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**Analysis of Czech Diplomatic Career: How Do
Czech Women Diplomats Perceive Themselves
Inside the Czech Diplomatic Environment**

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This research concerns the Czech diplomatic environment and career, analyzing how Czech women diplomats perceive themselves in it. The diplomacy career according to the International Relation Feminist Theory, composing this study theoretical framework, is a result of social activity and hierarchical politics, making identities and activities that are conceived as belonging to men, or masculine characteristics, have greater prestige than women. This political structure, and distribution of power in politics and diplomacy, reflect an access to resources, power and authority unequal and underprivileged for women. The main objective of this research is to answer the research questions: how do Czech women diplomats perceive themselves in the Czech diplomatic career? According to their experience, by qualitative and exploratory research, collecting primary data through semistructured interviews with, 10 to 15, Czech women diplomats. By the end of this research it will be possible to show if Czech women diplomats perceived themselves carrying on hard, soft, or both diplomatic subjects. Also it will bring to light, according to their experience, how Czech diplomacy follows the patterns presented by the theoretical framework. This research as others studies regarding diplomacy, women and international relations helps us better understand and address unequal and oppressive gender relations, which is explained by the International Relation Feminist Theory. The research question and its answer are important to consolidate this study field, adding value to the theory. As its result may show that content defended by the theory is a reflection of the Czech diplomatic environment, exemplifying the theory into a political system.

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I declare that I have written this Master's thesis independently (under the supervision of the head supervisor of the thesis) and stated all employed sources and literature.

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Annotation

Hammes, G. (2023) *Analýza české diplomatické kariéry: Jak se české diplomatky vnímají v rámci českého diplomatického prostředí* (Master thesis). Univerzita Hradec Králové

Tento výzkum se týká českého diplomatického prostředí a kariéry a analyzuje, jak se v něm české diplomatky vnímají. Diplomatická kariéra podle feministické teorie mezinárodních vztahů je výsledkem společenské aktivity a hierarchické politiky, které vytvářejí identity a činnosti, které jsou pojímány jako patřící mužům. Tato politická struktura a rozdělení moci v politice a diplomacii odráží nerovnoměrný přístup k zdrojům, moci a autoritě a znevýhodňuje ženy. Díky rozhovorům s českými diplomatkami bylo možné pochopit jejich vnímání českého diplomatického prostředí jako genderově vyváženého co se týče počtu ženských zaměstnanců, ale nedostatek zastoupení žen týkající se vysokých pozic. Také se nevnímají jako osoby, které se zabývají pouze měkkými požadavky, jak je prezentováno teoretickým rámcem. Tento výzkum jako ostatní studie týkající se diplomacie, žen a mezinárodních vztahů nám pomáhá lépe porozumět a řešit nerovné a utlačovatelské genderové vztahy, které vysvětluje feministická teorie mezinárodních vztahů.

Klíčová slova: ženy v diplomacii; česká diplomacie; feministická teorie mezinárodních vztahů.

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Analysis of Czech Diplomatic Career: How Do Czech Women Diplomats Perceive Themselves Inside the Czech Diplomatic Environment

1. Introduction

International relations, international politics and diplomacy, since their beginnings, have been a male-oriented study field, and the role and participation of women have been low. As society has changed and the role of women in work and studying areas has grown, the term gender balance reminds the importance of studying gender as a main subject in political science and international relations. Although it is said that gender equality and the role of women in the labor force have increased in the past years when it comes to politics, international relations and diplomacy, women are still under-represented, bringing to light that the political arena is still following the rules of an archaic patriarchal society.

Women's under-representation in politics is usually interpreted as a lack of political interest, but that is not the only factor that keeps women away from politics. As structural and social barriers continue to provide distance between women and access to leadership positions. Age, class, ethnic background, religion or sexual orientation are barriers that women face in politics (ENLOE, 2014).

Inside the international relations arena, diplomacy also has been historically an institution lacking women's participation, building an environment of masculine dominance. According to the literature, women were seen as weak and passive to deal with diplomatic struggles, with a lack of military experience and not understanding completely the structure and dynamics of foreign policies (CASSIDY; ALTHARI, 2017). Although already mentioned, women have been present and increasing the number of representatives, but mostly in the private sector, as for diplomacy women are still under-represented and seen as weak to deal with “hard” diplomatic issues, mostly working with “soft” diplomatic matters.

The International Relation Feminist Theory, which gained force with the third wave of the feminist movement that was influenced by poststructuralism, in which divisions such as masculine/feminine are seen as constructions of social groups created to maintain the power of groups dominant. The authors, J. Ann Ticker, Cynthia Enloe, Seema Nairan, Laura Sjoberg, Jan Stockmann and Daniel Maliniak claim that a political construction of genres implies an appreciation superiority of masculine and masculine activities. This results in an organization of social activity and hierarchical politics, making identities and activities that

are conceived as belonging to men, or masculine characteristics, have greater prestige, in the face of identities and activities associated with women or characteristics considered feminine. This political structure, and distribution of power in politics, as well as diplomacy, reflect an access to resources, power and authority unequal and underprivileged for women.

This research aims to analyze the Czech diplomacy career structure to be able to understand the role of women in the Czech diplomacy and diplomatic missions through their perception. Understand if, according to Czech women diplomats, due to their experience Czech diplomacy follows the patterns presented by the theoretical framework, International Relations Feminist Theory.

