

# **The Framing of Gender-Based Violence in the European Union:**

## **How did the European Union under the latest von der Leyen Commission frame gender-based violence? A case study of the political groups in the European Parliament**

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**Abstract:**

Gender-based violence remains an issue of concern worldwide and in the EU. European citizens even consider gender-based violence as being the most urgent gender equality issue that needs to be tackled. This topic has also very much interested scholars, which have often adopted the use of a frame analysis to study the issue. However, no study until now has specifically focused on the framing of gender-based violence under the latest von der Leyen Commission (2019-2024) and no study has specifically analyzed the way the political groups of the European Parliament have framed the issue during this particular time frame. This thesis therefore aims to see how the main seven political groups of the European Parliament, namely: the EPP, the S&D, Renew Europe, The Greens/EFA, the ECR, the I&D and the Left have framed the issue of gender-based violence in their publications during the latest von der Leyen Presidency. This thesis finds overall that right wing and extreme right groups such as the ECR and the I&D are more likely to rely on existing frames and stereotypical representations of the issue in their publications, especially frames that depict gender-based violence as a problem related to migration. On the other hand, left leaning and more moderate groups, such as the EPP, the S&D, Renew Europe, the Greens/EFA and the Left are more likely to use the opposite of existing frames and generally depict gender-based violence as being a thematic and societal problem that requires an intersectional perspective to tackle the issue.

**Keywords:** European Parliament, European political groups, European Union, framing, gender-based violence, von der Leyen Commission

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Gender-based violence remains a major problem and a violation of human rights at global level. The World Health Organization (WHO) has estimated that around 30% of women have been victim of gender-based violence worldwide at least once in their lives and that most often the violence has been perpetrated by an intimate partner (World Health Organization, March 25, 2024). When looking at femicides, one of the most extreme forms of violence against women, the data is shocking, with more than 130 women being killed by an intimate partner or family member daily (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2023).

Gender-based violence has many different facets. In addition to physical harm, gender-based violence can involve sexual, psychological and economic harm and take many different forms including intimate partner violence, coercive sex, rape, stalking, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, honor crimes, and sexual harassment (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.). These different aspects of gender-based violence are encompassed in the United Nations definition of gender-based violence as “any act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” (United Nations Digital Library, 1994; Felipe Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.178).

As a major violation of human rights and as a barrier towards gender equality across the world, gender-based violence is an acute societal problem that must be prioritized by policymakers at global level. At the European level, the role of the European institutions can be considered as crucial in advancing the fight against gender-based violence as the European Union has the power to create binding legal standards to be followed by the 27 EU Member States, but also as EU policies can serve as a model for other regions at global level (European External Action Service, November 26, 2020).

Vigorous policy action at the level of the European Union is legitimized by gender equality being one of the founding principles of the EU (Official Journal of the European Union, 1957; Perivier & Verdugo, 2018, p.79; Lomazzi et al., 2019, p.3-4), but also by the fact that European citizens consider gender-based violence as the most urgent gender-based inequality that needs to be addressed in the European Union (European Parliament, n.d.). The question that remains however is how do policymakers and the EU institutions perceive the issue and how do they decide to frame it? It is particularly relevant to focus on this group of actors as they have the power to put policies in place that could change the status quo and the current state of affairs (Rodelo & Muñiz, 2019, p.104). Moreover, this specific group of actors has the potential to influence citizens’ perception of the issue (Rodelo & Muñiz, 2019, p.104).

The topic of gender-based violence has particularly interested scholars in the last few years, which have in many instances adopted a frame analysis to see whether the media or politicians rely on certain frames when talking about the issue (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.77; Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2023, p.7; Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p. 90-91). It is however interesting to note that no scholarly work until now has specifically looked at the way gender-based violence has been framed under the latest von der Leyen Commission, spanning from 2019 to 2024. This is a particularly relevant time frame to analyze as Ursula von der Leyen, the first woman to hold the position of President of the European Commission, particularly prioritized the fight for gender

equality as well as giving a lot of importance to the topic of gender-based violence (European Commission, 2020). Moreover, it is interesting to note that no scholarly work until now has specifically analyzed the way the political groups of the European Parliament have framed the topic of gender-based violence. Focusing on this specific EU institution is very interesting as it is often presented as being the most gender equal institution out of all the important decision-making bodies in the EU (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.143).

In order to add to existing research in this field, this thesis will therefore analyze the way gender-based violence has been framed by the political groups of the European Parliament during the latest von der Leyen Presidency (2019-2024). I will more specifically attempt to answer the following research question: “How did the main political groups of the European Parliament frame the topic of gender-based violence under the latest von der Leyen Commission?”. To do this I will more specifically focus my attention on the seven main political groups of the European Parliament, namely: the EPP, the S&D, Renew Europe, the Greens/EFA, the ECR, the I&D and the Left.

The goal of this thesis will be to see whether the seven main political groups of the European Parliament rely on certain specific frames and stereotypes when talking about gender-based violence or whether they use the opposite of those said frames. This will be done by relying on a frame analysis in which a total of 35 publications, ranging from opinion pieces to policy papers, by the political groups will be analyzed. I will more specifically see whether the following seven specific frames identified by scholars in the literature, namely: the insiders vs. outsiders’ frame (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013; Gorosarri González, 2021), gender-based violence as a public health issue frame (Colombini et al., 2016), the frame that attributes the responsibility to the victim (Easteal et al., 2015; Gorosarri González, 2021), the frame that presents women as passive victims (Gámez Fuentes, 2013; Roberts et al., 2019), the frame that focuses on non-intimate partner violence (Son & Fielding, 2024), the episodic frame that makes use of sensationalist wording (Son & Fielding, 2024) and the frame that presents women as a homogenous group (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013), are present in the publications of the political groups.

This thesis will be structured as follows. I will first present the literature review, in which I will explain what existing research has been done in the field of gender-based violence and its framing. I will then present the conceptual framework in which I will identify the main frames that will be used for the analysis. I will then move on to the methodology, in which I will explain what a frame analysis consists in and how I plan to use it in the analysis. I will then move on to the empirical part of the thesis, which will be divided in two parts. In the first empirical part, I will present the background information and historical overview of the topic of gender-based violence in the EU sphere and under the most recent von der Leyen Commission. In the second empirical part, I will conduct the main analysis and present my findings and more specifically see how the seven main political groups of the European Parliament framed the topic of gender-based violence. I will then finish this thesis with a conclusion in which the main findings, the limitations and ideas for further research will be presented.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Gender-Based Violence: Origin and Current Research: The Root of the Issue

As previously seen violence against women remains one of the most urgent and severe forms of human rights violations in our current times (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.). In recent decades, an increasing number of scholars have addressed the topic from an academic perspective in a number of scholarly fields such as political science, gender studies, sociology and even in international relations.

In the last four years more specifically, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase in gender-based violence cases has been reported worldwide (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Indeed, restrictions on movement and social distancing made it more difficult for women to seek support and increased their risk of abuse in their homes (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). This was importantly due to the difficulty of keeping victim support services available and open during those times, as well as dealing with an important increase in demands and insufficient funding (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

Scholars have also taken an interest into this specific question and have tried to better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the phenomenon of gender-based violence. An interesting finding by a number of academics is that the COVID-19 pandemic, which was accompanied by an increase in domestic violence cases, also saw the rise of new forms of violence (Iqbal Jatmiko et al., 2020).

Indeed, according to Iqbal Jatmiko and his colleagues (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic saw an important increase in online sexual violence (Iqbal Jatmiko et al., 2020, p.319). The study shows that social media have the capacity to exacerbate already existing forms of abuse and that women in this case are at an increased risk of receiving hateful messages from personal relationships, partners, friends as well as family members (Iqbal Jatmiko et al., 2020, p.319). Moreover, academics find that women are not only at risk of being targeted online by acquaintances, but they are also at risk of getting attacked and threatened by individuals they are not directly in contact with (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p.91).

Miller & Demirbilek (2023) find that the characteristic of anonymity on social media platforms allows for more severe forms of harassment, cyberbullying and other forms of violence committed against women online (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p.91). The authors also find that women that are particularly outspoken about their views and opinions on social media platforms are at an increased risk of getting harassed and receiving hateful comments (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p.91). Scholars note that this is a real cause of concern as this form of violence restricts women's right to freedom of expression as well as profoundly impacts their lives by increasing their risk for mental health issues such anxiety and depression as well as risking to affect their relationships and their job (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p.92-93).

Scholars point out however that a number of other factors need to be considered when addressing the issue of gender-based violence. Felipe Russo & Pirlott (2006) note that social structures themselves have an important influence on the perception individuals have of the issue as well as the likelihood to suffer certain forms of violence (Felipe Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.187). The authors explain that social structures often demonstrate the existence of unequal gendered

relationships that normalize and maintain the legitimacy of male violence (Felipe Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.187).

Furthermore, scholars also demonstrate the important role that the media can play when it comes to the perpetuation of various forms of gender-based violence. Scholars have shown that the way the media portray sexual violence and rape more specifically have notable consequences on individual's perception and attitudes towards the issue (Felipe Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p.188-189). The authors note that the way television and movies talk about rape can lead to a victim blaming type of discourse in which certain myths are perpetuated such as the following: the victim was promiscuous, the victim lies about the rape, the victim was dressed inappropriately and so on (Felipe Russo & Pirlott, 2006, p. 188-189).

Scholars note however that the media can also play a helpful role when it comes to tackling the issue of gender-based violence. According to Miller & Demirbilek (2023), social media for example, when used with the intention of combatting gender-based violence, represent a great opportunity for awareness raising, advocacy as well as support of the issue (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p.90). The authors explain that this is the case as social media can allow victims of gender-based violence to freely express themselves on those platforms, share their experience, find a sense of community and solidarity as well as experiencing the feeling of not being forced to be silenced (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p.90-91). Furthermore, social media platforms can represent interesting places for NGOs, activists as well as other civil society actors, to raise awareness on the issue through the use of campaigns, as well as challenging gendered societal norms, educating individuals on the issue and encouraging the discussion of this problem (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p.91).

