



European Committee
of the Regions

EUROPEAN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY DAYS 2026

COR SESSION: LOCAL WOMEN LEADERS, CATALYSTS FOR EU PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

*1ST OCTOBER – 14:30-17:30
BRUSSELS, COR VMA 23 & ONLINE*

Interpretation: EN/FR

Programme:

14:30– 15:00 Opening Remarks

- Chair: Gillian Coughlan (IE/Renew), CoR Vice-President, Chair of the CoR Working Group on Kosovo, CoR Rapporteur on Enlargement – Western Balkans and Türkiye.
- Speakers:
 - Lina Gálvez (S&D/ES/), Member of the European Parliament, Chair of the Committee on Women's rights and gender equality European Parliament (tbc)
 - François Decoster, Ambassador of France to New Zealand and the Cook Islands (tbc)

15:00–16:15 Panel 1: Locally elected women leaders – an asset for EU public diplomacy

- Chair: Gillian Coughlan (IE/Renew), CoR Vice-President, Chair of the CoR Working Group on Kosovo, CoR Rapporteur on Enlargement – Western Balkans and Türkiye.
- Speakers:
 - Lucia Yar (SK/Renew), Member of European Parliament, Member of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Member of the Committee on Security and Defence



- o Magali Altounian (FR/Renew), CIVEX Chair & CoR rapporteur on Fragility and on the Pact for the Mediterranean
- o Julia Koch-de Bioley, head of the Equality task force at the EEAS (tbc)
- o Camilla Brückner, UN Brussels Director
- o Iuliia Vusenko, Member of the Volyn Regional Council, Ukraine

16:15–17:30 Panel 2: The role of local leaders in contributing to GAP III EU action plan on gender equality in EU external action

- Chair: Michaela Kauer, Director of the Vienna Representation Office
- Speakers:
 - o Angèle Meyanga, Mayor of Afanloum (Cameroon), President of REFELA (Network of African locally elected women)
 - o Brigitte Luggin, Team Leader for Gender equality and non-discrimination, European Commission Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)
 - o Rosa Farragut Estarràs (EPP/ES), Member of the European Parliament, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Women's rights and gender equality European Parliament (tbc)
 - o Abir Al-Sahlan (SE/Renew), Member of the European Parliament, co-rapporteur of the Parliament report 'EU Gender Action Plan IV – priorities for gender equality and women's rights in external action' (tbc)

Closing: Michaela Kauer, Director of the Vienna Representation Office

Website: <https://www.cor.europa.eu/en/plenaries-events/european-public-diplomacy-days-cor-session-local-women-leaders-catalysts-eu-public-diplomacy>

Registration for in person attendance: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/epdd-2026>

Background:

On 30th September and 1st of October, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) is joining forces with other EU institutions to organise the second editions of the [European Public Diplomacy Days](#). As in the first edition, the overall purpose of the event is to strengthen the EU capacity to convey its common message of attachment to a rule-based multilateral order promoting prosperity, stability, security, peace, and the rule of law. At a time where the multilateral, rules-based world order is increasingly being challenged, the Diplomacy Days increase the 'Team Europe' approach to public diplomacy among EU institutions and EU Member States by fostering collaboration and highlighting collective achievements.

In a context of international turbulence, rising armed conflict and other evolving threats, the debate on **the participation and role of women in foreign affairs and international security** is a timely and relevant one. Despite the growing body of evidence regarding the positive effect of including women in several key areas, women continue to be under-represented in the field of foreign and security policy across the world. This is a directly relevant topic to the Irish Presidency of the Council, as Ireland has a long tradition of female leadership, from figures of the past like Queen Maeve and Gráinne Mahlo the Pirate Queen to today's President Connolly. Showcasing women's experience and perspectives reinforces Ireland's commitment to equality, representation, and community-informed diplomacy in addressing European and global challenges.

The meaningful participation of women in foreign policy promotes inclusive consensus-building - countries such as Spain, France, Germany and Canada have developed dedicated policies in that respect. These approaches aim to reshape diplomatic priorities by bringing gender equality and human rights issues to the negotiation table, and by promoting the ratification of international treaties such as the Istanbul Convention on violence against women. Against this backdrop, the 24th of June is now recognised as the [International day of women in diplomacy](#) by the UN.

At the EU level, [Gender Equality Action Plan III](#) (GAP III) is the European Union's commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in EU external relations, aligning with international commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Local female elected officials are pivotal actors in advancing the contribution of women to foreign policy and strengthening EU public diplomacy. Their leadership at municipal and regional levels not only drives gender equality in local governance but also amplifies the EU's commitment to inclusive, rights-based external action. Their engagement in public diplomacy initiatives - such as city-to-city cooperation, local dialogues, and participation in EU-funded projects - strengthens Europe's narrative as a champion of equality and inclusion. Moreover, female local leaders are recognised for their capacity to build consensus, mediate in divided communities, and promote inclusive solutions to complex challenges, all unique assets for the EU's diplomatic engagement in fragile or sensitive contexts. GAP III recognises their role as essential for translating policy into practice, fostering consensus, and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in shaping Europe's global narrative.

The objective of the session will be to highlight the link between local female elected officials and the EU's foreign policy and public diplomacy. Local women leaders ensure that gender equality is not only a policy objective but a lived reality for communities across Europe and beyond, and this will become apparent through this session. Empowering and supporting these leaders is fundamental to the successful implementation of GAP III and to the EU's global standing as a promoter of equality, peace, and prosperity.