During this research, an important fact was brought up by the majority of the interviewees, the Czech diplomacy historical background. Due to that, this research also explores the historical context of the Czech diplomacy environment, right after the communist regime and how it influenced the role of women with respect to their work as diplomats. The Czech Republic's diplomatic environment is a curious case of momentaneous gender balance, represented by its historical context. Owing to this understanding of how women are seen regarding the presenting context, means to understand that politics (domestic and international) and diplomacy is still a "man" land.

To obtain the main research data a qualitative and exploratory approach was used, collecting primary data through 10 semi-structured interviews, held in English language, with Czech women diplomats, aiming to answer the research questions: *how do Czech women diplomats perceive their positions in the Czech diplomatic career?* According to their experience, *which kinds of diplomatic subjects (hard or soft) do women work with regarding the Czech diplomatic structure?*

This topic ought to be discussed and understood to become a natural concept, bringing women more participation and acceptance in international politics, and generating a gender-balanced environment. Identifying and understanding how women are seen (by the others and themselves) in the Czech diplomatic environment, can contribute to further gender equality discussion in the country and central Europe region, also being a reflection of how its society is structured.

The reflection caused by this research on the interviewees is the impact that this research was aiming to achieve, apart from understanding how Czech women diplomats perceived their role, in the end, most of them questioned their approach and actions towards the topic.

The historic underrepresentation of women in international politics and diplomacy, reflects an enduring patriarchal structure. Despite social advances towards gender balance, politics and diplomacy remain largely male-dominated, evidencing systemic barriers that hinder women's full participation. This underrepresentation is often erroneously attributed to women's lack of interest in politics, overlooking social and structural barriers such as age, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation that hinder their access to leadership roles. Despite perceived progress, women are typically limited to "soft" diplomatic matters, illustrating persistent gender biases (ENLOE, 2014). The International Relations Feminist Theory highlights this power dynamic, where masculine identities and activities are given greater prestige. Through a qualitative exploration of the experiences of Czech women diplomats, this research sought to understand their perceptions and roles within the Czech diplomatic structure, leading to significant introspection among interviewees. Further research is required to prompt more meaningful discussions about gender balance in international relations, enabling a more equitable distribution of resources, power, and authority. By bringing to light how women are perceived within the diplomatic arena, we can contribute to broader conversations on gender equality, reflecting and influencing the social structure at large.

2. Theoretical Framework: International Relations Feminist Theory

2.1 The importance of feminist historical overview to the topic's development

International Relations, as a discipline, was constituted in the period after the First World War. The purpose of the study was, essentially, to reflect on the issue of war and how to avoid its terrible consequences. With this perspective, Edward Hallett Carr (1939) wrote the book "Twenty Years of Crisis", criticizing the idealism of the first academics of International Relations (IR), because, while they thought about how the world "should be", the correct thing would understand how the world "really" is.

From this vision, the "first great debate" of IR began as a confrontation between idealists and realists. This debate ended when, at the beginning of World War II, the logic of survival took precedence internationally. This victory was also shown with the publication of the book "Politics Among Nations", by Hans Morgenthau, in 1948 (PETERSON, 1998).

The behaviorist revolution in the social sciences, caused the second great debate on IR to begin with the desire to make the field more scientific. Scientific realism criticized the traditional, debating how to study the field and not what to study. The import of empirical methods from other areas, more precisely, from the exact sciences, was defended. Due to the bipolarity of the Cold War, the process of decolonization and the emergence of non-state actors such as international governmental and non-governmental organizations and transnational corporations, began to criticize the basic ideas of realism and liberalism theory gained emphasis on academia when seeking cooperation and interdependencies as a key point of interstate relationship (PETERSON, 1998).

In traditional theories of International Relations, the survival of the State and the protection of its sovereignty remained the focus of realistic academic thought, while liberalism added the idea of the economy as a creator of interdependence between States. According to Cassidy (2017), it can be said that these theories did not problematize what happened within state borders. Even with the broadening of the theoretical view of international relations, by recognizing non-state actors, states were still seen as the main actors and domestic relations were not decisive for foreign policy.

The first International Relations feminists sought to reverse the relative delay of the discipline concerning the question of gender, as being defined as a socially constructed concept difference between biological conditions for men and women and, the biological definition of this differentiation is nominated as sex (CASSIDY, 2017).

Using the insights of feminists from other sciences to demonstrate the importance of this theme in the area of global politics, as they sought to reveal the gender bias and the normativity of the discipline, and review fundamental concepts of International Relations, such as the nation-state, security, power and diplomacy in such a way that they could illuminate, instead of making invisible, women and gender relations in the international environment.

During the 1980s and 1990s, global political transformations imposed the need to change the view of what knowledge is and how it should be produced, overcoming the limitations of traditional theories. Thus, in this moment of crisis in IR thinking, postmodernism manifests itself, which is characterized by reassessing the rational-positivist basis, having as one of its objectives the pluralization of the field of International Relations (PETERSON, 1998).

When investigating and researching women in the international arena, it is necessary to reinterpret the meaning of international relations. Space is opened for personal stories and

narratives to overcome the silence and neglect of women in the political and public sphere. With feminist theory, “gender researchers ask different questions about the world, creating perspectives that help broaden the scope of the discipline, connecting it with other social sciences and bringing it closer to human experiences” (MEDEIROS, 2017, p. 16).

