Milosevic, *Does Europe prefer her sons over daughters? Adding the gender perspective to ruropean memory*, [online], 2018, [access: 28 XII 2021]: <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2018/04/05/does-europe-prefer-her-sons-over-daughters-adding-the-gender-perspective-to-european-memory/>>.

35 J.J. Ellis, *Founding fathers*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 13 Nov. 2019, [access: 24 I 2022]: <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Founding-Fathers>>.

first published in 1980.³⁶ He reflected on how the founders successfully exploited and reproduced former colonial power relations to the benefit of the few (including themselves), while using native Americans, black slaves and the white underclass against each other, in order to curb their respective political and social claims. While no woman has been promoted to the ranks of the USA's founders, mainstream historians have nevertheless acknowledged an informal role of the wives of the founding fathers, notably Abigail Adams ('who is known for her sensitive, intelligent advice to her husband³⁷'), Dolly Madison or Martha Washington. The crucial role of women from the lower classes in the American revolution was neglected or misinterpreted in case they stepped out of their traditional roles.³⁸ Despite explicit claims voiced by the founding fathers' wives, women were not granted political representation. After the revolution, no state constitution gave voting rights to women, except for the constitution of New Jersey, but even there the rights were revoked as early as 1807.³⁹ Hardly surprising, given that Thomas Jefferson, a founding father and the third US president (1801–1809), noted in a letter to Anne Bingham: 'Our good ladies, I trust, have been too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics. They have the good sense to value domestic happiness above all other, and the art to cultivate it beyond all others.'⁴⁰

Thus, a way to narrate the participation of women in the creation of the USA in the late 18th century was to highlight a specific 'womanly' role of the founding fathers' wives, their loving support and discreet advice to the leaders. In 20th-century Europe, women have become more autonomous actors, but their role is still 'different'. Women gained recognition for their journalistic work, pacifist (Bertha von Suttner, Louise Weiss) or

36 H. Zinn, *A people's history of the United States*, Harper–Row, New York 1980.

37 Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., Consider the import of America's founders George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abigail Adams, Video Transcript, [access: 24 I 2022]: <<https://www.britannica.com/video/172150/overview-Founding-Fathers>>.

38 H. Zinn, *Ludowa historia Stanów Zjednoczonych. Od 1492 roku do dziś*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warsaw 2016, p. 159.

39 Ibidem, p. 160.

40 'From Thomas Jefferson to Anne Willing Bingham, 11 May 1788', *Founders Online*, National Archives, [online], [access: 24 I 2022]: <<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-13-02-0076>>.

anti-fascist activism (Ursula Hirschmann), although often in the shadow of their husbands (Hirschmann was married first to Eugenio Colorni and then to Altiero Spinelli, co-authors of the Ventotene Manifesto). Even Simone Veil was well aware of the symbolic resource that she was, as she described the reasons behind her nomination as EP president in 1979. French president Valéry Giscard-d'Estaing 'loved symbols that captured the imagination: the French-German reunification; definitely turning the page of the world wars ; a deported Jew becoming the first female president of the new EP; this, he thought, was the future.'⁴¹

Yet, the way forward should not be to reproduce the myths about history being made by great individuals, while complementing 'historical' heroes with 'herstorical' heroines. In fact, feminist scholars are cautious when speaking about founding mothers.⁴² The real structural challenge in narrating European integration is to shift the focus from 'history-making events', populated by heads of state or government or top diplomats, who, even today, are mostly men. United Europe was not made by a few visionaries who brilliantly championed supranational construction as opposed to a more traditional confederal project. Such an understanding overlooks the huge political work, carried out behind the scenes and featuring coalitional pressure, issue linkages and intense lobbying by multiple actors involved at different levels of the political process. A good example is the French ratification of the ECSC and EEC (European Economic Community) treaties and the non-ratification of the EDC (European Defence Community) treaty, where, in all three cases, major scepticism reigned over the supranational vision promoted by Robert Schuman or Jean Monnet.⁴³ A shift away from 'high politics' also allows appreciation of the socially-oriented milestones of the European integration processes. Important political battles for equal pay or transnational higher education were fought, not only by politicians, but also by social and political activists, lawyers or academics, all making a profound impact on the lives of Europeans.

