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## **Between support for the Iranian women’s rights movement and opposition to the Istanbul Convention – Analysing discourses on feminist themes by the Identity and Democracy group under the lens of femonationalism**

### **Abstract**

In the ninth legislative period, the Identity and Democracy (ID) Group emerged as a central oppositional force to the European Parliament’s gender equality agenda. While much of the scholarly debate has focused on the group’s mobilisation of anti-gender politics, other facets of the group’s position on feminist themes have remained unexplored. For example, the group was very vocal in its support for the Iranian women’s rights movement following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in 2022. To provide a deeper understanding of the ID group’s discourse on feminist themes, this article draws on Sara Farris’ (2017) concept of femonationalism. By conducting a critical discourse analysis of two cases, the debate on the Iranian women’s rights movement and on the EU’s accession to the Istanbul Convention, this article follows the critical aim of deconstructing the ID Group’s discursive promotion of feminist themes and highlighting its entanglement with anti-emancipatory agendas: the discursive Othering of Muslim and, more generally, non-Western people and cultures.

*Keywords: Femonationalism, Identity and Democracy group, Iranian women’s rights movement, Istanbul Convention*

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## Introduction

Jina Mahsa Amini and the ‘Women, Life, Freedom’ Movement in Iran were awarded the European Parliament’s Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 2023. Solidarity with the movement has been expressed by all seven political groups in the European Parliament throughout the entire political spectrum, including radical right and populist parties. Among them, the Identity and Democracy (ID) group has been very vocal in its support, stating its respect for and solidarity with Iranian women (see e.g., ID Group, 2023a).<sup>1</sup> The ID group’s emphasis on women’s emancipation appears paradoxical at first glance. It has acted as a key player in the promotion of anti-gender policies in the European Parliament, for example in its fight against the European Union (EU)’s ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Berthet, 2022, pp. 690-692; see also ID Group 2023b, 2023c). Similarly, the ID group’s predecessor, the Europe of Nations and Freedom group, voiced its opposition to gender equality in the previous legislative period (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021).

This article turns renewed attention to the group’s discursive engagement with feminist themes and how it can be understood. It shifts the focus away from anti-gender politics, which have already been thoroughly investigated in the literature on gender equality and the European Parliament (Berthet 2022; Kantola & Lombardo 2021; Santos & Geva, 2022), and towards the concept of femonationalism by Sara Farris (2017). Femonationalism points to a convergence between nationalist, neoliberal and feminist actors (see *ibid.*, pp. 6-10). It denotes the former two groups’ “exploitation of feminist themes [...] in anti-Islam (but [...] also anti-immigration) campaigns” (*ibid.*, p. 4) and captures the “stigmatization of Muslim men under the banner of gender equality” (*ibid.*) by feminist actors. While the concept makes extensive theoretical assumptions, this article particularly builds on Farris’ (2017, p. 11; pp. 73-77) conceptualisation of femonationalism as an ideological formation operating discursively and rooted in nationalist We/Other distinctions that are intertwined with racism and sexism. Additionally, this article links to scholarly work on the concept of identity (see Sloopmaeckers, 2020; Wodak & Boukala, 2015) which provides tools to empirically analyse the ID group’s discourse on feminist themes in a way that foregrounds Othering processes. Using these tools, this article conducts critical discourse analysis following Wodak and Boukala (2015), Wodak et al. (2009) and Wodak (2001) of the ID group’s discourse on feminist themes, focusing on the two cases briefly introduced above: the debate on the Iranian women’s rights movement and the debate on the EU’s accession to the Istanbul Convention. Covering the time span between September 2022 and October 2023, this study builds on a variety of qualitative data: a motion for a resolution

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<sup>1</sup> The ID group primarily consisted of members of the German *Alternative für Deutschland* (AFD), the Italian Lega and the French Rassemblement National (see ID group, 2023d). At the time of writing, it had 59 members, forming the 6th largest group in the European Parliament (see *ibid.*).

by the ID group, relevant speeches by ID group members in European Parliament plenary debates and statements released on the ID group's website.<sup>2</sup>

The aim of this article is twofold. First, it follows the critical aim of deconstructing the ID group's discursive support for the Iranian women's rights movement and opposition to the Istanbul Convention. The findings of the empirical analysis reveal that the ID group resorts to Othering discourses in both debates, characterising women's suppression as an inherent characteristic of Islam in the former case and attributing violence against women in Europe to non-Western migrants in the latter. The relevance of this critical endeavour is reinforced by the increasing importance of the European Parliament as a site of EU policymaking and its character as a "unique transnational platform" (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021, p. 566) for reaching out to like-minded voters and connecting with other political parties (ibid.). The ID group's discourses might inform and legitimise anti-Islam and anti-immigration policies at the EU level but also shape discourses on these policies at the national level. Second, this paper centres the European Parliament as a platform for femonationalist politics, which has not yet been extensively studied in the literature.

The article proceeds as follows. Initially, it introduces the theoretical framework of femonationalism. The subsequent section then provides a literature review on existing applications of the concept of femonationalism followed by an outline of the analytical and methodological approach. Afterwards the main findings are presented, engaging with the ID group's discourse on the Iranian women's rights movement and the Istanbul Convention in depth. The article concludes with a discussion of the findings and their empirical and theoretical implications.

## **Theoretical framework: Femonationalism**

The concept of femonationalism was developed by Sara Farris, most prominently in the book *In the Name of Women's Rights. The Rise of Femonationalism* (2017). The term femonationalism denotes the merging of emancipatory projects with non-emancipatory claims and agendas that has recently been observed in Western Europe (see e.g., Farris, 2017, p. 9). It is defined as

"both [] the exploitation of feminist themes by nationalists and neoliberals in anti-Islam (but [...] also anti-immigration) campaigns and [] the participation of certain feminists and femocrats in the stigmatization of Muslim men under the banner of gender equality" (Ibid., p. 4).

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<sup>2</sup> Note that the ID group's website was taken offline following the European elections in 2024 and the dissolution of the group.

Farris (2017, p. 5) identifies three theoretical dimensions of femonationalism: 1) a convergence of nationalist, neoliberal and certain feminist actors, 2) a distinct ideological formation, 3) a political economy grounded in neoliberalism.

As convergence, femonationalism describes the united promotion of feminist themes by nationalists, neoliberals and certain feminists which otherwise pursue separate political agendas (*ibid.*, pp. 10-13). Femonationalism is thus not anchored in a deliberate political project but is (re)produced by different actors in distinct ways. Nonetheless, these actors all harbour one ideology, whether explicitly or implicitly. As an ideological formation, femonationalism builds on We/Other distinctions that are grounded in the assumption of Western supremacy and Western colonial typologies (Farris, 2017, pp. 10-13, 73-77). Drawing on critical race studies, Farris (2017, p. 73) shows how the portrayal of the Other is based on the intersection of sexism and racism resulting in sexed dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Substantially, the representation of the Other distinguishes between men and women, whereby the former are viewed as “oppressors and sexual threats” (*ibid.*, pp. 73f.), whereas the latter are considered “as victims and sexual objects/property” (*ibid.*, p. 74). Similarly, sexism and racism shape the delineation of the Other from the Self when identifying sexism and patriarchy as “the exclusive domains of the (non-western and Muslim) Other” (*ibid.*).