Wollstonecraft, by recognizing women's ignorance about politics and by expressing their claims, states that women's situation of degradation is not natural, but the result of actions arising from male selfishness, which leads women, according to the author, to be treated like animals. Therefore, this treatment must cease to exist, that is, women should not be treated like animals. In this way, the resistance, coming from men, against the inclusion of women as actors in society, will no longer be valid (NYE, 1988).

With the end of World War II, most of the feminist claims of the first waves had been realized. Due to the male participation in the war, women became the point of reference for sustaining the home, while their husbands fought in the war. This is how women's participation in public life and the field of work increased. In addition, the suffragette movement made women achieve the right to education, property, divorce, among others (BEDIA, 2014).

From the mid-1950s to the mid-1990s, the second feminist wave developed. During this period, a large number of studies began on the condition of women in society, being the basis for the creation of a theory based on the idea of the root of female oppression. Therefore, we can say that the feminism of this wave can be summed up in the radical feminism that began in the 1960s and 1970s. women.

In 1949, the book “The Second Sex”, by Simone de Beauvoir, was published. This work marked the beginning of the second wave. It denounced the cultural roots of inequality between females and males, and its contributions were many for the theoretical and practical development of the following decades (SANTIN, 2019).

It was during this period of deepening the feminist agenda that the issues of “sex” and “gender” came to be understood as terms with different meanings. When Simone de Beauvoir declares that “one is not born a woman: one becomes a woman” she reaffirms the idea that gender is a gradually acquired identity. And through the distinction between sex and gender, it is perceived that “being female” and “being a woman” are two different “beings”, which is why one becomes a woman and one is not born one. The idea of gender must be understood as a modality of development or of understanding options. A process of interpretation of the body, giving it a cultural characteristic. That is, instead of simply being born a woman, there

is a projection, interpretation, and cultural reinterpretation to become a woman (BUTLER, 1986).

The problem that simmers in the depths of so many women today is not a question of loss of femininity, overculture, or domestic demands. It is much more important than it seems at first glance. It is the solution to those new and old problems that have been torturing wives, husbands and children for years, puzzling doctors and educators. It may well be the key to the future as a nation and as a culture. We cannot continue to ignore that intimate woman's voice, which says: I want something more than my husband, my children and my house (FRIEDAN, 1963).

Therefore, it is identified that the woman's problem is political and is perpetuated on the premise of the insistence on keeping women in the position of wife and mother and without being part of the public sphere. This work is like a “bible” for the new feminist wave by revealing the female dissatisfaction with being confined only to the domestic environment, to set the social scene on fire, giving rise to new feminist movements in the pursuit of equality (SANTIN, 2019).

The movement brought a new way of fighting, they are reflection and “self-awareness” groups. This tactic arose from the need to break the isolationism of women in Western societies. In this way, space was built that allowed the expression of the female voice. A space for them to get to know each other and discover their identity without male interference. From this, there was a transformation of the individual into the collective, that is, what was individual and isolated became a collective experience. Sex discrimination came to be seen, even with differences in race, gender, culture or even generation, as a constant that permeates these alterities, affecting all women. (ALVES & PITANGUY, 1985).

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of military dictatorships in Latin America, the adoption of neoliberal policies, the technological and communication revolutions, were moments that marked the Western world in the 1990s, that is, it was a period of changes and questioning of previously thought ideals. With the epistemological ruptures, part of the academy became against the idea of having social uniformity, questioning the non-acceptance of differences. Therefore, discussions about ideals established in previous waves stimulate the birth of punk female movements. The “Riot Grrrl” stand out, which, by denying corporatism, incorporated themes such as rape, sexuality, patriarchy and female empowerment (SANTIN, 2019).

These systems of neglect of discrimination and acceptance of the universalization of women structure the experiences of the difficult struggle of women of color¹, so that these

strategies must be intervened to have an intersectional response. The view of women who do not share the same race and/or class is limited to those whose lives are shaped by different obstacles (CREENSHAW, 1991).

Third-wave feminism works with the idea of “transversal policies”, or “transversalism”, going against ideas such as particularism and universalism visible in the first two waves. The objective of the third wave is nothing more than an attempt to establish a dialogue between all the possible conditions faced by the different women in the world, considering, in addition to gender, race, class and sexuality, also the conditions of nationality, age, religion, among other points. There must be enough sensitivity for the exercise of putting oneself in the place of the other to take place. That said, the understanding of demands and needs and points of view of different realities is facilitated, so that it is possible to draw a safer line of more egalitarian strategies and policies (FRANCHINI, 2017).

2.2 International Relation Feminist Theory

Theoretical approaches that have gender as their object of study seek in international institutions and the rules of this system, explanations of the reason for the asymmetry in the relationship between women and men and in the construction of identity of these genders.

Among feminist approaches, something they all have in common is that their purpose is not just to overcome the oppression of women, but to build a just international order, where there is no hierarchy of gender, race, class or religion. Therefore, their research methods may vary and the use of gender as an object of study is what creates the link between them.

Literature based on feminist theories of International Relations have proliferated since the early 1990s, questioning the idealization of the link between masculinity, states and war. These theories introduced gender as an important empirical and analytical tool for understanding power relations in the world, as well as a normative position aimed at building an alternative world order. Together with postmodernism/structuralism, constructivism, critical and green theory, feminists challenge the realist and liberal theories of the field and seek to move International Relations away from a State-centered vision towards a vision that also includes non-state actors (TRUE, 2005).