### Scholarly Research on Gender-Based Violence in the EU Context

As previously explained, this thesis will more particularly focus on the topic of gender-based violence in the context of the European Union. This is of particular interest as the European Union considers the issue to be of very high importance and has shown its commitment to tackling the problem by ratifying the Istanbul Convention in June of 2023 (Council of Europe, June 28, 2023) as well as issuing the Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence in May of 2024 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2024).

The topic of gender-based violence also remains of great interest to scholars and this can be seen through the growing number of papers and academic works in this field. One important form of gender-based violence that has increasingly interested scholars is the topic of sexual harassment. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) finds, through a survey, that sexual harassment remains a pervasively common experience for women (Latcheva, 2017, p.1822). Indeed, in the work conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), it was reported that 55% of women in the European Union, which is about every second woman in the EU, has experienced some form of sexual harassment at least once in her life since the age of 15 (Latcheva, 2017, p.1830).

The survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) notes that finding a pattern among the perpetrators of sexual harassment is quite difficult as the perpetrators vary widely depending on the context and that the setting and mediums used to

commit certain forms of harassment tend to also vary importantly (Latcheva, 2017, p. 1846). Finally, it can be noted that sexual harassment is now also prone to taking place in new settings, such as on social media platforms and that certain groups of women are more at risk of falling victim to sexual harassment (Latcheva, 2017, p.1846-1847). Latcheva (2017), explains that younger women, women working in the highest occupational groups as well as women with a higher education background are more likely to be disproportionately affected by sexual harassment compared to other groups (Latcheva, 2017, p.1846-1847).

It is important to note that in the context of the European Union, gender-based violence not only affects women broadly across society but also impacts women working in the same EU institutions that assert their full support to the cause of gender equality. According to Berthet & Kantola (2020), the European Parliament is often portrayed as the most gender equal institution out of all the important decision-making bodies in the European Union (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.143). This can for example be seen through the encouraging advances made in women's representation in the European Parliament, where women's representation increased from 36.4 percent to 40.4 percent in the 2019 European elections (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.143). The authors note, however, that the present situation in the European Parliament still remains less than ideal (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.143).

Indeed, since the worldwide onset of the #MeToo movement in 2017, a number of women working in the European Parliament came forward stating they suffered from sexual harassment in this institution as well as the very little effort made to support them, allowing to make the less apparent political dynamics and gendered power struggles in the institution visible to the eyes of the public (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.144). Moreover, the presence of a group of employees at the European Parliament and a group of Accredited Personal Assistants (APAs) to a few Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) more specifically, allowed to bring even more visibility to the issue (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.144). This was done by putting in place a campaign called #MeTooEP, which was led in combination with petitions, specific requests to Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) as well as the creation of a blog specifically addressing the issue (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.150).

Another problem that arises, that equally deserves scholars' attention, is the silence of victims of sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence and its overall under-reporting. Scholars find indeed that only a very small number of women that have been victims of sexual harassment or other forms of gender-based violence publicly address the issue and even less decide to report it (Latcheva, 2017, p.1841; Garrett & Hassan, 2020, p.649). Scholars also note that in certain cases women that have been victims of gender-based abuse, violence or harassment on multiple occasions will only decide to publicly report the most serious cases as well as downplaying the seriousness of the situation as a whole (Latcheva, 2017, p.1841-1842).

A number of reasons exist as to why certain women prefer to avoid reporting and publicly speaking out about the sexual harassment or other forms of gender-based abuse they have suffered from. According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), in the case of the workplace, women are more likely to avoid reporting their abuse out of fear of embarrassment, out of fear that their career might be negatively impacted, out of fear that they might not be believed

or taken seriously as well as out of fear of negatively affecting their relationship with their colleagues and directors (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.)

### Gender-Based Violence as an External Problem and Other Myths

As previously seen analyzing the issue of gender-based violence from the perspective of the media is particularly interesting as it is a growing scholarly field that sees how the media has allowed for an increased awareness of the issue of gender-based violence while also in part contributing to certain forms of perpetuation of violence on those platforms (Miller & Demirbilek, 2023, p. 90-91). Another particularly interesting field in this domain that has recently intrigued scholars, is the one that analyzes how the media present and frame the topic of gender-based violence.

Scholars explain that using a frame analysis to address the topic of gender-based violence is particularly relevant as it allows to see which aspects of reality are shown and which ones are hidden related to the issue at play (Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2023, p.7). Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol (2023) explain that conducting a frame analysis consists of two aspects, the first being the uncovering of the construction of meaning, while the second one consists in recognizing the effects that these frames have on individuals (Aldrete & Fernández-Ardèvol, 2023, p.7).

Identifying the frames used by the media to talk about the topic of gender-based violence is particularly important as certain frames can have long lasting societal consequences and an impact on the way individuals perceive gender-based violence and what they consider as acceptable or not in this specific case (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.77). Indeed, certain frames, such as the frame that attributes the responsibility to the victim of gender-based violence can have extremely harmful and damaging consequences as they put the weight of the crime on the victim while normalizing and in certain cases and even justifying the perpetrator's actions (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.77).

Among the existing frames commonly perceived in the media and other publications, scholars note that one that is particularly dangerous, and damaging is the one that focuses excessively on the racial otherness of the perpetrator (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.77). According to this frame, violence against women and any other form of gender-based violence can be justified and explained by the fact that the perpetrator is from a different ethnic, religious or cultural origin than the majority population in a country (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.77). This is particularly problematic as it leads to a culturalization of the issue, meaning that the culture of the perpetrator becomes the sole focus of the case while ignoring the larger gendered problem of gender-based violence in society (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013, p.542). Furthermore, Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin (2013) note that this frame is problematic as it reinforces and in certain cases even justifies the xenophobic and Islamophobic rhetoric and comments made by politicians and the media when addressing violence against women (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013, p.543).

Scholars also note that the way the victim of gender-based violence is framed has important societal repercussions. In addition to the existing frame that attributes the responsibility or part of the responsibility of the crime to the victim, another existing frame presents women as passive and helpless victims. According to Gámez Fuentes (2013), this is problematic as through this frame women are victimized and presented as lacking any form of agency regarding the case (Gámez Fuentes, 2013, p.401). Moreover, another problem that arises when using this frame is that the

statements women might make might not be taken seriously as well not allowing them to explicitly explain what happened (Gámez Fuentes, 2013, p.401).

### An Intersectional Perspective to the Gender-Based Violence Debate

After having presented a number of existing frames in the field analyzing gender-based violence, the question that remains is how should the issue of gender-based violence ideally be tackled and talked about more generally in order to avoid relying on damaging frames that perpetuate stereotypical gendered norms?

According to scholars in this field, the gender-based violence debate should ideally be based on an intersectional view that considers the position of the different individuals involved as well as their position in society instead of relying on stereotypes and preconfigured gendered norms (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010, p.137). Scholars believe that in order to combat gender-based violence at its root it is necessary to consider the overlapping identities of the victims of gender-based violence as this will have an impact on the levels of discrimination, oppression and violence they experience on a day-to-day basis (Warrier, 2022, p.2539).

Considering intersectionality when looking at the issue of gender-based violence is not only relevant from an academic and theoretical point of view but also for societal and practical reasons as it can be of great help for advocacy, interventions and policy development (Warrier, 2022, p.2539). Only in this way will it be possible to move away from a single axis and binary thinking that relies on harmful stereotypes and frames (Warrier, 2022, p.2550).

### The Gap in the Literature and How this Thesis will add to it

A number of scholars have looked into the way a frame analysis can be used to analyze the issue of gender-based violence. This is a particularly interesting field, currently growing and interesting more and more scholars. As explained above in this literature review, the context of the European Union is particularly fruitful to analyze considering the important number of actions the EU has put in place to tackle the issue as well as the repeated statements made by various European institutions regarding their commitment to dealing with the issue and promoting gender equality.

Moreover, more and more scholars have started looking at the way state entities, the European institutions, and the media use various frames to present gender-based violence. However no scholarly work until now has specifically focused on the way the main political groups in the European Parliament frame the topic of gender-based violence and this more specifically during the latest von der Leyen presidency. This is what this thesis aims to do, as previously seen the main aim of this thesis will be to answer the following research question: How did the main political groups of the European Parliament frame the topic of gender-based violence under the latest von der Leyen Presidency?

In the next chapter of this thesis, I will present the conceptual framework I will rely on for the analysis of the seven main political groups of the European Parliament. My conceptual framework will mostly be based on existing frames found by scholars in the field of gender-based violence and its framing and will allow me to see whether the main political groups of the European Parliament rely on certain specific frames in their discourse on gender-based violence.

### Chapter 3: Conceptual Framework

As previously seen in the literature review, the framing of gender-based violence has been a subject of increasing interest to scholars in the last few years. Scholars find indeed that the topic of gender-based violence can be framed in different ways depending on the intentions and goals of the framing entity (Easteal et al., 2015, p.104). Easteal, Holland & Judd (2015) explain that this is of particular importance, especially when considering the media as they have the power to perpetuate certain harmful stereotypes as well as allowing to influence the way individuals think of the issue (Easteal et al., 2015, p.110).

In the specific case of this thesis, the goal will be to more specifically see how the seven main political groups present in the European Parliament, namely the Group of the European People's Party (EPP), the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D), the Renew Europe Group, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (The Greens/EFA), the European Conservative and Reformists Group (ECR), the Identity and Democracy Group (I&D) and the Group of the Left, framed the issue of gender-based violence during the latest von der Leyen Commission. This is particularly relevant as the von der Leyen Commission considered this specific issue to be a priority of the European Union and even decided to add it to the Gender Equality Strategy of the European Union for the 2020-2025 period (European Commission, 2020).

In order to do this, I will analyze a number of publications issued by the seven main political groups of the European Parliament and see whether they make use of certain specific frames present in the literature on the framing of gender-based violence by political entities and the media. For this task I decided to focus my attention on seven specific frames that were extracted from the literature. These frames are the following seven: the insiders vs. outsiders' frame, the frame that presents gender-based violence as a public health issue, the frame that attributes the responsibility to the victim, the frame that portrays women as passive victims, the frame that focuses on non-intimate partner violence, the episodic frame that also makes use of sensationalist wording and finally the frame that presents women as a homogenous group.