The femonationalist ideology is reproduced discursively but also possesses a certain materiality that is at the centre of the concept’s political-economic claims (*ibid.*, pp. 12f.). Farris (2017) argues that this distinct portrayal of the Other, and the inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics it involves, are linked to the reorganisation of Western European economies, especially the reproductive sphere, under neoliberalism (*ibid.*, Chapter 4). She proposes that non-Western migrant women, constructed as primary victims of patriarchal oppression, are welcomed as a “regular army of labour” (*ibid.*, p. 173) in Western Europe, i.e., as an urgently needed workforce in the care and domestic sector to meet labour force shortages against increasing demand and reduced public services (*ibid.* pp. 124-130, 173-180).<sup>3</sup> While acknowledging the political-economic logic of the femonationalist convergence and its crucial importance for critical analyses, this article focuses on the discursive manifestation of the femonationalist ideology.

Farris’ (2017) theoretical considerations and empirical observations, though a ground-breaking contribution to the debate, are not entirely new. Critiques of Western representations of and the production of knowledge about the Muslim world, including the inherent dynamics of Othering, were fundamentally established in the writings of Edward Said (1979) and his notion of Orientalism. Later, in the early 2000s, the US’ war on terror sparked an academic debate on the appropriation of feminism for racist agendas in the wake of Western imperialist interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Originating in queer theory, Jasbir Puar’s (2007) concept of homonationalism points to the mobilisation of LGBTQI+ rights by nationalists in the US during the war on terror. Young (2003) conceptualises the notion of protective masculinity to grasp how states may take on the (benign) role as internal protectors of citizens’ and, in particular,

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<sup>3</sup> Leaning on and adapting Marx’s notion of migrants as a ‘reserve army of labour’.

women's security against an outside Other, reflecting structures of a patriarchal household in state-citizen relationships (see *ibid.*, pp. 7f.). Looking at the US war on terror in Afghanistan from this perspective, she spotlights how the liberation of Afghan women took centre stage in the US' rhetorical justification of the war, allowing the US to cast itself as a "protector of the world" (*ibid.*, p. 17). Zine (2006) coins the term "gendered Islamophobia" to capture this discrimination of Muslim women, especially how their bodies function as a site for Othering processes. Zine (2006) points out how the politics of race and gender legitimised and shaped imperialist interventions in the early 2000s with the desire to "to repress the Arab Muslim male on the one hand and to 'liberate' Muslim women on the other" (*ibid.*, p. 8). Similar to Farris (2017), Fekete (2006) and Yilmaz (2014) note that feminist actors have increasingly started to share right-wing parties' anti-Muslim and anti-immigration positions following 9/11.

In a more recent contribution, Goetz (2022) explores the ideological confrontation of racism and sexism from the perspective of intersectionality. Intersectionality (see Crenshaw, 1989) is not explicitly mentioned by Farris (2017), a fact which has been the subject of criticism by other scholars (see Möser, 2022). Möser (2022, p. 1551) also criticises Farris' (2017) notion of convergence, arguing that it places too much emphasis on Western feminism and obscures important distinctions between the political projects it includes. These considerations raise important points to weigh in theoretical elaborations of the concept. Nonetheless, rather than centring the conceptual level of convergence and the role of feminists in this constellation, this article primarily uses the analytical framework provided by femonationalism to understand the empirical puzzle at hand, the ID group's discourse on feminist themes, which shall be outlined in the following section.

## **Femonationalism and the ID group**

While there is a growing number of empirical studies building on the concept of femonationalism, they largely focus on different national settings. Farris (2017) bases her conceptual elaborations on case studies from the Netherlands, France and Italy. Other authors have turned to specific facets of the phenomenon, analysing civic integration programmes in Sweden (Bauer et al., 2024), the Muslim face-veil ban in France (Calderaro, 2022), the Italian Fratelli d'Italia and femonationalism's relation to anti-gender backlash (Colella, 2021), the Iranian diaspora in Belgium (Rahbari, 2021), or the ban of female genital mutilation and populist politics in Switzerland (Bader & Mottier, 2020). In her introduction, Farris (2017, pp. 1f) points to the electoral success of right-wing parties in the 2014 European elections, noting "the[ir] invocation of gender equality (and occasionally LGBTQI+ rights) within an otherwise xenophobic rhetoric" (*ibid.*, p. 1). While her remark suggests that these parties' electoral success introduces femonationalist discourses into the European Parliament and its approach to gender equality and women's rights, Farris (2017) does not engage in an analysis of these processes in her book. Turning to the European Parliament as a platform for

femonationalist politics, this article thus takes a novel approach to the study of femonationalism (see also Greiwe, 2025).

The fruitfulness of studying the European Parliament also lies in the institution's increasing relevance in EU policymaking and its function as a "unique transnational platform" (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021, p. 566) for politics. It is further reinforced by the institution's self-representation as a "promoter of gender equality" (see van der Vleuten, 2019, p. 35) which has been challenged in academia. The opposition articulated by radical right populist parties has received specific attention in this literature (Kantola & Lombardo, 2021), as well as the rising influence of anti-gender politics (Santos & Geva, 2022; Berthet, 2022).<sup>4</sup> The ID group emerges as a particularly relevant player acting as a driving force behind the opposition to gender equality in the European Parliament during the 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary term (Kantola, 2022, pp. 238-240; Elomäki & Ahrens, 2022, pp. 331-333). In her comprehensive analysis of the discursive contestation of the Istanbul Convention in the European Parliament, Berthet (2022) points to the contradiction that is also identified in this article's introduction. The ID group – but also other political groups – voice their support for women's rights and the need to combat violence against women (ibid., p. 691) while rejecting the Convention on the grounds that it introduces a "gender ideology" (ibid. pp. 690-692). While the ID group's engagement in anti-gender politics has already been studied, this article provides an additional perspective on the group's continuous support for women's rights by introducing insights from the concept of femonationalism. Moreover, while existing studies tend to provide an overview of all political groups or the entire opposition to gender equality in the European Parliament, its focus on the ID group allows for more detailed assessments of one key player forming this opposition.

## **Research design**

In order to investigate the question of how the ID group discursively engages with feminist themes, a qualitative research design was chosen. Centring two different cases, the Iranian women's rights movement and the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention, the analysis engaged in an in-depth study of the ID group's discourse on feminist themes. The following section justifies this case selection and further presents the analytical and methodological approach taken.

### *Case selection*

The decision to include two different debates on feminist themes in the analysis was made to assess potential femonationalist patterns in the ID group's discourse beyond a singular case. The cases concern slightly distinct but connected feminist themes. The case of the Iranian women's rights movement revolves around women's freedom in the

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of anti-gender politics more generally, see for example Kováts (2017) and Kuhar and Paternotte (2018).

broader sense, while the debate on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention focuses on violence against women, or rather gender-based violence.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, the cases show important differences, as the ID group expresses its support for the Iranian women's rights movement but rejects the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention. Against this backdrop, the primary reason for examining the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement was that it does not directly concern the concept of 'gender', so that the group's discourse on feminist themes beyond their opposition to the notion of 'gender' can be explored. Another important characteristic is that it centres the situation of non-Western women, thus allowing for the specific study of the representation of Muslim/non-Western women in the ID group's discourse, the centrality of which is highlighted in femonationalism.