Even so, the IR discipline, which is particularly devoted to the study of war, is reluctant to embrace the broader range of feminist theories. Seemingly constituted as the study of anarchic relations between states, the IR field is a male construct and IR practice, in

addition to being male-dominated, is Anglo and Eurocentric. The field is dominated by its dichotomous vision (war and peace, anarchy and order, domestic and international, among others). It is because of this that one realizes why this area of knowledge is difficult and almost hostile to feminist ideals that publicly denounce the positivist premises of the discipline (PETERSON, 1998).

In short, there are several ways of thinking about feminism. But, in all of them, even with different agendas, there is the fight against the sexist culture, which makes feminists “borrow” any gap that this culture grants to the theory. This is a type of incessant adaptation, which justifies the existence of different strands.

“That adaptation, that continual overcoming of a theoretical instance that constrains feminist practice, that leaves too much of what remains alien to female experience intact and untouched by women's thought and action, is the story of feminist theory” (NYE, 1995, p. 16).

We can say that the field began to have new elements, from the work of Cynthia Enloe: “Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Relations” (1989). In his work, Enloe expresses the need to abandon the conception that IR consists of States without people, abstract societies, or even theories about them and start thinking about the various people, places and activities of everyday international politics. She also claims that you need to find those people who make the world go around and name them. (SYLVESTER, 2001). Enloe's perspective redefines IR through a gendered lens, asserting that global politics is deeply influenced by gender roles and women's experiences. According to Enloe (2004), “To ignore gender is to ignore a critical piece of the international puzzle.” This approach interrogates established paradigms and highlights the essential role of women in political, economic, and social arenas worldwide.

Through Enloe, it is possible to understand that “making feminist sense” is an important task, while understanding that global policies depend so much on issues such as the dynamics of marriage, sexual relationships, and male expectations of men and women. men and women's expectations of women, and political economies at the domestic level as well as the traditional reservations of the countryside. From this, feminist scholars understand that there is no way to separate the idea of making feminist sense of world politics from the idea of making sense of these policies in their entirety. It is with this premise that Enloe asks

where women and gender are in international politics, revealing a vision that until then had gone unnoticed.

Feminist attentiveness to all sorts of women is not derived from hero worship. Some women, of course, will turn out to be insightful, innovative, and even courageous. Upon closer examination, other women will prove to be complicit, intolerant, or self-serving. The motivation to take all women's lives seriously lies deeper than admiration.

Feminist attention to all kinds of women does not derive from unconditional admiration. Some women, of course, will prove to be intuitive, innovative and courageous. But with a closer look, other women will prove to be complicit, intolerant, or self-serving. The motivation to truly consider the lives of all women runs deeper than admiration. Asking "where are the women?" is driven by a determination to really find out how the world works. The work of an informed- feminist is fueled by the desire to reveal ideas, relationships and politics on which (often unequal) gendered works depend" (ENLOE, 1989).

The work of Enloe (1989) was responsible for giving feminist theory in IR a necessary visibility by offering a more concrete meaning of what feminism can mean for the study of international politics. On the other hand, this view also criticizes traditional theories, which causes a certain aversion on the part of conventional IR academics. Therefore, specific corrective and analytical interventions are needed for International Relations, with the aim of integrating the feminist view of IR, and opposing traditional themes (PETERSON, 1998).

Critics of Enloe's feminist IR theory argue that it overly prioritizes gender as an analytical lens, potentially overshadowing other forms of oppression and marginalization (Tickner, 1997). In response, Enloe advocates for an intersectional analysis that recognizes the multiple identities that individuals inhabit and the complex ways that these identities interact with power structures (Enloe, 2014).

Realist IR theorists often challenge Enloe's theory, contending that it strays too far from the traditional foci of power, state interest, and security (Mearsheimer, 2001). However, Enloe counters this criticism by insisting that acknowledging the gendered dimension of these areas enhances to the understanding of global politics. She argues that gender hierarchies play a significant role in maintaining state power and perpetuating conflict, making gender an indispensable factor in IR analysis (Enloe, 2004).

Moreover, postcolonial scholars, such as Narayan (1997), criticize Enloe for focusing primarily on the experiences of Western women, which risks essentializing the experiences of women in the Global South. In response, Enloe acknowledges the need for sensitivity to cultural and geopolitical differences, advocating for an approach that avoids Western-centric perspectives and respects the diverse experiences of women globally (Enloe, 2014).

The International Relations Feminist scholarship, said by Maliniak (2008) “contend that gender subordination explains significant differences in worldview between men and women” (MALINIAK, 2008 p. 122), also according to Enloe (2014) “feminist sense of international politics requires us to follow diverse women to places that are usually dismissed by conventional foreign affairs experts as merely “private,” “domestic,” “local,” or “trivial.” (ENLOE, 2014 p. 03). As stated by Laura Sjobergandj and Ann Tickner, “International Relations feminist theory has been concerned with bringing these inequities to light, helping us to understand what causes them, and thinking about ways to end them” (SJOBERGANDJ and TICKNER, 2013 p. 171), developing feminist theory in different areas, especially in politics and economics, conduct policy-makers to discuss gender issues.

According to Sjobergandj and Tickner (2013), the goal of feminist research is to make the invisible visible, bringing women’s lives to the center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, and understanding women as subjects rather than objects” (SJOBERGANDJ and TICKNER, 2013 p. 173), in which also concerned gender as a socially constructed characteristics, based on their quality and capacity, weakness, dependency, connection, emotionality, passivity, and private related to femininity and power, autonomy, rationality, activity, and the public are stereotypically related to masculinity (SJOBERGANDJ and TICKNER, 2013; MALINIAK, 2008).