The first frame that will be used in this thesis is the insiders vs. outsiders' frame. This frame can also be referred to as the cultural frame and is present in both the work of Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin (2013) in their work titled "The othering of domestic violence: The EU and cultural framings of violence against women" as well as in the work of Gorosarri González (2021) in her academic paper titled "Frames of gender-based violence: a comparative study of news reports about crime with victims (1996-2016)". This frame is constructed around the belief that the main reason why a form of gender-based violence has occurred is because the perpetrator is from a different culture than the one present in the country (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.77). This frame is based around the idea that violence against women is an external problem brought inside a country through immigration and not as a problem related to the normalization of violence against women or the existence of certain gendered norms (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013, p.534). This frame is particularly problematic as it can try, in certain instances, to justify xenophobia and intolerance by creating a dichotomy between the "insiders" (non-violent Europeans) and "outsiders" (violent others) (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013, p.538).

The second frame that will be employed is the frame that presents gender-based violence as a public health issue. This frame can be identified in the academic work by Colombini and her colleagues (2016) and is titled “Agenda setting and framing of gender-based violence in Nepal: how it became a health issue”. According to this paper, the frame that presents gender-based violence as a health issue can be problematic as it frames a broader societal issue that has its roots in gendered norms and stereotypes as mainly being a health crisis (Colombini et al., 2016, p.499). This frame can be identified by its use of specific and technical language when it comes to gender-based violence as well as importantly focusing on the most extreme forms of gender-based violence such as femicides and female genital mutilation (FGM) (Colombini et al., 2016, p.500).

The third frame that will be used here is the frame that attributes the responsibility to the victim. This frame was identified in the work by Easteal, Holland & Judd (2015) in their paper titled “Enduring themes and silences in media portrayals of violence against women”, as well as in the work by Gorosarri González (2021) in her paper mentioned above. According to this frame, the main focus is placed on the victim as there is a more detailed identification of the accuser than the perpetrator of the crime (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.75). This frame can be identified by looking at the use of words such as “alleged” that have for effect of lessening the accuser’s credibility (Gorosarri González, 2021, p.75). Moreover, in certain instances the media even present the crime as being a shared responsibility between the accuser and the perpetrator (Easteal, 2015, p.111). This is particularly problematic as it fundamentally contradicts the feminist understanding of gender-based violence while reinforcing certain stereotypical gendered and misogynist beliefs (Easteal, 2015, p.111).

The fourth frame is the one that portrays women as passive victims. This frame is present in both the work of Gámez Fuentes (2013) in her paper titled “Re-framing the subject(s) of gender violence” as well as the work of Roberts, Donovan & Durey (2019) in their paper titled “Agency, resistance and the non-‘ideal’ victim: how women deal with sexual violence”. In this specific frame women are presented as helpless victims lacking any form of agency and of the capacity of expressing themselves (Gámez Fuentes, 2013, p.400-401). When women fit this specific frame by embodying its main characteristics they are often deemed as “ideal” victims (Roberts et al., 2019, p.328). This is particularly problematic as “ideal” victims are more likely to be listened to compared to individuals that do not fit this stereotype, reinforcing problematic gendered and patriarchal beliefs (Roberts et al., 2019, p.328).

The fifth frame focuses on non-intimate partner violence. This frame can be found in the work by Son & Fielding (2024) titled ““Teen fled danger into the arms of death”: The political agenda setting effect of Australian news media framing of violence against women”. In this particular frame the main focus of the media is placed on gender-based violence cases in which the victim did know the perpetrator (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.1). This is particularly interesting as the media are more likely to cover those cases as they are more likely to attract the public’s attention (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.1). Scholars note however that this is a problematic way of presenting things by the media as the situation in reality is quite different (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.2). Indeed, statistically speaking, women are far more likely to suffer from gender-based violence at the hands of a known individual, such as a partner, a friend or a family member, compared to a stranger (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.2). Presenting the issue in those terms by presenting gender-based violence

cases as “exceptional” occurrences is damaging as it overlooks a broader existing societal and cultural problem of violence against women (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.3-4).

The sixth frame is called episodic frame which also makes use of sensationalist wording and can be found in the work by Son & Fielding (2024) mentioned above. According to this frame the gender-based violence case is presented as a unique and episodic event with little contextual information on the case (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.3). A thematic frame, on the other hand, contextualizes the gender-based violence case into a broader context as well as presenting the issue as a wider societal problem (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.3). While the episodic frame places the blame of the crime solely on the individual, the thematic frame, on the other hand, emphasizes the role played by wider social structures and norms (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.3). The episodic frame is also characterized by its presentation of the perpetrator as being an “abnormal” and “different” individual instead of mentioning the problematic normalization of violence against women or patriarchal beliefs and norms as being to blame (Son & Field, 2024, p.3). The application of this frame is often coupled with the use of sensationalist and dramatic wording (Son & Fielding, 2024, p.3).

Finally, the seventh frame portrays women as a homogenous group. This frame can be found in the work of Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin (2013) priorly mentioned. In this frame, the victims of gender-based violence are presented as interchangeable and as lacking any specific characteristics that differentiate them between each other (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013, p. 534). This is problematic as it does not include the element of intersectionality when considering the issue of gender-based violence (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2013, p.534). Indeed, depending on an individual’s race, socio-economic status, educational background and the fact of being a member of the LGBTQI+ community, their risk of being affected by gender-based violence will differ as well as the response and help they might receive when addressing their experience (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2023, p.537). Scholars therefore call for the consideration of intersectionality when addressing gender-based violence (Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin, 2023, p.537).

In the next section, in which I present the methodology, I will more specifically explain how the seven previously presented frames will be used for the analysis of the seven main political groups of the European Parliament. To do this these seven frames will be grouped in a concise table, which will be composed of a number of elements such as the name of the frame the question posed that allows to see whether the frame is present or whether the publication makes use of an intersectional view as well as the scholarly work the frame is extracted from.

## Chapter 4: Methodology and Operationalization of Key Concepts

The methodology that I will use for my research is a frame analysis, a method often used in social sciences and communication studies. The concept of frame analysis, which originates from sociology and psychology disciplines, was developed and expanded by Ervin Goffman in the 1970s as a method used to understand how individuals perceive and interpret situations and activities (Scheufele and Tewsbury, 2007, p.9).

According to Goffman, “frames” are mental structures that allow individuals to make sense of their experiences (Goffman, 1974). More precisely, his definition of a frame is “definitions of a situation built up in accordance with the principles of organization which govern events - at least social ones - and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such as these basic elements as I am able to identify” (Goffman, 1974).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the concepts of “frames” and “framing” expanded to the area of research on social movements, thanks to sociologists such as Robert Benford and David Snow who wanted to use a new research method for their work (van Dijk, 2023, p.153). A similar development took place in the communication studies research field, with scholars such as William Gamson, Robert Entman and others, looking for a new methodological approach to study the structures that delineate the emphasis and importance of news events (van Dijk, 2023, p.153).

Building on this work, the use of a frame analysis further expanded especially in the area of media research, becoming a very popular method for the study of news (van Dijk, 2023, p.154). Media Framing Analysis has been used, for instance, to study how the media represents a specific issue or event by drawing attention to some aspects to the detriment of others, as well as which factors impact this selection process (van Dijk, 2023, p.154).

Framing often involves the use of specific words or images that influence the representation of reality, while omitting other features that would suggest a different impression of that same reality (van Dijk, 2023, p.154). As Entman indicates, framing means “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.” (Entman, 1993, p.52).

This selective approach in communication has the effect of influencing public perception as the audience’s attention is brought to a particular facet of reality (Entman, 1993, p.52; van Zoonen & Vliegenthart, 2011, p.102). As such, framing is a key dimension in a political communication, which most often aims at influencing public opinion on specific policy issues (van Zoonen & Vliegenthart, 2011, p.102). Indeed, political parties use frames in their manifestos, policy papers, and other policy documents to shape public perception and influence policy outcomes (Oxley, 2020, p.2).

The link between framing, political messaging and policymaking is of great relevance for my research work which focuses on how the political groups of the European Parliament have addressed the issue of gender-based violence. Using a frame analysis, I will look at how the ideologies inherent to the seven main European political groups have shaped their respective views on gender-based violence.

As previously explained using a frame analysis is a particularly interesting way to confront the topic of gender-based violence. Moreover, little research has been conducted on the topic of gender-based violence in the context of the European Union until now (Berthet & Kantola, 2020, p.143). It is also important to note that the political groups of the European Parliament and the way they perceive and frame gender-based violence as well as the way they act as gender equality actors has been an under-researched field (Berthet, 2023, p.7). Furthermore, no research until now has specifically analyzed the way the seven main political group of the European Parliament frame the topic of gender-based violence and more specifically during the latest von der Leyen Presidency, therefore it is particularly interesting to focus on this particular area of research.

In this thesis the goal will be to address the following research question: How did the main political groups of the European Parliament frame the topic of gender-based violence under the latest von der Leyen Commission? In order to answer this question, I will conduct a frame analysis in which I will see whether the seven main political groups of the European Parliament rely on the seven frames previously presented in the conceptual framework.

To do this, I decided to select five publications for each main political group of the European Parliament, meaning that I will analyze a total of 35 publications. Regarding the type of publications to analyze, I decided to focus my attention on a wide range of publication in order to have as much variety and views as possible. I will more specifically focus on the following types of publications of the seven main political groups of the European Parliament, which can all be found on their respective official websites, namely: news articles videos, position papers, opinion articles, press releases, event videos, opinion pieces, policy papers as well as plenary booklets. To retrieve these specific sources, I will consult the main website of the main political groups and select five sources for each that I deem particularly relevant for the analysis. Moreover, for each main group of the European Parliament, I will also analyze the main website page dealing with the topic of gender-based violence and gender equality more broadly. When it comes to the analysis more specifically, I will focus on various aspects related to the publications to identify the seven previously found frames. When it comes to news articles for example, I will focus on the overall wording in the article, as well as the title and the images presented and whether certain relevant aspects are missing.