However, due to the strong presence of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its suppression of Iranian, i.e., Muslim/non-Western women in the debate, it can be expected to provide a particularly fertile ground for the linkage of feminist positions with generalising anti-Islam rhetoric. Considering that other debates on feminist themes are potentially less prone to include anti-Islam stances, the paper includes a second case in the analysis, which serves as a 'control case' – although in a qualitative, interpretative methodological framework. The debate leading to the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention in June 2023 is a well-suited case, as it was discussed in a similar time period and concerns violence against women in general, a feminist theme neither closely related to the religion of Islam nor to migration per se. Analysing the ID group's discourse on the Istanbul Convention thus provides a better contextualisation of the group's positions on feminist themes and its potential invocation of femonationalist discourses in diverse contexts (see Gerring, 2016, pp. 58-62 for similar considerations on descriptive research designs). Together, both cases capture empirical variations relevant for femonationalism: gender inequalities in Europe versus gender inequalities in a Muslim/non-Western country, suppression of women in general versus suppression of Muslim/non-Western women in particular. Finally, as the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention took place in a similar time frame as the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement, the intervening effect of other contextual factors (such as electoral periods) can be mitigated.

More generally, the relevance of analysing femonationalism in the European Parliament, and thus beyond the national level, emerges from the following considerations. The promotion of values such as equality between women and men but also human rights and democracy lies at the core of the EU's self-conception (see Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union). The aspiration to promote these values worldwide in its external relations has prominently been captured in concepts such as "Normative Power Europe" (see Manners, 2002) in academia. In taking on this global role, the

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<sup>5</sup> Note that the term 'gender-based violence' is broader than 'violence against women' and goes beyond a binary gender order (see Council of Europe, n.d.). The Istanbul Convention explicitly refers to violence against women as a form of gender-based violence.

European Parliament is often seen as the strongest champion of these values among EU institutions (see Feliu & Serra, 2015).

### *Operationalisation*

Analysing femonationalism in the ID group's position on feminist themes, this article focuses on the discursive Othering processes highlighted by Farris (2017). In studies of the EU and Europe, Othering has often been discussed in relation to the notion of 'identity' rather than nationalism (see e.g., Slootmaeckers, 2020; Wodak & Boukala, 2015). Regarding gender equality, Kulpa (2014), for example, shows how Othering processes in the European Parliament's resolutions construct Central and Eastern European countries as the homophobic Other of the West/Europe. Slootmaeckers (2020) demonstrates how the promotion of LGBTQI+ equality in the EU's enlargement policy serves EU identity construction in different forms of Othering. Reminiscent of the We/Other distinctions informing nationalism (see Farris, 2017), scholarly work on the notion of identity has thus stressed its relational character. Concretely, this work posits that the Self is always defined in relation to an Other (Slootmaeckers, 2020, pp. 348-351), turning the invocation of sameness and distinctiveness into core features of identity building (Wodak & Boukala, 2015, p. 88).

The paper incorporates the concept of Othering in the analytical framework in order to take an inductive, bottom-up approach in the analysis of the ID group's discursive position on the Iranian women's rights movement and the Istanbul Convention. Instead of applying theoretically pre-defined categories of femonationalism, the paper uses open categories that grasp all representations of Self/Other relationships featuring in the ID group's discourse. These representations were first considered in relation to femonationalism in the ensuing discussion. In this way, a potential confirmation bias was mitigated.

Building on Slootmaeckers (2020, pp. 348-351) and Wodak and Boukala (2015, pp. 88f., 93f.), the paper proposes that Othering processes have three different discursive dimensions (see Table 1):

- 1) *Definition of the Self and of the Other*, i.e. what subjects belong to the Self and the Other – which can involve spatial references to places.
- 2) *Characterisations of the Self and the Other*, i.e. what traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to the mentioned subjects and places.
- 3) *Representations of the relationship between the Self and the Other*, i.e. how is the relation between different mentioned subjects and places portrayed?

While identity constructions are understood as inherently relational (see above), the third dimension served to capture interactive dynamics between different actors in a

narrower sense (e.g. repression of, solidarity with, condemnation of, protest against, threat to). This complemented the analysis of the characterisation of subjects and places (Dimension 2, e.g. as repressive, courageous, timid, democratic, authoritarian) with an interactive perspective.<sup>6</sup>

**Table 1.** Operationalisation: Othering

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>1) Definition of the Self and of the Other</b>	Subjects/Places	References to subjects and places
<b>2) Characterisation of the Self and of the Other</b>	Attributions	Attribution of traits, characteristics, qualities and features to the subjects and places
<b>3) Representations of the relationship between the Self and the Other</b>	Relations	Portrayal of the relation between different subjects and places

## *Methods*

The analysis builds on a variety of different primary sources including press releases, speeches in plenary debates and a motion for a resolution authored by ID group members (see Appendix A). The material covers between 16 September 2022, the day of Jina Mahsa Amini's death, and 31 October 2023, when the Iranian women's rights movement was awarded the Sakharov prize. The paper's data selection process proceeded as follows. The debate speeches were derived from the European Parliament's document register of plenary sessions' verbatim reports. All entries including the keyword "Iran" were scanned, and all speeches by ID group members with explicit references to the situation of women in Iran were added to the data material. Moreover, the "Motion for a Resolution on the death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's right protesters in Iran" was included, authored by ID group members. The speeches and the motion were complemented by press releases on the Iranian women's rights movement from the news section of the ID group's website (in all languages) during the same time period. The data material comprised in total 28 sources: the "Motion for a Resolution on the death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's right protesters in Iran", 22 speeches from European Parliament plenary debates by different ID group members, and five press releases from the ID group's website. The same procedure was applied for the data material covering the debate on the Istanbul Convention; "Istanbul Convention" was chosen as the keyword for the search process.

<sup>6</sup> Note that this distinction is purely analytical, and the dimensions are closely connected in empirical terms.

The data selection process for this case study resulted in 15 primary sources: 13 speeches in plenary debates and two press releases. Given that the majority of speeches were given in the ID group members' respective native languages, they were translated into English using DeepL.

Analysing the three dimensions of Othering empirically, the paper conducted a critical discourse analysis departing from an understanding of discourses "as linguistic social practices [which] can be seen as constituting non-discursive and discursive social practices and, at the same time, as being constituted by them" (Wodak, 2001, p. 66). Discursive practices are considered central to the constitution of identities (Wodak et al., 2009, pp. 29f.) and to the constitution of femonationalism as an ideological formation (Farris, 2017, p. 12f.). Critical discourse analysis follows the aim of "unmask[ing] ideologically permeated and often obscured structures of power, political control, and dominance, as well as strategies of discriminatory inclusion and exclusion in language use" (Wodak et al., 2009, p. 8). It thus appeared as a particularly suitable method to analyse Othering processes in this paper. Concretely, the analysis proceeded as follows: in a first coding round, all examples of subjects and places (Dimension 1) for both cases were coded and collected in a list. Based on that list, 48 subjects and places were defined as inductively developed subcodes, e.g., *the Iranian state*, *Iranian women*, *migrant men*, *EU institutions* (see Appendix B for the comprehensive list). The analysis proceeded with a second round of coding during which I identified attributions (Dimension 2) of the subjects and places defined as well as relationships (Dimension 3) between them (see Appendix C for an example). For example, the paper coded a characterisation of the relationship between the Iranian women and the Iranian state as *relationship(Iranian women-Iranian state)*. These coded passages were then summarised and interpreted.

The following sections present the prevailing representations of the Self, the Other and Self/Other relations in the ID group's discourse, which are illustrated with concrete examples. The first part is devoted to the case of the Iranian women's rights movement, which is overall marked by the ID group's supportive stance towards the feminist issue of women's freedom. The second part turns to the case of the Istanbul Convention, in which the ID group acts as an oppositional force to the EU's accession in the European Parliament.