It is possible to say that the international system is ruled by masculine concepts and values, restricting the role of women in politics and foreign affairs agenda related to participation and policy making. Ann Tickner, argues that all kinds of knowledge come from living experience:

“Since knowledge about the behavior of states in the international system depends on assumptions that come out of men's experiences, it ignores a large body of human experience that has the potential for increasing the range of options and opening up new ways of thinking about interstate practices. Theoretical perspectives

that depend on a broader range of human experience are important for women and men alike, as we seek new ways of thinking about our contemporary dilemmas” (TICKNER, 1992. Chapter 1, p. 09).

International politics are recognized as “high politics”, known by men-dominated reserved, but male scholars of international relations and politicians missed some important subjects to world and society development (CASSIDY, 2017; STOCKMANN, 2017). Noting the lack of women’s participation in politics in general some feminist authors began to pay attention to women's behavior in political science and international relations, leading to the existence of international relations feminist scholarships (STOCKMANN, 2017).

J. Ann Tickner is another author who, in part, managed to answer these questions. needs that were elicited from Enloe. Tickner's work in “Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security”, from 1992, in debating feminist perspectives in IR is based on the recognition of the meaning of gender oppression. When she deals with the IR field, she calls it “malestream”, as she claims that it was conceptualized by understanding that it is not an individual personality that determines the masculine man, but rather a hegemonic masculinity that defines him. That is, the idea of femininity is opposed by stating that it has less value and masculinity would then have more value. In this way, women are not seen strongly enough and the knowledge that comes through women's experience remains at the margins of the discipline's analysis. (NARAIN, 2014).

Ann Tickner's (1992) research has done much to create a space for gender as a variable in academic analysis of IR by challenging the field's dominantly male paradigm, as well as rebuking top-down and state perspectives. -focused on realism over safety. The International Relations Feminism Theory comes from a “bottom-up” perspective, questioning, for example, the idea that war is fought for the protection of women and children. More than that, feminism questions that war leads to violence, mass rape, migratory crises and uncontrolled prostitution, and its effects on women are brutal. It also deals with issues hitherto ignored by the conventional interpretation of IR, such as democratization, international and women's organizations. Tickner, thus, brings in his narrative a vision based on the idea of human rights, complementing the methodological repertoire of International Relations with new analysis tools.

The evolution of feminist theory in the discipline of International Relations has fundamentally reshaped the understanding of the global political landscape. Scholars like Cynthia Enloe and Ann Tickner have challenged the traditionally masculinist, state-centric,

and Western perspectives that dominated the field, focusing on the significant role that gender and the experiences of women play in shaping international politics (Nye, 1995; Enloe, 1989; Tickner, 1992). Enloe's work, in particular, has been pivotal in illuminating the often-unseen contributions of women to international politics, while also emphasizing the necessity of an intersectional approach that takes into account the diverse experiences and identities of women around the globe (Enloe, 2014). Despite facing resistance from traditional IR academics and critiques from various perspectives, feminist IR theory continues to advocate for a more inclusive understanding of global power relations. While the incorporation of feminist perspectives into IR remains a contentious issue, it is clear that their incorporation has significantly expanded our understanding of international politics, opening new avenues of research and offering more comprehensive analyses of global affairs (Peterson, 1998; Tickner, 1997).

2.3 International Relation Feminist Theory and Diplomacy

The feminist theory of international relations seeks to highlight the lack of women's participation in science politics in general and focus on international relations and diplomacy. Also points out the reason why it happens, as women have been marginalized from studying politics and also as said by Tickner (1992) the living experience that constructs the knowledge and guides international studies, international systems and political systems are all represented by male optics (TICKNER, 1992). Hence, the subjects broad out by feminist international relations theories can be applied to domestic politics, to understand women's participation in international politics in determined countries, as most women are seen as not strong enough to deal with international politics affairs or not capable of seeing international conflicts and specific situation strategically (SJOBERGANDJ and TICKNER, 2013).

As mentioned above the lack of participation of women in the international arena, also reflects directly on the diplomatic field. It is said that women throughout political history have participated in diplomatic action, but this is done through informal means, as the role of a diplomatic wife is seen with a certain prestige. This statement is a reflection of the main issue told by the feminist authors, women for its historical role has seen as weak, soft and delicate, having a better qualification and facilitation of diplomatic interactions, and serving affairs as the same as diplomatic wives, as said by Aggestam & Town (2019) "as hostesses

of receptions and dinners, volunteers with connections in civil society” (AGGESTAM & TOWN, 2019 p.14).

Diplomacy, traditionally understood as a field of action involving negotiation, representation, and communication among state representatives, has often been perceived as a gender-neutral sphere. However, feminist IR theorists argue that diplomatic practices and institutions are inherently gendered, influenced by social norms and biases about masculinity and femininity (Zalewski, 2010).

According to Cassidy and Althari's (2017) notion of the historically entrenched underrepresentation and marginalization of women in diplomacy is largely a result of patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes. The authors argue that the field of diplomacy has traditionally been dominated by men, constructing an environment entrenched in masculine dominance. This gender imbalance, they assert, can be traced back to deeply held social beliefs about the roles and capacities of men and women. Specifically, they note, "women were seen as weak and passive to deal with diplomatic struggles, with lack of military experiences and not understanding completely the structure and dynamics of foreign policies" (Cassidy & Althari, 2017, p. 122). This effectively limited the participation and advancement of women within diplomatic roles.