The main frames that will be used for the analysis have been created in a deductive way, meaning that they are being “defined and operationalized prior to the investigation (de Vreese, 2005, p.53). These frames, which are extracted from the conceptual framework, can be summarized in the table that I created below, in which I first present a specific frame, then I explain how it can be identified in the media and publications, I then present the question that allows to say whether the said-frame is present or not and finally in the last column of the table I explain from which academic work the frame was found in.

Frame	Nr.	Indicators of stereotypical presentation	Question	Scholarly work in which this frame appears
Insiders vs. Outsiders' frame	1	Culturalization, focus on the racial otherness of the perpetrator, migration perceived as a societal problem leading to more violence against women, non-violent Europeans vs. violent "others"	Is there an excessive focus on the cultural, ethnic and religious origin of the perpetrator?	Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin (2013); Gorosarri González (2021)
Gender-based violence as a public health issue	2	Gender-based violence presented as a health crisis, focus on specific and technical language when talking about the issue, focus on biological differences between men and women, focus on the most extreme cases of gender-based violence such as femicides or female genital mutilation (FGM)	Is there an important focus on the health aspect of victims of gender-based violence?	Colombini et al. (2016)
Attribution of responsibility to the victim	3	Weight of the crime put on the victim, excessive focus on the appearance and other characteristics of the victim, uses of terms such as "alleged", belief that the victim is exaggerating, idea that responsibility is shared between the victim and the perpetrator	Is the victim blamed/partially blamed for the gender-based violence that occurred to them?	Easteal et al. (2015); Gorosarri González (2021)
Women as passive victims	4	Victims presented as passive and lacking agency, infantilization of women by using terms such as "women and girls", victim left in the shadow of the case, overall victimization, concept of the "ideal" victim	Are the victims of gender-based violence presented as passive victims that lack any form of agency?	Gámez Fuentes (2013); Roberts et al. (2019)
Focus on non-intimate partner violence	5	Important focus by the media on cases in which the victim did not know the perpetrator, idea that men that are strangers to women are a danger, idea that women should not be walking around unaccompanied, more likely to receive attention in the media compared to cases in which the victim knew the	Do the media extensively focus on cases in which the victim did not know the perpetrator of gender-based violence?	Son & Fielding (2024)

		perpetrator, presented as “exceptional” cases		
Episodic frame and sensationalist wording	6	Case of gender-based violence is framed as an episodic unique event, use of sensationalist wording and over-dramatization of the event, individualization of the case, the perpetrator is presented as “abnormal” and “different”, the opposite of a thematic framing	Is the gender-based violence case presented as a unique episodic event? Is the issue over-dramatized as well as accompanied by sensationalist words?	Son & Fielding (2024)
Women as a homogenous group	7	Victims of gender-based violence seen as interchangeable, lack of attention placed on specific characteristics that differentiate them, such as race, socio-economic background, religion, age, disability, being part of the LGBTQI+ community and so on	Are the victims of gender-based violence presented as interchangeable and as an overall homogenous group?	Montoya & Rolandsen Agustin (2013)

In the next two chapters of this thesis, I will move on to the empirics and the detailed analysis of my topic, which will ultimately allow me to answer my research question. My analysis will be divided into two respective chapters. The first chapter of the analysis will mainly consist in an historical overview and a background presentation of the context of the European Union under the latest von der Leyen Commission as well as a presentation of the seven main political groups of the European Parliament. In this chapter, I will present the most important advances made by the European Union in the realm of tackling gender-based violence since the appointment of Ursula von der Leyen as President of the European Commission. In this chapter, I will also present the broad and overall position of the seven main political groups of the European Parliament on the issue of gender-based violence.

In the subsequent chapter, I will then analyze in a more detailed way the respective five sources of the seven main political groups of the European Parliament, as well as their main websites and see whether they rely on specific frames, thanks to the wording they use and the way they present and talk about the issue of gender-based violence.

## **Chapter 5: Empirical Part 1: Background Information and Historical Overview: The Topic of Gender-Based Violence in the EU Sphere under the von der Leyen Commission**

### Gender-based violence in the European Commission's 2019-2024 term under the von der Leyen presidency

Fighting gender-based violence has been an integral part of European Commission's action on gender equality for some time. However, efforts in this area have expanded in the last EU mandate under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen, the first woman holding the position of President of the European Commission. Indeed, gender violence has become a strategic priority and featured prominently in the European Commission's 2019-2024 term (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020).

In her opening statement to the European Parliament as European Commission President Candidate, she stressed the importance of speaking openly about the problem of gender-based violence, reminding Members of the European Parliament that around half of all women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment and that one out of five women has suffered from some form of gender-based violence (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020).

Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines for the European Commission 2019-2024 reiterate that gender-based violence remains a major problem in the EU and that more should be done at EU level to tackle it (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020). The Guidelines also elaborate on the policy tools that the European Commission will use to tackle the problem, putting forward three main strategic approaches (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020).

First, the Guidelines emphasize the importance and urgency of the EU's accession to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020). This treaty requires parties to develop legislation and other measures to prevent, investigate and punish violence against women and domestic violence, as well as to put in place support services for victims (Council of Europe, 2011). Adopted on April 7, 2011, it is also known as "the Istanbul Convention" as the 121st Session of the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul on May 11, 2011, marked the opening of the signatures process (Council of Europe, 2011).

While the EU signed the Istanbul Convention on the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, the EU accession to the Convention was still pending in 2019 (European Parliament Legislative Train Schedule, n.d.). As only an EU accession makes the EU legally bound to the Convention (opposed to a signature which indicates an intention to examine the Convention and consider its ratification in the future), completing the EU ratification of the Convention is highlighted as a main objective in the von der Leyen's Political Guidelines for 2019-2024 (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020).

Secondly, taking into account the uncertainty surrounding the ratification of the Convention, which requires a Council of Ministers' decision and is therefore beyond the competence of the European Commission, the Guidelines announce that the European Commission will consider possible alternative legislative proposals in case of further delay with the EU accession to the Convention (European Parliament Legislative Train Schedule, n.d.).

Thirdly, the Guidelines recommend that gender-based violence be added to the list of EU crimes in Article 83(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which lays down an exhaustive list of areas of crime where the European Parliament and the Council may establish minimum rules concerning the definition of criminal offences and sanctions applicable in all EU Member States (Publications Office of the European Union, 2020).

This three-pronged approach is reiterated in Ursula von der Leyen's Mission Letter to Helena Dalli, the European Commissioner for Equality, on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, which states: "we need to do more to crack down on gender-based violence and to better support victims. EU accession to the Istanbul Convention remains a priority for the Commission. If it remains blocked in the Council, you should look at strengthening the support, protection and rights of victims, including by considering proposals on minimum standards regarding the definition of certain types of violence and strengthening the victims Directive. Using the possibilities in the Treaty, you should propose adding violence against women to the list of EU crimes." (European Commission, December 1, 2019).

It is significant that President von der Leyen decided to nominate a European Commissioner with a specific responsibility for equality, as in the previous Commission's terms equality was integrated into broader Commissioner's portfolios such as "Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality" in the 2014-2019 term, or "Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship" in the 2010-2014 term (European Commission, n.d.). The nomination of a Commissioner with sole responsibility for equality could be assumed to be an additional indication of von der Leyen's intention to bring gender equality, and gender-based violence, higher up on the 2019-2024 EU agenda.

Helena Dalli, a longstanding gender equality advocate who was instrumental for the adoption of the Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence Act in her own country, extensively elaborated on gender-based violence during her European Parliament hearing in October 2019 (European Parliament, 2019). Furthermore, in her answers to the questions from Members of the European Parliament (MEP) she provided additional elements on the strategic approaches highlighted in the Political Guidelines stressing the necessity to address online violence and harmful online behaviors, which are new and fast spreading forms of gender-based violence. (European Parliament, 2019).

The 2019-2024 European Commission's political commitment to tackling gender-based violence is further elaborated in the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (European Commission, 2020). The publication of this Strategy within the first 100 days of the newly appointed European Commission is a demonstration of the political importance that Ursula von der Leyen and Helena Dalli have attached to this policy area.

The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 sets the policy framework for the development of a range of different EU initiatives aiming at preventing and combating gender-based violence and protecting victims (European Commission, 2020). This includes policy and legal frameworks to combat violence and harassment at the workplace, online violence and harassment, trafficking of human beings and sexual exploitation, and female genital mutilation (FGM) (European Commission, 2020). The strategy also calls for the development of a European Victims' Rights Strategy addressing the needs of victims of gender-based violence, building on the Victims' Rights Directive (European Commission, 2020).

The Strategy defines the Istanbul Convention as the benchmark standard on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (European Commission, 2020). Consistently with Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, the Strategy urges to speed up the conclusion of the EU's accession to the Convention and indicates that in case of further delay the Commission will propose legislation to achieve the same objectives (European Commission, 2020).

In the sections below, I will elaborate on key actions and achievements in the three priority areas put forward by the 2019-2024 Commission to tackle gender-based violence:

### The European Directive on gender-based violence: a flagship initiative in the 2019-2024 EU mandate

With the Istanbul Convention ratification still pending in 2022 a proposal for a Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence was released by the European Commission symbolically on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2022, which marks International Women's Day (European Commission, March 8, 2022). The aim of the proposal for a Directive is to prevent gender-based violence and protect victims by complementing the fragmented EU and national legislation by proposing minimum standards in the following areas: criminalization of certain forms of violence; protection of victims and improved access to justice; better assistance for victims and coordination between relevant services; and prevention (European Commission, March 8, 2022).

The proposed Directive was particularly welcomed by the European Parliament which had been calling for a directive on gender-based violence since 2009 (European Parliament, 2009). In particular, in 2021 the European Parliament issued a resolution with a comprehensive list of the Parliament's expectations in the area of gender-based violence and especially gender-based cyber violence (European Parliament, 2021).