41 S. Veil, *Une Vie*, Editions Stock, 2007, p.181 [translated from French by the author].

42 G. Abels, H. MacRae, *Whose story is it anyway...*

43 Cf. C. Parsons, *Showing ideas as causes: The origins of the European Union*, "International Organization" 2002, no. 56(1), p. 48, DOI:10.1162/002081802753485133.

It's the institutions, stupid!

In her essay, Nochlin insisted that:

(...) art was not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, but rather (...) occurred in a social situation, were integral elements of this social structure, and were mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions (...) the answer to why there have been no great women artists lies (...) in the nature of given social institutions and what they forbid or encourage in various classes or groups of individuals⁴⁴

Women were not allowed to draw nudes or enter art academies, whereas fees for the few private schools that did accept them were higher for women than for men.⁴⁵ The image of a 'lady painter', constructed by etiquette handbooks and literature, favoured a modest and self-demeaning level of amateurism as a 'suitable accomplishment' for a well-brought up young woman ('painting is quiet and disturbs no-one'⁴⁶), who, anyway, was mostly interested in domestic duties. As to the rare exceptions who did achieve artistic grandeur, such as the 19th-century painter Rosa Bonheur, they usually had artist fathers, who gave them unusual encouragement, and they never married.⁴⁷

Formal access to institutional politics, that is, the right to vote and stand for election, was a necessary yet not a sufficient condition for women to enter politics and office. How was it possible for women to go into politics? The collapse of the political order, the experience of war, where traditional gender roles were suspended for the greater cause, facilitated the political expression of women.⁴⁸ This was manifested in relatively high numbers of female resistance members seeking to remain active in the public space and getting elected to the immediate post-war legislatures of the founding member states. Once the 'nor-

44 L. Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women...*

45 S. Zientek, *Polki na Montparnassie*, Wydawnictwo Agora, Warszawa 2021.

46 L. Nochlin, *Why have there been no great women...*

47 Ibidem.

48 W. Guéraiche, *Les Femmes et la République. Essai sur la répartition du pouvoir de 1943 à 1979*, L'Atelier, Paris 1999.

mal' was re-established in the early 1950s, this window of opportunity closed for many women, whereas others had to wait until the late 1970s to play a significant role. This was the case of Nilde Iotti from the Italian Communist Party, who served as President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 1979 to 1992. Another member of the Italian resistance movement, Tina Anselmi, was deputy leader of the Christian Democratic Party from 1968, but became the first female minister in Italy only in 1976. In France, women accounted for 1.3% of the National Assembly in 1958 and 1.7% in 1968, down from 7% in 1946. It was not only about getting elected, but, rather, about standing for election: women accounted for only 2.3% and 3.3% of candidates in the national parliamentary elections in France in 1958 and 1968, respectively. Female candidate numbers surged only in 1978, with women accounting for 16.3% of candidates, albeit only 4% of elected deputies. This has changed incrementally until the history-making figures of 2017, when women accounted for 42.4% of candidates and 38.8% of elected deputies.⁴⁹

When the first women were appointed ministers, they all received 'womanly' portfolios: social policies, education or health. In the 1930s' leftist cabinet of Leon Blum, Irène Joliot-Curie had to win a Nobel Prize in chemistry before earning her nomination as undersecretary of state for a 'manly' area of research. Another career path was through family ties and influence. Susanna Agnelli, an MP since 1976 and Italy's first female foreign affairs minister (1995–1996), was the granddaughter of Giovanni Agnelli, the founder of the Fiat empire.⁵⁰ A career as a state official was no obvious choice for a woman. In her memoirs, Simone Veil recalled her early days at the public prosecutor's office in the mid-1950s: her husband was against her working as a lawyer, but agreed to a *carrière de magistrat*; yet, her superiors could not understand why she wished to work with three children and a husband who was about to embark on a promising career as an *énarque*. She was only able to work because her parents-in-law were

49 *La part des femmes progresse à l'Assemblée et au Sénat*, Observatoire des inégalités [online], 4 XII 2018, [access: 27 I 2022]: <<https://www.inegalites.fr/paritefemmeshommespolitique>>.