## **The ID group's discursive support for the Iranian women's rights movement**

The debate on the Iranian women's rights movement in the European Parliament was triggered by the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in September 2022 following her arrest by the Iranian morality police. Her death resulted in nationwide protests against the Iranian regime under the slogan "Women. Life. Freedom". The ID group's discourse on the Iranian women's rights movement establishes complex relations between different

subjects and places. Still, it draws distinct boundaries between the Self and the Other that are presented in the following subsections.

### *Defending Europe and European values against Islam: women's rights and democracy*

The ID group presents the freedom of women as a European and universal value that should be promoted. Europe is considered as a “long civilisation we have inherited [that] guarantees equality between men and women and offers freedom unequalled in space and time” (MEP Dominique Bilde, 17 January 2023).<sup>7</sup> Equality between men and women is considered as something that is already realised, and the degree of its realisation is deemed to be particular to Europe. Beyond women's rights, the ID group stresses democracy and freedom as European characteristics (see MEP Anders Vistisen, 12 September 2023; MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 12 September 2023) – and thus part of the Self-conception.

In turn, critique is directed at the Iranian state, whose repression of women frequently pointed out (see e.g., ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 11 November 2022, 15 December 2022). Several ID group members link the regime's violent repression to its character as an authoritarian dictatorship (MEP Silvia Sardone, 15 March 2023; ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 11 November 2022, 19 October 2023) that not only represses women but also shows a general disrespect for the rule of law, democratic rights and freedoms (MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 4 October 2022; MEP Teuvo Hakkarainen, 4 October 2022). Similarly, it is highlighted that not only women but Iranian citizens in general and Christian minorities in particular also suffer from persecution in the Iranian state (ID group, motion for a resolution, 4 October 2022; MEP Anna Bonfrisco, 4 October 2022; MEP Marco Campomenosi, 12 September 2023). Furthermore, as the ID group argues, the oppression of women in Iran results from the way in which the Iranian regime interprets the role of women in Islam. For example, one ID group member describes the Iranian state's conception of women as “with the Islamic veil, submissive, uneducated, an inferior being” (MEP Silvia Sardone, 15 March 2023).<sup>8</sup> These Other representations mark a clear contrast to the imagination of Europe as a free, democratic and gender-equal continent. Still, the criticism voiced in these examples is aimed against the Iranian regime specifically.

Other examples, however, show how the ID group tends to combine its critique against the Iranian regime with representations of a more abstract Muslim Other rejecting the religion of Islam and Muslim culture as such. The ID group's motion for a resolution condemning Jina Mahsa Amini's death state that “the suppression of women is an undeniable characteristic of Islam” (ID group, motion for a resolution, 4 October 2022). Similar claims are made by single group members, who posit that “Islam and its concept

<sup>7</sup> “La longue civilisation dont nous héritons garantit l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes et offre une liberté inégalée dans l'espace et dans le temps”.

<sup>8</sup> “[...] con il velo islamico, sottomessa, senza istruzione, un essere inferiore”.

of womanhood are not going anywhere” (MEP Teuvo Hakkarainen, 4 October 2022) or refer to the religion of Islam as a “misogynistic, misanthropic and totalitarian ideology” (MEP Christine Anderson, 22 November 2022).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the ID group frequently invokes the Islamic veil as a concrete site for the struggle for women’s equality. It is presented as “a symbol of women’s subjugation” (MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 4 October 2022) which is justified with the Iranian women’s protests against it (MEP Silvia Sardone, 19 October 2022; MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 12 September 2023; MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 12 September 2023).<sup>10</sup> As these examples demonstrate, anti-Islamic views are not exceptions or the opinions of individual members, but characterise the discourse of the entire ID group. Still, there are a few other voices. ID group member Anna Bonfrisco, for example, remarks that the rule of the Iranian regime is only one interpretation of the religion: “The Iran proposed by the ayatollah is only steeped in murderous cynicism and is a blasphemy of Islam itself” (MEP Anna Bonfrisco, 22 November 2022).<sup>11</sup>

When looking at the representation of Self/Other relationships, however, the centrality of Islam in the ID group’s discursive Othering processes becomes even more evident. The portrayal of the relationship between the Self and the Other focuses on characterising Islam as a threat to women’s rights in Europe and to European values, such as democracy and freedom. The ID group, for example, points to the continuing repression of Muslim women in Europe (MEP Dominique Bilde, 17 January 2023; MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 12 September 2023). It highlights attempts by the Iranian regime and Muslim organisations to restrict the freedom of expression in individual member states (MEP Anders Vistisen, 12 September 2023) and links the immigration of Muslim people to Europe to an increase in terrorist attacks (MEP Teuvo Hakkarainen, 4 October 2022). The ID group, hence, argues that Europe needs to be protected against the Muslim Other (MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022; MEP Silvia Sardone, 22 November 2022; MEP Dominique Bilde, 17 January 2023). As one member puts it, claiming a position of European superiority with regard to women’s rights, European values need to be defended “so that what happens today in a seemingly distant country is not a dramatic anticipation of our future” (MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022).<sup>12</sup> This position of superiority is also conveyed in the assessment that the Iranian state and Muslim countries in general have failed to adopt European values and the Western model of democracy. As one ID group member emphasises, “[t]he export of Western democracy to Islamic countries has not succeeded so far either” (MEP Teuvo Hakkarainen, 4 October 2022).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> “Islam ja sen naiskäsitys eivät katoa mihinkään”.

<sup>10</sup> “[...] symbole de l’asservissement de la femme”.

<sup>11</sup> “L’Iran proposto dall’ayatollah è solo intriso di cinismo assassino ed è una blasfemia dell’islam stesso.”

<sup>12</sup> “[...] perché quello che accade oggi in un paese apparentemente lontano non sia la drammatica anticipazione del nostro futuro”.

<sup>13</sup> “Länsimaisen demokratian vienti islamilaisiin maihin ei ole onnistunut tähänkään asti”.

### *Striving for European values: the Iranian women's rights movement*

The Iranian women's rights movement, and the Iranian people in general, are standing in-between in this relationship, as they are considered part of the Other geographically but strive for the values that form the core of the ID group's Self-representation. Iranian women are occasionally presented as victims of the Iranian regime (MEP Simona Baldassarre, 4 October 2022; ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 19 October 2023), but the ID group predominantly highlights their courage, braveness and boldness (see e.g., MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 4 October 2022; MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022; MEP Silvia Sardone, 2023; ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 15 December 2022, 19 October 2023). Their fight for freedom is understood as the desire to adopt European values (see MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022) and as a different version of the country of Iran "as a civilisation [...] that did not always confine women" (MEP Dominique Bilde, 17 January 2023).<sup>14</sup> The use of the term "civilisation" here strongly invokes a sense of sameness between the ID group's imagination of Europe (see above) and the Iranian women's rights movement's vision for Iran.

Consequently, the representation of the relation between the Iranian women's rights movement and the European Self diverges from representations of Islam. The ID group strongly expresses its solidarity with and respect for Iranian women (see e.g. ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 11 November 2022, 15 December 2022, 19 October 2023) and its care for Iranian refugees in Europe (see e.g., MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022). Their protests are regarded as closely connected with their own fight for freedom (ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 11 November 2022, 15 December 2022; MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022; MEP Anna Bonfrisco, 22 November 2022) and, hence, the movement is viewed as a "role model" (ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 15 December 2022) in this common project.<sup>15</sup> This support is expressed not only verbally. The ID group drafted a motion for a resolution condemning the death of Jina Mahsa Amini (see ID group, motion for a resolution, 4 October 2022) and awarded the Iranian women with its newly invented "Women Fighting for Freedom" prize (ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 11 November 2022, 15 December 2022, 19 October 2023). In the same vein, it expresses its support for the European Parliament's decision to award the Sakharov Prize to the Iranian women's rights movement (ID group/MEP Christine Anderson, 19 October 2023).