However, while several of the Parliament's requests were reflected in the Commission's legislative proposal, the European Parliament pointed out a number of gaps such as the limitation of free legal aid and psychological support to victims of rape and female genital mutilation (FGM), the lack of provisions on minimum number of shelters, the lack of definition of gender-based violence and the absence of development of indicators to measure success or the establishment of an EU observatory on violence against women (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2022).

The legislative proposal went through the EU co-decision process, involving the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers, and was formally approved in May of 2024, following inter-institutional negotiations (European Parliament Legislative Train Schedule, n.d.). The final text agreed ended up being less ambitious compared to the initial European Commission's proposal, as it decided to only criminalize the following offences: female genital mutilation (FGM); forced marriage; non-consensual sharing of intimate images; cyber stalking; cyber harassment; cyber incitement to hatred or violence (Official Journal of the European Union, 2024).

To note is the absence of rape from the list of criminal offences, despite its inclusion in the original European Commission's proposal (Official Journal of the European Union, 2024). The European Parliament efforts to keep rape in the list of criminal offences was unsuccessful due to resistance from the Council of Ministers, which considered that there was a lack of legal basis as rape is not included in the list of EU crimes listed in Article 83 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (Peseckyte, November 13 2023).

On the positive side, the European Parliament managed to introduce and reinforce a number of provisions, including: the criminalization of forced marriage and of cyberflashing, an extended list of aggravating circumstances such as for crimes committed against public representatives, journalists and human rights defenders, and for 'honor crimes', and the possibility to review the act after five years (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2024).

### The EU ratification of the Istanbul Convention

In parallel to the development of the EU Directive on gender-based violence, the necessary steps for the EU ratification of the Istanbul Convention progressed and finally culminated in the conclusion of the ratification process in June of 2023 (Council of Europe, June 28, 2023).

While at the onset the Commission was not necessarily envisaging having two separate legal instruments, in this case the Istanbul Convention and the EU Directive, to address gender-based violence, the combination of the two frameworks is likely to equip the EU with particularly strong and modern standards in the fight against gender violence. Indeed, there are a number of differences between the two frameworks, and importantly the EU Directive on gender-based violence extends protection to modern forms of violence, such as cyber harassment and non-consensual sharing of intimate images (Council of Europe, February 27, 2024).

The European Parliament strongly welcomed the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, as it had been calling for a ratification in its resolutions and reports for a long time (European Parliament, January 25, 2023). The European Parliament played an important role towards the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention, by asking the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) to provide legal clarifications for the EU ratification process (InfoCuria Jurisprudence, 2021). In its Opinion of October 6, 2021, the Court of Justice of the European Union clarified that a qualified majority was sufficient for the EU ratification thus creating the conditions for a decision to be taken without the agreement of all EU Member States (InfoCuria Jurisprudence, 2021).

### Expansion of the EU crimes list in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU):

On December 9 of 2021, the European Commission issued a Communication proposing to expand the list of EU crimes by adding hate speech and hate crimes (European Commission, 2021). While the proposal does not focus specifically on gender-based violence, as originally suggested in Ursula von der Leyen's Political Guidelines, the link between hate speech, hate crime and gender-based violence is outlined in the Communication (European Commission, 2021). Furthermore, in the Communication the Commission makes it clear that the proposal complements the upcoming Directive on gender-based violence providing an additional legal basis for addressing gender-based violence taking the form of misogynous hate speech or hate crime (European Commission, 2021).

With this proposal the European Commission hopes to trigger the adoption of a Council decision that hate speech and hate crime are areas of crime which could be listed in Article 83(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (European Commission, 2021). Such a Council decision would then provide the legal basis for the European Commission to

propose legislation to establish minimum rules on the definitions and sanctions of hate speech and hate crime (European Commission, 2021).

This initiative has been welcomed by the European Parliament, which called on the European Commission to present a legislative proposal to add gender-based violence in the list of EU crimes under Article 83(1) of the TFEU in a resolution in September 2021 (European Parliament, 2021).

With the Council decision still pending, the European Parliament issued a report in January 2024 urging the Council to adopt a decision to include hate speech and hate crime among the criminal offences within the list under Article 83(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) (European Parliament, 2024).

### European Parliamentary groups' views on the 2019-2024 European Commission priorities and actions

Addressing violence against women appears prominently in the European People's Party Group's (EPP) position paper on gender equality of December 2020 (EPP Group in the European Parliament, December 17, 2020). The ratification of the Istanbul Convention, new EU legislation on minimum standards and supporting victims with an EU Strategy on Victims' Rights are amongst the measures recommended by the group (EPP Group in the European Parliament, December 17, 2020). Furthermore, the paper stresses the need to address cyber violence and hate speech against women, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM) and human trafficking (EPP Group in the European Parliament, December 17, 2020).

The EPP Group led the European Parliament's work on the proposed Directive on combatting gender violence and domestic violence in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), with MEP Frances Fitzgerald in the position of European Parliament co-Rapporteur (European Parliament Legislative Train Schedule, n.d.). Commenting on the agreement reached on the final text of the directive during the interinstitutional negotiations, MEP Fitzgerald expressed satisfaction with the measures introduced on cyber violence (EPP Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024).

In the EPP Group's press release on the agreement she is quoted saying: "Under the new legislation, women across Europe will no longer need to fear the unauthorized dissemination of their intimate images, including deepfakes, on the internet. Non-consensual sharing of such images will be recognized as a punishable crime, signaling a major shift in the realm of women's protection online. This directive will compel EU Member States to take more decisive actions in punishing various forms of abuse against women, including cyberstalking. It sets minimum standards for addressing these crimes uniformly across the EU." (EPP Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024).

On the other hand, MEP Fitzgerald expressed disappointment with the low level of ambition of the Directive on rape. On this specific topic she said: "the law falls short of the comprehensive measures that many had hoped for, most notably, the inclusion of rape in the legislation. This is deeply disappointing. The blame lies squarely with those Member States, notably

France and Germany, that opposed its inclusion." (EPP Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024).

More recently, the EPP Group has included a section on "Europe stops violence against women" in its political manifesto for the 2024 European elections, recognizing the progress accomplished at EU level while calling for continued efforts (EPP Group in the European Parliament, 2024). This is a significant step forward from the EPP 2019 EU manifesto, which did not include any reference to gender-based violence, and it is a clear sign of the influence Ursula von der Leyen has had on the priorities of her political family following her appointment as European Commission President (EPP Group in the European Parliament, 2019).

Gender equality has traditionally featured amongst the strategic priorities of the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) Group in the European Parliament, with the group's manifesto for the 2019 European elections calling for a European Strategy on gender equality to tackle sexual harassment and gender-based violence, amongst other gender priorities (S&D Group in the European Parliament, 2019).

The S&D Group led the work in the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), which shared competence with the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM), on the proposal for a Directive on gender violence and domestic violence (European Parliament Legislative Train Schedule, n.d.). While welcoming the final agreement on the Directive, the S&D Group defined the legislation as being only a first step towards the eradication of gender-based violence and stressed that the Group will continue to advocate for gender-based violence to be classified as an EU crime (S&D Group in the European Parliament, April 23, 2024).

Similarly to the EPP, the S&D leading MEP on the Directive, MEP Evin Incir, welcomed the role that a new directive will play in combatting gender-based cyber violence, like cyberstalking and cyber-flashing (S&D Group in the European Parliament, April 23, 2024). She also emphasized the Directive's criminalization of female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, while regretting that non-consensual sex such as rape is not criminalized in the same way (S&D Group in the European Parliament, April 23, 2024).

In its 2024 EU manifesto, the S&D Group, puts forward ending gender-based violence and discrimination amongst its political commitments (S&D Group in the European Parliament, 2024). The manifesto defines the Group as "the party of feminism" and includes a section titled "A feminist Europe", which refers to the Directive on gender-based violence and stresses that the S&D Group will continue to press to make violence against women an EU crime (S&D Group in the European Parliament, 2024). Furthermore, gender-based violence appears in other sections of the manifesto too (S&D Group in the European Parliament, 2024).

The Renew Europe Group, on its side, defined the agreement on the new Directive on gender-based violence as "historical", welcoming in particular the criminalization of female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage, and cybercrimes (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, April 24, 2024). Furthermore, it emphasized the requirement for Member States to develop action plans to prevent and combat violence against women and guarantee access to healthcare services for victims (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, April 24, 2024).

Similarly to the EPP Group and S&D Group, Renew Europe regrets that rape, which it defines as “one of the most severe forms of gender-based violence” is not included in the list of criminal offenses (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, April 24, 2024). The Group also calls for a common definition of the crime of rape in the EU Directive, which should be based on the lack of consent as in the Istanbul Convention (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, April 24, 2024).

Fighting violence against women was listed as a priority in the 2019 EU manifesto of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group in the European Parliament (ALDE), the predecessor of Renew Europe (ALDE Group in the European Parliament, 2018). Renew Europe’s 2024 EU manifesto maintains the Group’s commitment to combat gender-based violence (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

Ending violence against women and girls as well as increasing support for victims was a component of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA) Group’s 2019 EU manifesto and is part of their “Build an Inclusive Society” campaign (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, 2019; The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, 2024).

As a major advocate for a Directive on gender-based violence, the Group of the Greens/EFA strongly welcomed the agreement on the EU Directive, defining it a “major victory for the feminist movement and a huge step forward in terms of tackling violence against women and girls at EU level.” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, April 23, 2024). However, as other political groups, the Greens/EFA Group regrets that the Council’s lower level of ambition for the Directive has not permitted to include rape in the list of criminal offences (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, April 23, 2024).

Importantly, the Group called on the European Parliament to seek an opinion of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) on the EU accession to the Istanbul Convention (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, May 10, 2023). This CJEU opinion, requested by the European Parliament in April of 2019, clarified that unanimity was not needed in the Council of Ministers to adopt its decision to ratify the Istanbul Convention, thus paving the way for the ratification of the Convention by the Council (InfoCuria Jurisprudence, 2021).