The authors further contend that while there has been an increase in female representation in the field, women are still primarily associated with "soft" diplomatic matters, as opposed to "hard" issues such as military and security affairs (Cassidy & Althari, 2017, p. 127). This represents a significant form of gender bias that tends to devalue the work women do in the diplomatic sphere, often relegating them to roles perceived as less critical or influential.

As per Joseph Nye, who coined the term 'soft power' in the late 1980s, it denotes the 'ability to shape the preferences of others' through appealing and attractive aspects of a nation's culture, political ideals, and policies (Nye, 2004). Soft diplomacy does not involve coercion or direct payments but relies on dialogue, communication, and building long-term relationships to establish influence and goodwill on a global platform.

On the other hand, hard diplomacy refers to traditional diplomacy rooted in political power and military might. It encompasses actions such as sanctions, military intervention, and the use of force or threat of force to meet foreign policy objectives (Mearsheimer, 2001).

This form of diplomacy is typically employed when a state's vital interests are at stake, such as when it perceives a need to protect its sovereignty, security, or strategic objectives.

The fact that women are seen as not qualified to deal with diplomatic affairs, did not prevent or exclude women to follow the diplomatic career, but still it is observable the pattern of overrepresentation of men in discretion, a bequest of the past formal exclusion and disrespect of women. The presented scholar indicates that the behavior of institutions is also conducted by men optic, according to Aggestam & Town (2019) an example of institutions inside the international relations environment is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

“These institutions seem to contain predictable divisions of labor, including a familiar division of responsibilities and tasks among women and men, with women often ending up in support functions and in “soft” policy areas whereas men tend to cluster in “hard” policy areas and are overrepresented in leadership positions. Women’s entry into diplomacy seems to have been marked by such divisions” (AGGESTAM & TOWN, 2019 p.21)

Not only in Central Europe, but in the world in general, historically women have been left out of work, study and decision-making, as it was based on religious and patriarchal values (TICKNER, 1992). The role of women in Central European countries has changed after the war and during communist regimes where they had to become active in defending communist ideals. But with a more stable society, the old values confronted the role of women in society, especially referring to higher education and involvement in political affairs (JEZERSKA, 2018).

Right after the fall of communism in Central European countries, according to Jezerska (2018), “politics of women’s equality was associated with the ideological positions of the communist regimes and ‘not with women’s understanding of their interests” (JEZERSKA, 2018 pg.181). Another important fact to understand is the lack of women's participation in domestic and international politics, as it was associated with communist regimes present in most of the central European countries. The author also said that gender-sensitive communication, information about gender inequality and lack of women participation are not only a problem related to women, but it is also a subject that should concern men (JEZERSKA, 2018).

Christine Sylvester (1994), another feminist writer on International Relations, with her work “Feminist Theory and International Relations in a Postmodern Era”, 1994, uses postmodern feminism with a focus on identity politics and highlights the excluding reality

that the discipline of International Relations has developed throughout history. She proposes to create a method of cooperation through feminism that would allow conversations and negotiations about knowledge. She also draws attention to other feminist landscapes, such as empirical feminism and standpoint, when constructing his critique of international relations theories (THOMPSON, 1995).

In her work, Sylvester (1994) argues that the IR field is gender-centered. It expresses that the field was created by men and is the exclusive domain of men. She also questions that the field itself does not see this factor when it self-determines itself as “genderless” and who are the most harmed, according to the author, are women. This exclusion ends up becoming natural, causing analysts of IR theories not to consider feminist knowledge. In this way, adopting a postmodern and standpoint feminist view, she criticizes the three theoretical debates in the field: idealism versus realism; traditionalist versus neorealist and; modernism versus postmodernism.

“The debates of IR, therefore, are narrow and encrusting of a politics in which "men" control knowledge and "women" are either out of place altogether or are issued visitors' passes that enable us to leave assigned homelands for temporary support roles in IR [...]. "Women" can routinely enter IR as secretaries in the neoliberal institutions of interstate cooperation; but they too must return "home" each evening while the work of international relations continues at diplomatic receptions and dinners [...] "Women" are always from another place. Our absence is required, must be invented, to enable the encoding of international relations as masculine territory (SYLVESTER. 1994, p. 211).”

Sylvester states that there is a need for a significant change both in the field and in the practice of international relations. With a constant effort to emphasize the importance of cooperative relations in IR instead of trying to fight against an inflexible universal truth, Sylvester believes that international relations can become the “home” of a variety of people with different identities, which, many call them “women” (THOMPSON, 1995).

The fields of international relations and diplomacy extends from the historical informal roles of women in diplomacy, as diplomatic wives, to the contemporary underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within institutions such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Aggestam & Town, 2019). As Sylvester (1994) argues, the field is seen as gender-neutral, but it is fundamentally male-centric, effectively excluding women and feminist perspectives. The path toward change, as articulated by Sylvester (1994), lies in a cooperative approach to IR theory, advocating for the inclusion of various identities and

perspectives. The studies of Tickner (1992), Sjoberg and Tickner (2013), and Jezerska (2018) further support the necessity for the inclusion of women's perspectives, highlighting the influence of their historical and cultural context on their political engagement.