### *The ambiguous role of the EU*

The position of the EU in relation to the Self and the Other is less clear. Geographically, the EU belongs to the Self and the ID group also expresses its support for some of the EU's actions against the Iranian regime (MEP Anna Bonfrisco, 22 November 2022; MEP Marco Campomenosi, 17 January 2023; MEP Anna Bonfrisco, 12 September 2023). However, in terms of women's equality, the ID group regularly points to the EU's

<sup>14</sup> "[...] cette civilisation [...] qui n'a pas toujours claqué les portes aux femmes".

<sup>15</sup> "Vorbild".

“ambiguity” (MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022) and “hypocrisy” (MEP Silvia Sardone, 19 October 2022; MEP Silvia Sardone, 22 November 2022; MEP Dominique Bilde, 17 January 2023). These claims are made with reference to the EU’s attendance at the Iranian President’s inauguration ceremony in August 2022 (ID group, motion for a resolution, 4 October 2022), but mainly build on the EU’s promotion of the hijab in Europe either in its own campaigns or through its support for Muslim organisations (MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 4 October 2022; MEP Silvia Sardone, 19 October 2022; MEP Silvia Sardone, 22 November 2022; MEP Dominique Bilde, 17 January 2023; see also MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 4 October 2022). Many ID group members conceive this as an act of betrayal of the Iranian women’s rights movement, turning the EU into an accomplice of the Iranian regime (ibid.). Moreover, this is considered as acting against the will of the European people (MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 4 October 2022) and EU member states’ preferences (MEP Anders Vistisen, 12 September 2023) and is regarded as acceptance and even encouragement of Muslim women’s oppression in Europe (MEP France Jamet, 12 September 2023; MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 12 September 2023). As one member of the ID group points out:

*“Shame on those who support the freedom of Iranian women, but allow the submission of French, Belgian, German and Dutch women to Islamic law to take root in our towns and neighbourhoods”* (MEP Dominique Bilde, 17 January 2023).<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to Iranian women, the EU is thus presented as “timid” (MEP Silvia Sardone, 22 November 2022) and too passive in its actions against the Iranian regime (MEP Marco Campomenosi, 12 September 2023).

The ID group here clearly distances itself from the rest of the EU by highlighting the courage of its own support for the Iranian women’s rights movement (MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 12 September 2023). Within the European Parliament, it criticises the other political groups and their contributions to the EU’s promotion of the veil and Islam in Europe (MEP Jean-Paul Garraud, 4 October 2022). To the ID, other groups’ lacking acknowledgement of Islam as the central root of women’s suppression is used to question their support for European values (MEP Silvia Sardone, 22 November 2022). This claim is also reiterated in regard to the ID group’s exclusion from signing other parliamentary groups’ joint motion for a resolution condemning Jina Mahsa Amini’s death (ID group, 6 October 2022). Nonetheless, the ID group also considers itself as part of the EU. It supports initiatives in which the European Parliament “[...] is helping to echo the voice of protest of the Iranian people [...]” (MEP Anna Bonfrisco, 22 November 2022)<sup>17</sup>. One member also expresses regret concerning the division of the European Parliament in its support for the Iranian women’s rights movement (MEP Marco Campomenosi, 12 September 2023).

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<sup>16</sup> “Honte sur ceux qui soutiennent la liberté des femmes iraniennes, mais laissent s’installer dans nos villes et nos quartiers la soumission des Françaises, des Belges, des Allemandes, des Hollandaises à la loi islamique”.

<sup>17</sup> “[...] aiuta a far risuonare la voce della protesta del popolo iraniano [...]”.

In summary, the ID group's discourse on the Iranian women's rights movement engages in Othering processes, in which women's rights and freedom serve as a boundary to depict the religion of Islam and Muslim culture as the primary Other of a gender-equal, democratic and free Europe. The Iranian women's rights movement is seen as part of the Self in its courageous struggle for European values, which the ID group supports. The ID group considers itself as a primary political representative and defender of this Self in the supranational sphere, while criticising other EU institutions and political groups in the European Parliament. Before these findings are discussed from the perspective of femonationalism, the following section presents the findings on Othering processes in the ID group's discourse on the Istanbul Convention.

## **The ID group's discursive opposition to the Istanbul Convention**

The Istanbul Convention, short for 'The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence', is an international treaty by the Council of Europe adopted in 2011. The EU was the first international organisation to ratify the Convention in June 2023 (see Council of Europe, 2024). This section firstly outlines the overarching discursive themes raised by the ID group in the preceding debate. It then turns to the group's position on the EU's accession to the Convention more concretely.

### *Violence against women as a persisting problem in Europe?*

In the debate on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention, the ID group acknowledges violence against women as an increasingly pressing issue (MEP Annika Bruna, 19 October 2022; MEP Stefania Zambelli, 23 November 2022; MEP Guido Reil, 14 February 2023; MEP Alessandra Basso, 9 May 2023) problematising the "sexual abuse committed by powerful men" (MEP Annika Bruna, 19 October 2022) also within European institutions (ibid.).<sup>18</sup> This suggests that some ID group members recognise that sexist and patriarchal structures persist in Europe without explicitly linking them to Islam and immigration. This differs from the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement, in which such acknowledgement is absent. Nevertheless, it is striking how the ID group's assessment of the problem emphasises traditional family values and conceives of affected women primarily in their role as mothers, as a particular concern is shown regarding the consequences of violence against women for family structures and the situation of children (MEP Annika Bruna, 19 October 2022; MEP Stefania Zambelli, 23 November 2022; MEP Isabella Tovaglieri, 15 March 2023).

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<sup>18</sup> "abus sexuels commis par des hommes puissants".

Furthermore, although the portrayal of the Self is more nuanced, representations that link ongoing violence against women in Europe to the presence of a non-Western Other feature prominently in this debate. Resembling the discursive representations in the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement, Europe is presented as a "civilisation" (MEP Jordan Bardella, 14 February 2023) that guarantees women's freedom and equality. Emphasising the superiority of European culture vis-à-vis non-Western Muslim cultures, one ID group member states that

"[...] our values, the values of our history and of Europe, which place men and women on an equal footing, will always be eminently superior to those of cultures that enslave women, that imprison them behind a veil, that subject them to genital mutilation, that forbid them to go to school, to have a job, to drive or to go out alone in the street." (ibid.).<sup>19</sup>

Unlike the previous debate, in which the religion of Islam and Muslim culture remained a rather abstract Other, here the non-Western/migrant man is at the centre of the discursive Othering process. Non-Western/migrant men are frequently depicted as the main perpetrators of violence against women in Europe (MEP Guido Reil, 23 November 2022; MEP Christine Anderson, 9 May 2023; MEP Anders Vistisen, 9 May 2023; MEP Christine Anderson, 31 May 2023) and, thus, as a concrete manifestation of the threat non-Western cultures pose to women's rights and freedom in Europe. Their culture is described as "the most misogynistic [...] on earth" (MEP Guido Reil, 23 November 2022; see also MEP Christine Anderson, 31 May 2023), though referring to migrant men from different countries such as Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Somalia and Eritrea.<sup>20</sup> Men coming from these countries are considered to embody their culture's characteristics, having "misogynistic worldviews and an affinity for violence based on an archaic image of women" (MEP Christine Anderson, 9 May 2023).<sup>21</sup> Despite their individual cultural backgrounds, these men are thus cast as a single non-Western Other. Justifications of these representations draw on statistical crime rates (MEP Guido Reil, 23 November 2022; MEP Anders Vistisen, 9 May 2023). Nonetheless, not only are European women presented as victims of (mostly sexual) violence, but also non-Western/migrant women are again either explicitly (MEP Guido Reil, 23 November 2022) or implicitly (MEP Silvia Sardone, 14 February 2023; ID group/MEPs Christine Anderson/Nicolaus Fest, 25 January 2023) referred to as the primary victims suffering from violence in their own cultural and family context.