Similarly to the Greens/EFA, the Left Group in the European Parliament together with the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (The GUE/NGL) considers feminism and ending gender-based violence as strategic priorities (The Left Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). As other political groups, The Left Group together with the GUE/NGL welcomed the agreement on the Directive on gender-based violence while strongly regretting that rape has not been included in the list of criminal offences (The Left Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024).

On the other hand, gender-based violence does not appear as a priority for the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group and Identity and Democracy (I&D) Group, as these right-wing groups have traditionally focused on issues related to national sovereignty, immigration, and economic policies (ECR Group in the European Parliament, n.d.; Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, n.d.)

Nevertheless, the ECR Group issued a press release on February 6 of 2024, on the International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), in which MEP Assita

Kanko, co-negotiator for the new Directive to combat violence against women and domestic violence, calls for greater harmonization of rules across the EU Member States against female genital mutilation (FGM) (ECR Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024). Despite this press release, the group of the ECR has not taken a unified stance on gender-based violence, with ECR Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) traditionally following more the policy recommendations of their respective national political parties than a common ECR Group line.

Furthermore, both the Group of the ECR and the Identity and Democracy Group have associated gender-based violence to uncontrolled immigration (European Parliament, April 23, 2024). During the European Parliament debate before the vote on the Directive on gender-based violence, both ECR MEP Margarita de la Pisa Carrion and Identity and Democracy MEP Annika Bruna stressed the negative impact that immigration has had on violence against women calling for greater EU action on migration (European Parliament, April 23, 2024).

## **Chapter 6: Empirical Part 2: Analysis and Findings: The framing of gender-based violence by the political groups in the European Parliament**

### EPP Group in the European Parliament

The first political group of the European Parliament that will be analyzed is the Group of the Christian Democrats, namely the Group of the European People's Party or EPP Group in the European Parliament. This Group is considered as center-right leaning and as being pro-European. Among the priorities of the Group are the following: a European Security Pact for the EU (which includes protecting European citizens from external threats such as illegal migration), energy, jobs, competitiveness, good healthcare for citizens, economic opportunities as well as social solidarity and responsibility (EPP Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). It is interesting to point out that gender equality and the defense of women's rights are not mentioned among the political group's main priorities.

The EPP Group, however, has a website specifically dedicated to the topic of gender-based violence with the following title: "Our Impact: End Violence against women" (EPP Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). In this short presentation of the topic of gender-based violence, the EPP Group explains its commitment to combating the issue as well as the actions it has put in place in order to achieve this (EPP Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). In term of present frames, it is possible to note the use of two out of the seven frames of the conceptual framework, namely, the fourth frame, the one that presents women that have suffered from gender-based violence as passive victims, as well as, but to a milder extent, the presence of the fifth frame, the one that focuses on non-intimate partner violence. This can be seen through the use of the following sentence in the short text: "Women are safe in Europe. Or are they?" (EPP Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). This sentence, which is the first sentence of the short text, conveys a sense of danger and insecurity as well as the idea that women are overall not living in a safe environment in the EU. Moreover, placing this sentence as the first one allows for an attention-grabbing effect and for increased attention from the reader. It is also possible to note the use of an infantilizing language that presents women as lacking agency by the use of the term "women and girls" later on in the short text (EPP Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

In the case of the EPP Group, I decided to pick out five publications dealing with the issue of gender-based violence, more specifically I decided to pick two news articles, one video, one position paper as well as one opinion article, all found on the official website of the EPP Group. An interesting element that can be pointed out is the fact that all publications except one, used the opposite of the frames of the conceptual framework. The opposite frames that came up the most often were the two following ones, the opposite of frame 5 (focus on non-intimate partner violence), that came up in four out of five articles, as well as the opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording), that came up in two out of four articles.

The opposite of frame 5 (focus on non-intimate partner violence) could for example be seen with the presence of the following sentences: “reports of domestic violence have risen rapidly” (EPP Group in the European Parliament, December 17, 2020), “we will no longer accept women feeling unsafe at home” (EPP Group in the European Parliament, March 8, 2022), “women murdered by an intimate partner or family member” (EPP Group in the European Parliament, June 21, 2023), “Home should be a safe space, but sadly, it is not for many women who become victims to the very people who should care for them” (EPP Group in the European Parliament, February 15, 2024). While the opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording) could be seen in the following sentences: “to address violence and its root causes at all levels” (EPP Group in the European Parliament, December 17, 2020), “Education and information from the youngest ages is the only way we can eradicate these brutal crimes” ((EPP Group in the European Parliament, March 8, 2022).

One surprising finding is that one out of the five articles used two existing frames of the conceptual framework instead of relying on opposite frames. This could be seen through the use of frame 1 (insiders vs. outsiders’ frame): “While national laws will continue to be decided by national parliaments, with violence against women we are arguing that it’s time for the EU to set a common minimum standard, like we have done in case of terrorism.” , as well as frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording): “Are women safe in Europe”, “We want to correct this disgraceful anomaly” (EPP Group in the European Parliament, April 26, 2024).

### S&D Group in the European Parliament

The second political group of the European Parliament that will be analyzed is the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, also known as the S&D Group. This group is considered as being on the center-left of the political spectrum as well as being pro-European. The Group of the Socialists and Democrats states that its priorities are the following: social progress, the Quality Work Action Program, climate justice, security, fair taxation, decent housing for all, the Health First Act, inclusive migration, the protection of human rights as well as the development of a feminist Europe (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

Gender equality features quite prominently in the S&D Group’s website, with a page specifically dedicated to gender equality and women’s rights, showing that the group attaches high importance to this policy area (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). The gender equality and women’s rights page includes a section on violence against women, with other parts of the page touching upon gender-based violence too (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). The page puts emphasis on the fact that “in Europe, seven women are killed every day by their

partners or family members” (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). It also highlights human trafficking, coercive sex as rape, and sexual harassment (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). On the latter point it report that 32% of all victims of sexual harassment in the EU said the perpetrator was a superior, colleague or customer (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

For the S&D Group, I decided to analyze the following documents: two position papers, one press release, one event video and one opinion piece. It is interesting to note that the web page and the five documents that I have analyzed all take the opposite approach to the frames of the conceptual framework. The opposite frameworks that emerged from the analysis were in particular: frame 3 (attribution of responsibility to the victim), frame 5 (focus on non-intimate partner violence), frame 6 (episodic frame and sensationalist wording) and frame 7 (women as a homogenous group).

The only frame from the conceptual framework that could be identified was frame 4 (women as passive victims) as seen by the use of terms such “women and girls”, which was found in three out of the five publications, which could potentially indicate an infantilization of the victims (S&D Group in the European Parliament, April 14, 2020; S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2021; S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2023). However, this seems to be in contradictions with other wording used in the gender equality and women’s rights web page that emphasize that “50,000 women currently serve in the Ukrainian military, many of whom are involved in combat operations. These women are brave, powerful, and they prove that women can do anything and everything.” (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

Looking at the opposite frames used, we can note that the opposite of frame 3 (attribution of responsibility to the victim) is present in the gender equality and women’s rights web page, the event video and the opinion piece. For example, the web page includes a video on the #MeToo campaign in which the President of the S&D Group, MEP Iratxe García Pérez, accuses the habit of attributing co-responsibility to victims due to their provocative dressings or attitudes (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.; S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2023; S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 29, 2023).

The opposite of frame 5 (focus on non-intimate partner violence) is visible in the web site and the five documents, which all highlight that violence is very often perpetrated by an intimate partner, family member or friend. For example, the press release states that “38% of all femicides are committed by intimate partners” (S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2021) while the event video and the opinion piece report that rape is often perpetrated by a friend or partner (S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2023; S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 29, 2023). Another example is from the event video and opinion piece, which include the testimonial of a victim who found it difficult and humiliating to demonstrate that she had been raped by a friend (S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2023; S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 29, 2023).

The web page and the documents analyzed generally take an approach opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and sensationalist wording), as they refer to gender-based violence as being a widespread problem and even define it as a “pandemic” (S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2023). For example, the press release states, “millions of women suffer in Europe

every single day, experiencing physical or sexual violence, often by partners or ex-partners” (S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2021), while the opinion piece on gender equality and women’s rights says that “violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread violations of fundamental rights” (S&D Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2023).

As for frame 7 (women as a homogenous group), the opposite can be found in the position paper on the pandemic, which calls for support services to be made available for migrant and homeless women too, thus differentiating women and not considering them as a homogenous group (S&D Group in the European Parliament, April 14, 2020). The web page also refers to different groups, mentioning the LGBTQI+ community and calling for ‘harmful gender stereotyping and norms’ and violence prevention to become part of the educational programs at school (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

### Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament

The third political group of the European Parliament that will be analyzed is the Renew Europe Group, previously known as the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Group in the European Parliament (ALDE). This political group can be considered as being liberal and pro-European. Among the priorities of the Group are the following: defense, competitiveness, the safeguarding of European values, human rights, the protection of farmers’ interests, the implementation of green and digital rules, engaging youth through education and culture as well as handling migration properly and humanely (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). It can be noted that the fight for gender equality and the defense of women’s right is absent in the list of priorities of the Renew Europe Group.

When it comes to addressing the issue of gender-based violence more specifically, the Renew Europe Group neither has a webpage that solely addresses the topic of gender-based violence, nor does it have a webpage that addresses gender equality as a single topic. Instead, the topic of gender equality is addressed in a section titled “Our fight to respond to societal and health challenges”, in which the topic of gender-based violence is not addressed once. The page focuses instead on the gender pay gap as well as the support for empowered leadership and diversity in companies governance bodies (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

When it comes to the analysis of the publications on the topic of gender-based violence by the Renew Europe Group, I will more specifically focus on the following types of publications: four news articles as well as one event video, that were all retrieved from the main website of the Renew Europe Group. After the analysis of the publications, it was possible to note that the frame that appeared the most often was frame 4 (women as passive victims), which appeared in two out five publications. On the other hand, the opposite frames that appeared the most were the opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording) as well as the opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group).