However, Cassidy and Althari (2017) also acknowledge the evolving landscape of diplomacy, with an increasing number of women breaking the proverbial glass ceiling and assuming more significant roles. Despite this, they maintain that the legacy of masculine dominance and deeply embedded gender norms continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality within diplomatic circles. As also agreed by Fellegi (2023): “Female ambassadors in most countries represent tokens who, by acceptance of the (male) dominant culture, constantly reinforcing the steady low representation of this minority group and the lack of its presence in decision-making” (FELLEGI, 2023 p.222).

The feminist theory of international relations exposes the gendered structures underlying global politics and advocates for the need to reconsider the role of gender in shaping the international system. This theory increases the importance of further research and application to illuminate the nuances of women's experiences in diplomacy and political science, potentially leading to more inclusive and equitable practices in these domains.

3. Methodology & Data

To transcribe research data into an article or thesis is mandatory to follow scientific methods that are classified by the procedures chosen with the objective of attaining knowledge, scientific methods qualify research as to its objectives, its approach and its technical procedures (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013).

Investigations into the role played by women in diplomacy have heightened considerably in recent years, owing to the enhanced collaborative initiatives of non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, and international entities. According to Fellegi (2023):

“...there are three main fields of gender research that could contribute to the transformation of diplomacy. The most developed literature concerns diplomatic history, analyzing the informal involvement of women in diplomacy (e.g., Hendry 1998) and their struggle to access formal diplomacy in the twentieth century (e.g., Wood 2005). The second field maps the current representation and positioning of women in diplomacy and confirms an absolute male over representation in this field,

where women occupy less prestigious posts (Towns and Niklasson 2017).² The last research area focuses on diplomacy as a gendered institution. Most studies in this field focus on the cultural context and reveal the gendered structures and dynamics of diplomatic negotiations (e.g., Aggestam and Towns 2018) and networking (Niklasson 2020). These studies confirm that diplomacy, as a patriarchal stronghold built on traditional gender norms, is generally ill organized for balancing work and family life, which negatively affects women, particularly as the primary caregivers for children” (FELLEGI, 2023, p. 221).

This research's main data is based on semi-structured interviews, held in English language, with 10 Czech women diplomats, working in the public sector, representing the Czech government inside the Czech Republic or living abroad. The data was analyzed while responding the key questions, which reflect the main questions aimed to be answered by this research

The aim of the interviews is to understand how the Czech women diplomats see themselves in the diplomatic environment, what kind of missions, tasks and positions are accomplished by them. Also, discourse about how they feel regarding the daily challenges and expectations of being a woman and diplomat. And understand if there is any difference between them and their male colleagues regarding the positions, missions, recognition and respect.

This approach is widely recognized in the academic world for its ability to provide rich and detailed information, offering deeper insights into the participants' experiences, beliefs, and perspectives (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). To collect the data, the interview will be recorded after being transcribed, in order to code the information, identify themes and behaviors, then create patterns and analyze if those patterns and themes match with the hypothesis presented by the International Relation Feminist Theory.

Inquiries were formulated based on presumptions derived from extant studies, and respondents were invited to express their views on the characteristics of their jobs, the obstacles they encounter, and their insights into gender parity and potential gender disparities. The interview was guided through the following key questions:

- How old are you?
- When did you start to work as a diplomat/ Czech government representative?

- What is your current position?
- What were your former positions?
- Working as a diplomat, do you perceive your job as a “men's environment”? Why?
- Working in a high position, do you usually have a majority of male or female colleagues, or is it equal?
- Do you perceive the Czech diplomatic environment as gender balanced? Why?
- Regarding your diary task as a diplomat, do you believe there is a difference between men and women's mission? Soft and hard? Why?
- Do you believe there is a difference in the treatment between man and woman inside the diplomatic/ political environment? Why?
- Regarding the Czech diplomatic environment have you faced any issue/ prejudice at work, as being a woman?
- Regarding the Czech diplomatic environment, do you believe it is harder for women to achieve high positions as consuls and ambassadors? Why?
- From your opinion, how important and necessary is it to discuss gender equality inside the Czech diplomatic environment?
- How do you perceive yourself inside the Czech diplomatic environment?

After collecting and analyzing the data from the interviews, this research intends to answer the proposed research question, *how do Czech women diplomats perceive their positions in the Czech diplomatic career?* According to their experience, *which kinds of diplomatic subjects (hard or soft) do women work with regarding the Czech diplomatic structure?*.

Methodologically, it should be noted that the research carried out here, in terms of its objective, is qualitative and exploratory, as it seeks to understand a theme for the construction of the hypothesis and improvement of ideas. It is important to study and/or establish theories, performing a conceptual approach (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). The exploratory approach to this research is based on the qualitative concept, which is a method of dynamic and totalizing interpretation of reality, as it considers that the facts are not they can be revealed outside a social, political, or economic context. Therefore, this approach becomes appropriate, as the objective of this paper is to understand the role of women in Czech diplomacy and

diplomatic missions through their perception and discover if Czech diplomacy follows the patterns presented by international relations feminist theory.

Regarding the research bibliographies, books and articles already published will be used as secondary and tertiary sources as well as official reports covering these themes, pertinent to the topics covered (women's participation in international politics in The Czech Republic, feminist international relations, gender and diplomacy, women and diplomacy). During the use of bibliographic data collection, it is important to obtain veracities of the analyzed facts, mainly derived from the internet and also to observe if the chosen works have inconsistencies or contradictions (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

4. Women and Czech Diplomatic Career

This chapter explores the historical overview, presents data and statistics, as well as exposes the aspects of gender in diplomacy inside the Czech diplomatic environment. Bridging the point of view of the Czech women diplomats interviewees.