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<sup>19</sup> "[...] [N]os valeurs, les valeurs de notre histoire, de l'Europe, qui mettent les hommes et les femmes sur un pied d'égalité, seront toujours éminemment supérieures à celles de cultures qui asservissent la femme, qui l'emprisonnent derrière un voile, qui la soumettent aux mutilations génitales, qui lui interdisent d'aller à l'école, d'avoir un emploi, de conduire ou de sortir seule dans la rue".

<sup>20</sup> "der frauenfeindlichsten Kultur dieser Erde".

<sup>21</sup> "aufgrund eines archaischen Frauenbildes gewalttätige[] Männer".

### *Rejecting the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention: Ineffectiveness and concerns about sovereignty*

These overarching discursive representations also define the ID group's position on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention specifically. While the ID group underlines its general support for combatting violence against women (MEP Alessandra Basso, 2023; MEP Anders Vistisen, 9 May 2023), it rejects the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention. The Convention is considered ineffective against "imported violence against women" (ID group/MEPs Christine Anderson/Nicolaus Fest, 25 January 2023, 14 February 2023) and, consequently, deportations and stopping immigration to Europe are presented as the primary solution (MEP Guido Reil, 23 November 2022; MEP Christine Anderson, 9 May 2023, 31 May 2023).<sup>22</sup> As one ID group member puts it,

"It would be so easy to prevent this truly horrific violence against women in Europe. A significant contribution would already have been made if only the illegal border crossing of millions of young men with an affinity for violence based on an archaic image of women was stopped." (MEP Christine Anderson, 9 May 2023).<sup>23</sup>

Similar to the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement, the EU is criticised for assisting the repression of women by providing financial support to Muslim organisations (MEP Jordan Bardella, 14 February 2023), promoting the Islamic veil (ibid.; MEP Silvia Sardone, 19 October 2022) and continuing its support for immigration (MEP Christine Anderson, 31 May 2023). This criticism shows, as indicated above, that concerns about immigration are much stronger in this debate than in the debate about the Iranian women's rights movement. Outside the context of immigration, the EU's ratification of the Istanbul Convention specifically is seen as an attempt to restrict member states' sovereignty (MEP Anders Vistisen, 9 May 2023).

### *Anti-gender politics*

Finally, although not at the centre of this study's research interest, the strong mobilisation of anti-gender politics in the ID group's rejection of the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention, already highlighted in the literature (see Berthet, 2022), needs to be mentioned. In addition to the two arguments just discussed, the ID group mainly opposes the Istanbul Convention based on the claim that it does not actually intend to protect women against violence, but introduces what members term a "gender ideology" (MEP Alessandra Basso, 9 May 2023; ID group/MEPs Christine Anderson/Nicolaus Fest, 25 January 2023, 14 February 2023), as the Convention defines gender as socially constructed rather than in biological terms (ibid.).<sup>24</sup> This conception of gender is

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<sup>22</sup> "importierte Gewalt gegen Frauen".

<sup>23</sup> "Dabei könnte diese wohl wirklich grausame Gewalt gegen Frauen in Europa so einfach verhindert werden. Ein wesentlicher Beitrag wäre schon erbracht, wenn man nur den illegalen Grenzübertritt von Millionen junger, aufgrund eines archaischen Frauenbildes gewaltaffiner Männer unterbände".

<sup>24</sup> "Gender-Ideologie"; "l'ideologia gender".

rejected with references to Christian values and biology (MEP Guido Reil, 14 February 2023). Moreover, it is regarded as misogynistic (ID group/MEPs Christine Anderson/Nicolaus Fest, 25 January 2023) and as neglecting the actual needs of the victims of violence (MEP Alessandra Basso, 9 May 2023). Nevertheless, there are no Othering processes at work in this anti-gender opposition, except that the ID group emphasises its Christian values.

To conclude, the ID group's discourse on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention engages in Othering processes that depict non-Western cultures and, particularly, the non-Western migrant man as the primary Other with regard to violence against women. While the persistence of violence against women in Europe is not denied, it is not considered a structural phenomenon but primarily attributed to increasing immigration from non-Western countries to Europe. Non-Western migrant men are represented as the primary oppressors of women, both European and non-Western. The religion of Islam and Muslim culture feature in these representations, but less explicitly.

### **Discussion: Femonationalism in the ID group's discourse**

In line with this article's critical aim, the paper will now assess the claims put forward in the ID group's discourse from the perspective of femonationalism in the following section. Overall, the ID group's discourse strongly emphasises the importance of women's equality, rights and freedom, including combatting violence against women, i.e. supporting what can be considered feminist themes. At the same time, these issues are used to draw boundaries between the Self and the Other. In many of the contributions, Europe and Western culture are presented as having realised women's equality, rights and freedom, whereas the religion of Islam, Muslim culture and non-Western cultures more generally are considered to oppose these values. In the case of the Iranian women's rights movement, Othering processes clearly go beyond a critique of the Iranian state and its interpretation of Islam, to a generalising anti-Islam rhetoric. This is reinforced by the discourse surrounding the Istanbul Convention, which focuses less specifically on Islam and Muslim culture and instead invokes a more abstract non-Western Other. The non-Western migrant man emerges as the embodiment of a misogynistic culture and as the primary threat to women's rights in Europe. Insofar, the ID group's discourse corresponds to the theoretical assumptions of femonationalism, highlighting the pursuit of anti-emancipatory agendas — anti-Islam and anti-immigration campaigns — through the use of feminist claims.

To critically assess the ID group's position on feminist themes, and the We/Other distinctions it invokes, the existing literature has made valuable points. They help to better understand the character of the anti-emancipatory politics informing the ID group's discourse. Hasan (2012, p. 59), for example, stresses that the homogenising Othering processes, reflected in the ID group's discourse, neglect the complexity of Muslim culture. Fekete (2006, p. 18) emphasises that debates on veil bans, as raised by the ID group in the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement, essentialise the

role of women in this culture. According to Zine (2006), they again turn women's bodies into subjects of repression:

“Muslim women's bodies continue to be disciplined and regulated by both oppressive laws mandating veiling under authoritarian theocratic regimes in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan as well as by the laws denying their freedom to wear headscarves in Western democratic societies like France, Germany and Turkey. In either case, the fact that their bodies are made subservient to the decrees of patriarchal state authorities is an anti-feminist move.” (ibid., p. 11).

Such homogenising We/Other distinctions also have implications for the Self. Hadj-Abdou (2017, p. 87) points out that they tend to obscure gender inequalities and other inequalities in European communities.