Frame 4 (women as passive victims) could be perceived by the repeated use of the term “women and girls”, which was used on multiple occasions throughout the same publications (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2020; Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, November 29, 2021). The opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and

use of sensationalist wording) on the other hand could be perceived by the use of the following terms: “Our group is asking for a Directive that establishes preventive measures to combat the root causes of gender-based cyber violence, with a particular focus on education and awareness-raising, and actions to enhance the protection and support of victims” (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, November 29, 2021), “besides legislation, the fight against gender-based violence requires societal change in the perception and acceptance of violence. Violence against women and domestic violence is still a too common phenomenon, and often being trivialized.” (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, June 28, 2023). The opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group) could be perceived by the following wording: “...who experience multiple forms of discrimination on top of gender-based violence and develop intersecting measures to counter this. Ending violence against women and girls must include all women and their differing realities. That intersecting approach must become a priority across our institutions.” (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2020), “Unfortunately, more and more active women are facing this form of violence, not only politicians, but also journalists, high-ranking civil servants and human rights activists.” (Renew Europe Group in the European Parliament, June 28, 2023).

#### Group of the Greens/EFA in the European Parliament

The fourth political group of the European Parliament that will be analyzed is the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, also known as the Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament. This political group can be placed on the center-left/left of the political spectrum and is known for its belief in green politics, regionalism and progressivism. Among the priorities of the Group are the following: fight climate change and protect biodiversity, make our society fair and equal, protect democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, make the EU an open and inclusive society, putting the digital revolution at the service of people, making the EU a changemaker in the world and making a feminist EU (The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, n.d.).

When it comes to addressing the issue of gender-based violence more specifically, The Greens/EFA Group have a webpage specifically dedicated to the issue, titled “Fighting for the end of gender-based violence” (The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, n.d.). The webpage presents the following statement: “We all want to feel safe. To wear whatever we want without getting attacked.”, which can be linked to the opposite of frame 3 (attribution of responsibility to the victim) (The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, n.d.). Moreover, it can be noted that the opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording) is also present on this webpage, as seen through the following statement by the Group: “We want to put an end to this systematic form of violence” (The Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, n.d.). The opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group) can also be noted through the presence of a graphical representation of the LGBTIQ+ flag on top of the webpage (The Greens/EFA Group on the European Parliament, n.d.).

When it comes to the analysis of the publications on the topic of gender-based violence by the Group of The Greens/EFA, I decided to focus my attention on the following types of publications: two opinion articles, two videos and one press release. An interesting finding is the fact that the most present opposite frames appearing in the publications of the Group were the two following:

the opposite of frame 3 (attribution of responsibility to the victim) as well as the opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group), which both appeared in three out of the five publications. The opposite of frame 3 (attribution of responsibility to the victim) can be perceived through the following sentences: “What would you do in a world without violence? In a world without violence, I would post on social media whatever I want without being afraid of hateful comments or threats” “I would walk alone at night without fearing for my life” “I would wear whatever I feel like” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, March 15, 2021), “Only yes means yes!” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, April 7, 2022; The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, July 14, 2023).

The opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group) could be seen through the following text extracts: “gender-based cyber violence is not a new phenomenon it continues the cycle of violence that women, girls and gender diverse people face every day in every country in the EU. The EU urgently needs an inclusive and comprehensive directive to prevent and combat gender-based violence” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, April 22, 2021), “women and LGBTQI+ people have a right to be safe online”, “There is no one-size-fits-all solution to gender-based violence. We all experience GBV differently-based on factors like class, race, ability, age, religion, gender expression, gender identity and sex characteristics. These factors overlap, making everyone’s oppression and risk of violence unique” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, April 7, 2022), “Gender-based violence may affect people who do not identify themselves as women”, “Gender-based violence, including violence against women, involves all forms of violence that disproportionately affect women and marginalized communities” “Intersex genital mutilation is a violation of human rights and should be a crime in the EU”, “No law against gender-based violence without intersectionality” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, July 14, 2023).

Finally, the opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording) could be identified in two out of the five publications with the following statements: “The law is urgently needed. It will impact all of us”, “We have to tackle the problem at the root” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, April 7, 2022), “For the Greens/EFA, it is of high importance that we tackle the root causes of gender-based violence. We will continue to promote institutional and structural change to achieve a European Union free of all forms of gender-based violence” (The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, July 14, 2023).

### ECR Group in the European Parliament

The fifth political group of the European Parliament that will be analyzed is the Group of the European Conservatives and Reformists, also known as the ECR Group in the European Parliament. This group is a right leaning political group, composed of national parties from the center right to the far right. As its name indicates, this is a conservative group built on traditional values including national sovereignty, family values, and individual liberty (ECR Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). Its position on the EU is one of soft Euroscepticism, with the group advocating for the respect of national sovereignty and the decentralization of power from the EU to the national level (ECR Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). In this respect, the group is critical of the current EU immigration policy and calls for greater border security and control of immigration (ECR Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

Gender equality does not feature amongst the ECR's policy priorities, and the Group does not appear to have a clear and common position on the topic (ECR Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). However, the ECR has a Family and Life Policy Group which seems to put gender equality policy in opposition with the family values, with the policy group's web page stating that "ideologies, such as gender ideology, deny biological and social reality and undermine citizens' identities. Their mistaken ideas about liberty and dignity pit men against women, reducing their relationship to a bitter power struggle. This particularly affects women, families and life itself." (ECR Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

In the case of the ECR Group, finding specific publications on gender-based violence has proved to be particularly difficult. In addition to the web site, I decided to analyze four news articles and one policy paper. It is interesting to note that all the papers analyzed use at least one frame from the conceptual framework and that no opposite frames could be identified.

Frame 2 (gender-based violence as a public health issue) can be seen in the news articles by MEP Assita Kanko titled "We are determined to put an end to Female Genital Mutilation" and "New EU Directive must better protect women against female genital mutilation" (ECR Group in the European Parliament, February 12, 2020; ECR Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024), as well as in the news article "International community cannot remain indifferent to attempts to intimidate girls and women in Iran" (ECR Group in the European Parliament, March 16, 2023). The focus in these articles is put on female genital mutilation (FGM), in the first two (ECR Group in the European Parliament, February 12, 2020; ECR Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024), and on poisoning in the third (ECR Group in the European Parliament, March 16, 2023). It is interesting to note that the articles do not refer to gender-based violence or violence against women and exclusively mentions "female genital mutilation" or "poisoning" without touching upon other aspects of gender-based violence.

In a separate statement, in a news article on "ECR Group to bring together experts on EU-Africa relations", MEP Assita Kanko elaborates on the impact of COVID-19 saying "In particular, the EU must support women who are put at even greater risk of domestic violence, inequality and economic hardship due to the pandemic. For so many women and girls around the world and in Africa, COVID has brought greater risk, instability and harm into their lives. It is essential that we do not lose the momentum in the fight against Female Genital Mutilation, human rights and child marriage." (ECR Group in the European Parliament, April 20, 2021). In addition to frame 2 (gender-based violence as a public health issue), with the reference to "Female Genital Mutilation", we can also find elements of other frames. Frame 4 (women as passive victim) can be found through the use of the terms "women and girls" and "child marriage", which can be found in four out of the five publications (ECR Group in the European Parliament, February 12, 2020; ECR Group in the European Parliament, April 20, 2021; ECR Group in the European Parliament, March 16, 2023; ECR Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024).

Frame 7 (women as a homogenous group) is reflected in the general reference to women "around the world and in Africa" which gives the impression of a homogenous group lacking specific characteristics (ECR Group in the European Parliament, April 20, 2021). Finally, the use of frame 1 (insiders vs. outsiders' frame) can be found in the reference to "forced veiling of women" in the news article on "International community cannot remain indifferent to attempts to intimidate girls and women in Iran" and in the wording "the ECR also initiated actions supporting

women's rights, urging the EU to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terror group" in the report on the group's achievements 2019-2024 (ECR Group in the European Parliament, March 16, 2023).

### Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament

The sixth political group of the European Parliament that will be analyzed is the Identity and Democracy Group (I&D) in the European Parliament. This group is far-right leaning and well-known for its Eurosceptic and nationalist ideologies. Their official website highlights the following priorities for the Group: tackling the EU's democratic deficit through greater involvement of national parliaments in EU decision-making; opposing uncontrolled mass immigration; increasing EU's border protection; defending national sovereignty; opposing a Eurozone budget and direct EU taxes (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). Neither gender-based violence nor gender equality are mentioned in the list of priorities and the group's website does not include any page specifically dedicated to gender equality, gender-based violence or women's rights.

It has proved very difficult to find publications by the Identity and Democracy Group covering gender-based violence. Therefore, for my analysis I picked up three European Parliament plenary booklets and two press releases only partially, or indirectly, covering the topic of gender-based violence. The analysis of these publications shows in particular the use of three frames from the conceptual framework, namely: frame 1 (insiders vs. outsiders' frame), frame 6 (episodic frame and sensationalist wording), and frame 5 (focus on non-intimate partner violence).

Frame 1 (insiders vs. outsiders' frame) is reflected to different degrees in all publications, which all include words such as "Iran", "Afghanistan", "Islam", "Muslim", "Immigrants" or "Refugees". This is illustrated by sentences such as the followings: "I&D calls on all EU Member States and other European nations to safeguard their borders against a new massive inflow of refugees", (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, August 17, 2021) or "the European Union is helping to promote this same Islamic veil" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, October 6, 2022) or "the Europe of Brussels is drifting towards total submission to radical Islam" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, October 6, 2022) or "thousands of young women persecuted in Muslim countries" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, September 14, 2023).

As for frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording), its use can be noticed in different publications which make use of provocative titles such as: "Islamic veil: contested in Iran, promoted by the European Union" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, October 6, 2022), "Iran: the repression continues!" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, September 14, 2023), "Stop accession negotiations with Turkey" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, September 14, 2023), "I&D Group undemocratically excluded from signing Iran resolution" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, October 6, 2022). All references to violence against women found in the papers are related to totalitarian regimes or Islamism. For example, one of the reports refers to "thousands of young women persecuted in Muslim countries by the terrible morality police and therefore the dress police" and to "obscurantism and Islamic totalitarianism" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, September 14, 2023). All the previously mentioned

publications also refer to frame 1 (insiders vs. outsiders' frame) as they portray violence against women as being a faraway problem that is not inherent to the EU and for its portrayal of the issue as being of a cultural nature. The lack of reference to gender-based violence often being perpetrated by intimate partners, or family members, is an illustration of the use of frame 5 (focus on non-intimate partner violence).