50 *Susanna Agnelli: philanthropist, author and politician*, "The Times", 18 V 2009 [online] [access: 27 I 2022]: <<https://web.archive.org/web/20090521151302/http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article6307121.ece>>.

unusually supportive.⁵¹ When appointed minister, she was entrusted with a difficult health dossier, an area where she had no expertise, received a frosty welcome from the profession ('I was a woman, a woman in favour of de-penalizing abortion and a Jew.'⁵²) and all this during the severe economic crisis of the mid-1970s.

In France, 1974 marked the advent of 'state feminism',⁵³ or the modest feminisation of executive power that ensured minimal representation of women in French politics. This was due to president Giscard-d'Estaing's willingness to reap the legitimacy benefits from accommodating some of the claims voiced by the increasingly influential Women's Liberation Movement (*Mouvement de libération des femmes*: MLF) and the aspirations it created among French women. Thus, the government, rather than the parliament, became the entry point for female politicians, often with no party affiliation. The newly established State Secretariat for the status of women, led in 1974–1976 by journalist Françoise Giroud, provided an institutional boost to both representation of women and policy initiatives for women. However, with limited resources and intra-government coordination issues, its output and impact has been contested and mostly about long-term agenda-setting.

At the European level, the democratisation of the EP provided a major opportunity structure for women's participation in politics. Prior to 1979's direct elections, being a delegate to the EP, a mere consultative assembly, entailed no national career gain, was often seen as a waste of time and criticised by constituents for 'spending too much time on Europe'. According to former deputies who sat on the EP in the late 1960s and 1970s, European engagement was simply 'mandate-endangering'.⁵⁴ It was hardly a promising career path for the few female members of national legislatures. This changed with the introduction of direct proportional elections: in 1979, women accounted for 16.3% of EP membership, as opposed to 3.5% of the indirectly elected EP in 1972. Greater representa-

51 S. Veil, *Une Vie*, pp. 112–113.

52 Ibidem, p. 156.

53 C. Bard, *Les premières femmes au Gouvernement...*

54 M. Roos, *Becoming Europe's Parliament: Europeanization through MEPs' supranational activism 1952–79*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" 2020, no. 58(6), pp. 1413–1432.

tion led to the creation of an ad hoc committee on women's rights in 1979 (it became a standing committee in 1984). Chaired by French MEP Yvette Roudy, the committee mostly dealt with gender equality and eradicating discrimination in the workplace.⁵⁵ In 1984, female representation in the EP slightly increased to 17.3%, but no major progress was recorded until the mid-1990s.⁵⁶ Yet, in 2019, 40.4% of MEPs were women, thus placing the EP among the most gender-equal elected bodies in the world and significantly outperforming EU national parliaments (an average of 28.6%).⁵⁷ Some scholars argue that the gap is due to proportional elections which, together with the 'second order' nature of the EP contest, favour women. However, this rule-based explanation fails to account for stark national differences. Thus, other scholars stress the significance of party recruitment and selection procedures: the more the national candidate lists are centralised and left in the hands of the party elite, the less gender-balanced they tend to be.⁵⁸

Epilogue

There were no women in the famous picture of the signing of the Treaty of Rome (1957). Fifty years later, when the Treaty of Lisbon was signed in 2007, the extended family picture featured only seven women: one in the first row (the German Chancellor Angela Merkel), one in the middle row (the Swedish Vice-President of the European Commission Margot Wallström) and five (all foreign affairs ministers) in the third row.