Still, some discursive patterns diverge from femonationalist arguments as suggested by Farris (2017). For example, in the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement, Iranian women – representing Muslim and non-Western women more generally – are portrayed not primarily as victims but as courageous protesters. In the same vein, the central theme of the relationship between Iranian women and Europe does not build on rescue but is characterised by solidarity and respect. Furthermore, the representation of the Iranian women's rights movement frequently addresses all Iranian people, including Iranian men. Hence, Iranian men are not conceived of as oppressors of women. Iranians are also accepted as political refugees in Europe and the ID group's discourse shows only few explicit anti-immigration stances, in stark contrast to its discourse in the debate on the Istanbul Convention. Still, it could be argued, that Iranian people are welcomed in an (extended) Self-conception mainly based on their commitment to European values and abandonment of their culture and religion. Arguably, even though the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement provides a more fertile ground for anti-Islam campaigns, the debate surrounding the Istanbul Convention fuels stronger externalisation tendencies, as it is a reminder of Europe's persisting gender inequalities and, thus, challenges the ID group's Self-representation of Europe as the realisation of women's equality.

Alternatively, this could be due to the different circumstances surrounding the two debates. While the debate on the Iranian women's rights movement was primarily rhetorical and symbolic, the debate on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention had concrete policy consequences, namely the EU's ratification of the Convention.<sup>25</sup> Looking at the two cases from an overarching perspective, the findings suggest that femonationalism informs not only the ID group's support for women's rights in debates linked to Islam, but also shapes the group's position on feminist themes in a broader sense. As highlighted in literature (Berthet, 2022; Kantola, 2022, pp. 238-240), the findings on the ID group's discourse on the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention

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<sup>25</sup> The European Parliament gave its consent to the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention in May 2023. Following the necessary Council decisions, it entered into force in October 2023.

reinforce that the group, while presenting itself as in favour of women's rights, strongly positions itself in opposition to the concept of 'gender'. Femonationalist discourses thus represent a further dimension of the ID group's discourse on feminist issues, complementing its engagement in anti-gender politics.

## **Conclusion**

The analytical categories provided by the literature on Othering and identity-building in EU studies have provided valuable tools for an inductive approach to detect We/Other distinctions in the ID group's discourse corresponding to but also diverging from femonationalism. Although with some inconsistencies, the findings show that the ID group's discourse on feminist themes draws boundaries between the Self and the Other that are informed by a Western supremacist perspective. With these discourses, the ID group is thus part of the convergence that produces femonationalism as an ideological formation.

With a view to the European Parliament's promotion of gender equality and women's rights, the findings reveal further challenges in the institution beyond the rise of anti-gender politics. As actors link feminist themes to arguments informed by racism and sexism, the findings underline the importance of reflecting on how seemingly pro-feminist discourses might feed into anti-emancipatory agendas, including at the policy level. Focusing on the ID group, however, this article cannot make claims on the extent to which other political groups in the European Parliament engage in femonationalist discourses. The European Parliament as a platform for femonationalist politics thus remains an interesting arena for scholarly engagement. A future systematic comparison between different actors, still, might require a more rigorous application of pre-defined categories which the author has explored elsewhere (see Greiwe, 2025). Furthermore, greater consideration could be given to different debates' contexts and their impact on the positions of political groups. Debates in the European Parliament differ in terms of their embedding in the EU political process, also depending on the European Parliament's competencies. Although the findings suggest that femonationalist arguments shape the ID group's position across different contexts (e.g. symbolic, legislative), future research could further substantiate this assessment.

Future studies could also focus on other EU institutions aside from the European Parliament. For the scholarly debate on femonationalism, the findings confirm the fruitfulness of extending the focus of study to the supranational sphere as an arena where actors from different national backgrounds engage in femonationalist discourses and strengthen femonationalism as a transnational phenomenon. A promising area for future research here is studying the connection between two mounting challenges to gender equality, femonationalism and anti-gender politics, as both the literature on anti-gender politics (see e.g. Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018) and Farris' (2017) considerations on femonationalism have stressed the heterogeneity of actors and agendas involved.

Regarding feminist debates more generally, this paper makes a plea for feminism's emancipatory agenda. While the ID group, or some of its members, may indeed be concerned with women's equality, the group's support only comes at the cost of other oppressed groups, thus establishing what Hadj-Abdou (2017) terms a "hierarchy of oppression" (ibid., p. 87). Still, highlighting the ID group among the European Parliament's political groups is not supposed to deny racist structures underlying the institution as a whole (see Kantola et al., 2023). Returning to the Sakharov Prize and this article's introductory remarks, it needs to be pointed out that despite praising the European Parliament's decision to award the Iranian women's rights movement with the Sakharov Prize, the ID group did not nominate the movement itself. Its own nominee was Elon Musk instead (see European Parliament, 2023).

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Data material

Table A1: The debate on the Iranian women's rights movement

Author	Type	Date	(Debate) Title	Link
<b>ID group</b>	Motion for a resolution	3 October 2022	Motion for a Resolution on the death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's right protesters in Iran	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2022-0425_EN.pdf">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/B-9-2022-0425_EN.pdf</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Jean-Paul Garraud (Rassemblement National)</b>	Speech	4 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. The death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's rights protesters in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Anna Bonfrisco (Lega)</b>	Speech	4 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. The death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's rights protesters in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Teuvo Hakkarainen (Perussuomalaiset)</b>	Speech	4 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. The death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's rights protesters in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Isabella Tovaglieri (Lega)</b>	Speech	4 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. The death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's rights protesters in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Simona Baldassarre (Lega)</b>	Speech	4 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. The death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's rights protesters in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>European Parliament</b>	Vote	4 October 2022	Minutes. The death of Mahsa Amini and the repression of women's rights protesters in Iran (vote)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-04-ITM-013_EN.html</a>

				<a href="#">013_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>ID group</b>	Press statement	6 October 2022	ID Group undemocratically excluded from signing Iran resolution	<a href="https://www.idgroup.eu/id_group_press_release_mahsa_amani">https://www.idgroup.eu/id_group_press_release_mahsa_amani</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Virginie Joron (Rassemblement National)</b>	Speech	17 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. Order of Business	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-17-ITM-010_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-17-ITM-010_EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Silvia Sardone (Lega)</b>	Speech	19 October 2022	‘Verbatim report of proceedings. Fighting sexualised violence – The importance of the Istanbul Convention and a comprehensive proposal for a directive against gender-based violence (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-19-ITM-015_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-19-ITM-015_EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>ID group/Christine Anderson (AFD)</b>	Press statement	11 November 2022	Christine Anderson, MdEP (AFD): Neuer Women Fighting for Freedom-Preis geht an iranische Frauen	<a href="https://de.idgroup.eu/christine_anderson_mddep_afd_neuer_women_fighting_for_freedom_preis_geht_an_iranische_frauen">https://de.idgroup.eu/christine_anderson_mddep_afd_neuer_women_fighting_for_freedom_preis_geht_an_iranische_frauen</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Anna Bonfrisco (Lega)</b>	Speech	22 November 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. EU response to the increasing crackdown on protests in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-22-ITM-021_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-22-ITM-021_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Christine Anderson (AFD)</b>	Speech	22 November 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. EU response to the increasing crackdown on protests in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-22-ITM-021_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-22-ITM-021_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Silvia Sardone (Lega)</b>	Speech	22 November 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. EU response to the increasing crackdown on protests in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-22-ITM-021_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-22-ITM-021_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>ID group/Jean-Paul Garraud</b>	Press statement	30 November 2022	Conférence "Port du voile en Iran: quand l'UE détourne le regard"	<a href="https://fr.idgroup.eu/conference_port_du_boile_iran">https://fr.idgroup.eu/conference_port_du_boile_iran</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]