It is interesting to note the reference to the LGBTQI+ community in one of the reports analyzed (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, October 6, 2022). While at first glance this reference could show the use of the opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group), a closer look at the wording used raises questions about this framing. Indeed, the report says: "The EU's claim that there would be LGBT-free zones in Poland is pure fiction. The truth is that several Polish local authorities have committed themselves to the 'Municipal Charter on the Rights of Families', which stands against the 'demoralization' of childrearing and where the 'LGBT' abbreviation is not even mentioned. Another example is the allegations that the Hungarian Child Protection Act discriminates against sexual minorities. But the fact is that it only aims to push back the influence of LGBT propaganda, which is the good right of the Hungarians" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, April 7, 2022).

Another interesting finding is the presentation of Iranian women as courageous in one of the reports which states "As a sign of protest and even revolt, in small groups in the streets of some cities, some courageous women appear on social networks cutting their hair, burning their Islamic veils, or tearing it off and holding it up, arms extended" (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, October 6, 2022). This quote, alongside the statement that "Iranian women are risking their lives to fight for liberation", seem to indicate the use of the opposite of frame 4 (women as passive victims) (Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, October 6, 2022).

### The Left Group in the European Parliament

Finally, the seventh and last political group that will be analyzed is the Left Group in the European Parliament together with the European United Left and the Nordic Green Left (The GUE/NGL), also known together as the Left Group in the European Parliament-GUE/NGL. This political group can be placed on the left/far left of the political spectrum and is characterized by its soft euroscepticism. Among its priorities are the following: the protection of workers, economic justice, the environment, feminism, the defense of civil rights and liberties, peace and solidarity, democracy and ethics (The Left Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

When it comes to addressing the issue of gender-based violence more specifically, the Group does not have a specific website tackling the issue directly but instead has a broader website dealing with gender-equality more generally (The Left Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). This website does not have any summaries or short texts explaining the actions the Group has undertaken or its commitment to gender equality but is instead composed of various news articles on the topic (The Left Group in the European Parliament, n.d.). An interesting element is the fact that almost the entirety of the visible articles on the webpage deal with the issue of gender-based violence, showing the importance the Group gives to the issue, which can be seen through the

following titles: “Progress despite challenges: long-awaited rules to tackle gender-based violence agreed”, “From #MeToo to real change-Is the EU combating sexual harassment?”, “The death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women’s rights protesters in Iran” (The Left Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

When it comes to the analysis of the publications on the topic of gender-based violence by the Group of The Left, I decided to focus my attention on the following types of publications: four news articles and one video. The opposite frame that appeared the most often was the opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording), which appeared in three out of the five publications. The opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording) was visible through the use of the following sentences: “The lockdown shed light on an uncomfortable reality that has always been present before our eyes, but became invisible due to its normalization”, “If we really want to overcome patriarchy, today – and every other day – we need to consider violence in all its shades, starting from the type that usually goes unnoticed” (The Left Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2020), “We need to break the normalization of the subordination of women and smash the patriarchy underpinning our political, social and economic system, creating a new equitable and fair world for all genders (The Left Group in the European Parliament, January 1, 2021), “It is a great step forward to get all member states to inform and educate, on all levels of society, about women’s rights and consensual sex, in order to prevent gender-based violence (The Left Group in the European Parliament, February 6, 2024), “Patriarchy harms all of us”, “A feminist world would see an end to toxic masculinity” (The Left Group in the European Parliament, May 8, 2024).

In two instances it was possible to note the presence of the opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group) through the presence of the following sentences: “...This is particularly relevant for those who are oppressed or discriminated against for other reasons, migrant women, for example, or women living in poverty” (The Left Group in the European Parliament, January 1, 2021), “Our fight for justice targets all oppressive systems: patriarchy, racism, (neo)colonialism, classism, capitalism, and heteronormativity. These systems reinforce each other” (The Left Group in the European Parliament, May 8, 2024).

Finally, the presence of two more opposite frames could also be noted. The opposite of frame 1 (insiders vs. outsiders’ frame) could be noted with the following sentence: “All around the world- and Europe is not an exception-women are subordinated, objectified and humiliated (The Left Group in the European Parliament, November 25, 2020). While the opposite of frame 3 (attribution of responsibility to the victim) could be noted through the following sentence: “A world where consent reigns supreme. One that is free of victim-blaming, where perpetrators are held to account and survivors have access to free legal aid, support and healthcare” (Left Group in the European Parliament, May 8, 2024).

## Chapter 7: Conclusion and Reflection

Gender-based violence remains a common and pervasive issue worldwide, that has not only caught the attention of the public, the media and politicians but also of scholars. This can be seen through the fact that the research field of gender-based violence and its framing has considerably expanded over the last few years. However, an area in this field that has been under-researched is the one that specifically focuses on the period of the latest von der Leyen Presidency (2019-2024) and the way the political groups of the European Parliament perceived and framed the issue of gender-based violence. The main objective of this thesis was therefore to see how the seven main political groups of the European Parliament framed the topic of gender-based violence in their publications under the latest von der Leyen Commission. This was done through the formulation of the following research question: “How did the main political groups of the European Parliament frame the topic of gender-based violence under the latest von der Leyen Commission?” and the attempt to answer it consequently.

From the findings presented in the analysis, it is possible to say that overall right wing and extreme right wing political groups such as the ECR and the Identity and Democracy Group are more likely to use the existing frames of the conceptual framework and consequently rely on a stereotypical and sometimes harmful representation of the issue of gender-based violence. Overall, the stereotypical frame that was most commonly used by both of these groups was frame 1 (insiders vs. outsiders’ frame). This could be seen through the culturalization of the issue and by the association of gender-based violence to migration and the danger associated to it. This result is not surprising considering the important focus placed by both of these political groups on the issue of combating migration over the last few years (ECR Group in the European Parliament, n.d.; Identity and Democracy Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

On the other hand, all the other political groups that were analyzed, namely: the EPP, the S&D, Renew Europe, the Greens/EFA and the Left, which can all be considered as being more moderate and left leaning in certain cases, were more likely to adopt the opposite of the existing frames of the conceptual framework. It is for example interesting to note that all five of these political groups importantly relied on the opposite of frame 6 (episodic frame and use of sensationalist wording), meaning that instead of presenting the issue as exceptional and dramatic, they presented it as a thematic and societal problem that needs to be addressed at its root. Another opposite frame that was particularly present and could be found in the publications of four out of these five groups, namely of the S&D, Renew Europe, the Greens/EFA and the Left with the exception of the EPP, was the opposite of frame 7 (women as a homogenous group), meaning that the emphasis by the groups was put on the need for an intersectional perspective when tackling the issue of gender-based violence. The results for this groups are not too surprising overall. In the case of the S&D, the Greens/EFA and the Left, the fight for gender equality figures prominently on their official websites in which, feminism in the EU is stated as one of their priorities (S&D Group in the European Parliament, n.d.; The Greens/EFA Group in the European Parliament, n.d.; The Left Group in the European Parliament, n.d.).

In terms of limitations, the scope of this thesis was particularly wide and ambitious as the goal was to analyze all seven of the main political groups of the European Parliament for a rather long time frame of five years. This means that there was the risk that a number of interesting elements might have been overlooked during the analysis process. Moreover, while searching for

the publications of the groups of the European Parliament, one particular difficulty was the fact that finding specific publications on the topic of gender-based violence or even gender equality more generally proved to be particularly difficult for the groups of the ECR and the I&D as these two groups do not usually address these issues on their respective websites. This led me to decide to limit my number of publications to analyze per political group to five, which incorporated the risk of missing out on interesting elements in the publications of the five other political groups analyzed.

In terms of future research in this specific domain on gender equality, framing and the European Parliament, I believe that it would be particularly interesting to adopt other research methodologies such as interviews in combination to the use of a frame analysis. Future research could for example be conducted by applying the same research question but instead of exclusively relying on a frame analysis conducted on the publication of the political groups, it would prove interesting to interview Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), Accredited Personal Assistants (APAs) as well as other EP employees.

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## Appendix

Table used for the analysis (Chapter 6)/classification of the political groups into frames and opposite of frames

<b>Opposite of frame</b>	<b>Political group(s)</b>	<b>Frame</b>	<b>Political group(s)</b>
<b>Opposite of frame 1</b>  (Insiders vs. Outsiders' frame)	The Left	<b>Frame 1</b>  (Insiders vs. Outsiders' frame)	EPP, ECR, I&D
<b>Opposite of frame 2</b>  (Gender-based violence as a public health issue)	None	<b>Frame 2</b>  (Gender-based violence as a public health issue)	ECR
<b>Opposite of frame 3</b>  (Attribution of responsibility to the victim)	S&D, The Greens/EFA, The Left	<b>Frame 3</b>  (Attribution of responsibility to the victim)	None
<b>Opposite of frame 4</b>  (Women as passive victims)	I&D	<b>Frame 4</b>  (Women as passive victims)	S&D, Renew Europe, ECR
<b>Opposite of frame 5</b>  (Focus on non-intimate partner violence)	EPP, S&D	<b>Frame 5</b>  (Focus on non-intimate partner violence)	I&D
<b>Opposite of frame 6</b>  (Episodic frame and sensationalist wording)	EPP, S&D, Renew Europe, The Greens/EFA, The Left	<b>Frame 6</b>  (Episodic frame and sensationalist wording)	EPP, I&D
<b>Opposite of frame 7</b>  (Women as a homogeneous group)	S&D, Renew Europe, The Greens/EFA, The Left	<b>Frame 7</b>  (Women as a homogeneous group)	ECR