- 55 European Parliamentary Research Service, *A stepping stone towards gender equality: the Ad Hoc Committee on Women's Rights 1979-1984*, Historical Archives, March 4, 2015, [online] [access: 4 II 2022]: <<https://epthinktank.eu/2015/03/04/a-stepping-stone-towards-gender-equality-the-ad-hoc-committee-on-womens-rights-1979-1981/>>.
- 56 University of Pittsburgh, *Women of Europe 1977-2000*, Archive of European Integration (AEI), [online], [access: 27 I 2022]: http://aei.pitt.edu/view/eusries/SOCIAL=3AWomen_of_Europe.html>.
- 57 European Parliamentary Research Service, *Women in parliaments*, 25.02.2020 [online], [access: 27 I 2022]: <<https://epthinktank.eu/2017/03/03/women-in-parliaments/>>.
- 58 J. Fortin-Rittberger, B. Rittberger, *Do electoral rules matter? Explaining national differences in women's representation in the European Parliament*, "European Union Politics" 2014, no. 15(4).

Meanwhile, images play a key role as representations of collective meaning-making, ordering devices for including/excluding actors in politics, and means of domination.⁵⁹ As female figures remain the exception in history-making events, what about their symbolic presence in the European space? Are they part of the 21st-century collective meaning-making to a greater extent than they were in the mid-20th-century?

European currency carries an important symbolic meaning. While euro notes depict common architectural heritage, the 'national side' of euro coins features the traditional motifs of each euro-zone country.⁶⁰ Some countries have opted for state or historic symbols, such as the German federal eagle or the Brandenburg Gate. Monarchies typically use images of monarchs, although Spain also has Miguel de Cervantes on the 10, 20 and 50-cent coins. Greek coins show 18th- and 19th-century-statesmen, whereas Italian coins show great philosophers, poets and painters, all men of course. In total, there have been four instances of female representation on euro coins in all the 19 member states since 2002: a monarch (Queen Beatrix of Netherlands), a symbol (Marianne, the personification of the French Republic) and a goddess (Venus), painted by Sandro Botticelli. The only woman who made it onto a euro coin because of her personal achievements was Bertha von Suttner, the Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1905, featured on the Austrian 2-euro coin. Since the late 1990s, buildings and spaces housing European institutions have been named after great Europeans. While the main EP's building in Strasbourg was named after Louise Weiss in 1999, other EP buildings in both Strasbourg and Brussels were named after men, from Winston Churchill and Paul-Henri Spaak to Willy Brandt and Vaclav Havel. In March 2006, the building of the European Economic and Social Committee in Brussels was renamed after Bertha von Suttner to celebrate the centenary of her Nobel Peace Prize. In 2011, the esplanade in front of the main parliamentary building in Brussels was named Agora Simone Veil.

59 K. Lynggaard, *The Roles of Images in EU Politics*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" 2021, no. 59(5), pp. 1213-1229, [access: 27 I 2022]: <<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13176>>.

60 European Commission, National sides of euro coins, [online], [access: 31 I 2022]: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/euro-area/euro-coins-and-notes/euro-coins/national-sides-euro-coins_en>.

In her capacity as EP president, Veil initiated, in 1980, a contemporary art collection, housed in the EP. With over 500 pieces of art, from every single member state, the current collection constitutes a 'snapshot of the here and now of the European visual heritage' and is to reflect the EU motto of 'united in diversity'.⁶¹ Today, works by female artists constitute roughly one-fifth (21%) of the collection, yet proportions in national contributions vary with over 50% of works by women from Denmark, Finland or Poland and less than 10% from Italy, Greece or Hungary. Incidentally, art shows Europe as a woman. *The Rape of Europa*, a classical theme of Greek mythology, was painted by the greatest European masters, including Titian, Peter Paul Rubens, Rembrandt van Rijn, Paolo Veronese, Jacob Jordaens and Francisco Goya. In the paintings, a man (Zeus) acts upon and violates a woman (Europa). It is only very recently that women in Europe have become the ones who act, not the ones who are acted upon. As of January 2022, for the first time in European history, three of the five top EU jobs are now held by women: Ursula von der Leyen (President of the European Commission), Christine Lagarde (President of the European Central Bank) and Roberta Metsola (President of the European Parliament).

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61 As of 5 January 2022 the collection consisted of 504 pieces from 28 (former) member states and 4 pieces from 4 non-member states, [online], [access: 27 I 2022]: <<https://art-collection.europarl.europa.eu/en/>>.

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