<b>(Rassemblement National)</b>				
<b>ID group/Christine Anderson (AFD)</b>	Press statement	15 December 2022	Christine Anderson, MdEP (AfD): Iranische Frauen mit dem „Women Fighting for Freedom“-Preis geehrt	<a href="https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-mdep-afd-iranische-frauen-mit-dem-women-fighting-for-freedom-preis-geehrt">https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-mdep-afd-iranische-frauen-mit-dem-women-fighting-for-freedom-preis-geehrt</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Dominique Bilde (Rassemblement National)</b>	Speech	17 January 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. EU response to the protests and executions in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-01-17-ITM-017_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-01-17-ITM-017_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Marco Campomenosi (Lega)</b>	Speech	17 January 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. EU response to the protests and executions in Iran (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-01-17-ITM-017_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-01-17-ITM-017_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Silvia Sardone (Lega)</b>	Speech	15 March 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: in particular the poisoning of hundreds of school girls	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-03-15-ITM-021-01_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-03-15-ITM-021-01_EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Marco Campomenosi (Lega)</b>	Speech	12 September 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: one year after the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Jean-Paul Garraud (Rassemblement National)</b>	Speech	12 September 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: one year after the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Anna Bonfrisco (Lega)</b>	Speech	12 September 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: one year after the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Silvia Sardone (Lega)</b>	Speech	12 September 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: one year after the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html</a>

				<a href="#">013 EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Anders Vistisen (Dansk Folkeparti)</b>	Speech	12 September 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: one year after the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013 EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Isabella Tovaglieri (Lega)</b>	Speech	12 September 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: one year after the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013 EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>France Jamet (Rassemblement National)</b>	Speech	12 September 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Iran: one year after the murder of Jina Mahsa Amini	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-09-12-ITM-013 EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>Silvia Sardone (Lega)</b>	Speech	2 October 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. One-minute speeches of political importance	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-10-02-ITM-017_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-10-02-ITM-017 EN.html</a> [accessed 08.02.2024]
<b>ID Group/Christine Anderson (AFD)</b>	Press statement	19 October 2023	Christine Anderson (AfD): Sacharow-Preis: Mahsa Amini steht für den Freiheitskampf iranischer Frauen!	<a href="https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-afd-sacharow-preis-mahsa-amini-steht-fur-den-freiheitskampf-iranischer-frauen/">https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-afd-sacharow-preis-mahsa-amini-steht-fur-den-freiheitskampf-iranischer-frauen/</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]

Table A2: The debate on the Istanbul Convention

Author	Type	Date	(Debate) Title	Link
<b>Annika Bruna</b> (Rassemblement national)	Speech	19 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. Fighting sexualised violence – The importance of the Istanbul Convention and a comprehensive proposal for a directive against gender-based violence (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-19-ITM-015_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-19-ITM-015_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Silvia Sardone</b> (Lega)	Speech	19 October 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. Fighting sexualised violence – The importance of the Istanbul Convention and a comprehensive proposal for a directive against gender-based violence (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-19-ITM-015_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-10-19-ITM-015_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Stefania Zambelli</b> (then Lega, now Forza Italia and European People's Party)	Speech	23 November 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. Eliminating violence against Women (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-23-ITM-008_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-23-ITM-008_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Guido Reil</b> (AFD)	Speech	23 November 2022	Verbatim report of proceedings. Eliminating violence against Women (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-23-ITM-008_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2022-11-23-ITM-008_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>ID group/Christine Anderson and Nicolaus Fest</b> (both AFD)	Press statement	25 January 2023	Christine Anderson, MdEP und Dr. Nicolaus Fest, MdEP: EU sollte Istanbul-Konvention aufkündigen, statt sie zu ratifizieren!	<a href="https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-mdep-und-dr-nicolaus-fest-mdep-eu-sollte-istanbul-konvention-aufkuendigen-statt-sie-zu-ratifizieren/">https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-mdep-und-dr-nicolaus-fest-mdep-eu-sollte-istanbul-konvention-aufkuendigen-statt-sie-zu-ratifizieren/</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Jordan Bardella</b> (Rassemblement National)	Speech	14 February 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: EU accession (continuation of debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-14-ITM-012_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-14-ITM-012_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]

<b>Silvia Sardone</b> (Lega)	Speech	14 February 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: EU accession (continuation of debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-14-ITM-012_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-14-ITM-012_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Guido Reil</b> (AFD)	Speech	14 February 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence: EU accession (continuation of debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-14-ITM-012_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-02-14-ITM-012_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>ID group/ Christine Anderson</b> (AFD)	Press statement	14 February 2023	Christine Anderson (AfD): EU sollte Istanbul-Konvention NICHT ratifizieren!	<a href="https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-afd-eu-sollte-istanbul-konvention-nicht-ratifizieren">https://de.idgroup.eu/christine-anderson-afd-eu-sollte-istanbul-konvention-nicht-ratifizieren</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Isabella Tovaglieri</b> (Lega)	Speech	15 March 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. International Women's Day	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-03-15-ITM-005_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-03-15-ITM-005_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Christine Anderson</b> (AFD)	Speech	9 May 2023	Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: institutions and public administration of the Union – Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-09-ITM-016_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-09-ITM-016_EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Anders Vistisen</b>	Speech	9 May 2023	Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-</a>

(Dansk Folkeparti)			violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: institutions and public administration of the Union – Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement (debate)	<a href="#">9-2023-05-09-ITM-016 EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Alessandra Basso</b> (Lega)	Speech	9 May 2023	Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: institutions and public administration of the Union – Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-09-ITM-016_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-09-ITM-016 EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Angelo Ciocca</b> (Lega)	Speech	9 May 2023	Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: institutions and public administration of the Union – Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – EU accession: judicial cooperation in criminal matters, asylum and non-refoulement (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-09-ITM-016_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-09-ITM-016 EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]
<b>Christine Anderson</b> (AFD)	Speech	31 May 2023	Verbatim report of proceedings. Sexual harassment in the EU and MeToo evaluation (debate)	<a href="https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-31-ITM-018_EN.html">https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/CRE-9-2023-05-31-ITM-018 EN.html</a> [accessed: 08.02.2024]

**Appendix 2:** Lists of subjects and spatial references (inductively developed subcodes)

Table A3: List of subjects

<b>What actors are mentioned?</b>
Christianity
EU actors (except for the European Parliament)
EU citizens
EU MS and their governments
Europe (as a subject)
European children
European Parliament
European women
Europeans
Families
ID Group
Iran (excluding references to the Iranian state and executives)
Iranian men living in Europe
Iranian women living in Europe
Iranians in Europe
Islam
Men (and boys) in general

Men from Muslim countries, not from Iran specifically (not in Europe)
Men in Iran/Iranian men
Migrant men
Migrant women
Migrants
Minorities in Iran
Muslim countries
Muslim culture
Muslim men in Europe (not migrant)
Muslim organisations in Europe
Muslim women in Europe (not migrant)
Nationals of a single European country
Other (as a subject)
Other groups of the European Parliament
People
People in Iran/Iranians
Representatives of Islam
The Iranian state and executives
The Istanbul Convention
The veil (personification)

The West
The world/the international
Women (and girls) in general
Women from Muslim countries, not from Iran specifically (not in Europe)
Women in Iran/Iranian women

Table A4: List of spatial references

<b>What places are mentioned?</b>
In a European country
In Europe
In Iran
In Muslim countries
In the EU
Other (as a place)

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