The Czech Republic has undergone numerous changes in its political and social structures since gaining independence from the Soviet Union. One of these changes is in the realm of international relations and diplomacy, areas that are fundamental to the identity and survival of any sovereign nation.

Post-independence, the Czech Republic emerged as a new state with its own distinct political and cultural identity. As a symbol of national identity and values), diplomacy served as a critical tool for the Czech Republic to assert its new position in the international community. The transition from a satellite state in the Soviet bloc to a member of the European Union and NATO required significant diplomatic efforts, with a focus on navigating the complex international political landscape to secure its national interests (Melissen, 2005).

However, the establishment of Czech diplomacy was fraught with challenges. According to Tickner (2011), in the initial years of the Czech Republic, "diplomacy was mostly seen as a continuation of foreign policy by other means" (TICKNER, 2011 p. 45). The field was predominantly male, with few women participating or assuming leadership roles, reflecting the broader global trend of gender disparity in diplomacy (Enloe, 2014).

Cassidy and Althari (2017) argue that historically, diplomacy was an institution lacking female participation, leading to an environment dominated by masculinity. Women

were perceived as "weak and passive" to handle diplomatic challenges, mainly due to perceived deficiencies in military experiences and a lack of understanding of the structures and dynamics of foreign policies (CASSIDY & ALTHARI, 2017 p. 122).

Although these gendered stereotypes, there has been a gradual increase in the number of women involved in Czech diplomacy, particularly in the private sector. However, Cassidy & Althari (2017) point out that women are "still under-represented and seen as weak to deal with 'hard' diplomatic issues, mostly working with 'soft' diplomatic matters" (CASSIDY & ALTHARI, 2017 p. 127). This suggests that although progress has been made, gender stereotypes still play a significant role in the distribution of diplomatic tasks.

Despite these challenges, there are signs of improvement within Czech diplomacy, efforts are being made to increase women's representation and to implement gender-sensitive policies. However, achieving gender equality requires more than just increasing the number of women in diplomacy. It requires a systemic change that dismantles patriarchal structures, a change that truly values and respects the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their gender.

Czech diplomacy is a complex field that has evolved significantly since the country's independence. While strides have been made to increase gender balance, the field is still grappling with the historical legacy of male dominance. However, with an increased focus on gender equality and the continued efforts to challenge and dismantle patriarchal norms, Czech diplomacy stands poised for a future where both men and women can contribute their skills and perspectives to the country's diplomatic mission.

The case of Czech diplomacy regarding this research carries out the importance of historical background to understand and better analyze the information given by the interviewees. During the interviews to collect data, 90% of the Czech women diplomats broadly raised the relevance of women's careers inside the Czech diplomatic environment related to a specific moment.

Czech diplomacy since the country's independence illustrates a complex narrative woven with opportunities, challenges and a persistent struggle with gender balance. From the data collected through interviews, the significance of historical context and its influence on women's careers in Czech diplomacy became overwhelmingly evident, underscoring the complex interplay of past legacies and present dynamics. As Czech diplomacy navigates its path toward a more gender-balanced future, it is incumbent upon all stakeholders to challenge and dismantle the entrenched patriarchal norms, thereby allowing all voices to contribute to the country's diplomatic mission.

4.1 Women and Czech Diplomatic Career: Historical Overview

The Czech Republic's transition from being a part of the Soviet bloc to becoming an independent entity marked the start of a new era of diplomacy. The country had to navigate a novel and complex international environment while developing its national identity and values (Melissen, 2005). The establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in 1993 was the first step towards this, creating a dedicated institution to handle diplomatic affairs. However, the early years were fraught with challenges.

Laarman (1999) noted that the new state deal with a lack of modern bureaucratic tradition, a dearth of experienced personnel, and an uncertain external environment. Diplomatic efforts during this period largely focused on asserting the Czech Republic's sovereignty and establishing its position in the global community (Baun & Marek, 2013). Furthermore, the transition to a market economy required significant diplomatic efforts in areas such as trade negotiations and seeking foreign direct investment.

The Velvet Divorce in 1993 that led to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia resulted in the birth of two new countries, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This momentous event marked the beginning of a new diplomatic journey for the Czech Republic, requiring the establishment of its distinct foreign policy and diplomatic apparatus. Pithart (1994) poignantly notes, "The Czech Republic emerged from the break-up of Czechoslovakia on January 1, 1993, as a new, internationally recognized sovereign state with its own national symbols and institutions" (PITHART 1994 p. 72).

The internationalization of Czech diplomacy began with the pursuit of membership in international organizations. Joining these organizations was a means of securing the young state's standing in the international community, and was seen as a vital part of the country's strategy to consolidate its democracy and ensure national security (Baun & Marek, 2013).

The establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic was one of the first steps toward the country's diplomatic journey. However, as Laarman (1999) noted, the process was fraught with challenges. Laarman (1999) states, "Newly sovereign states emerging from the remnants of the former socialist federations faced a daunting task as they

rushed to establish their Ministries of Foreign Affairs and diplomatic relations with countries around the globe" (LAARMAN, 1999, p. 29).

One of the most urgent tasks was establishing diplomatic relations with other countries and international organizations. This was a complex process, particularly because the Czech Republic was asserting its separate identity while maintaining continuity with the former Czechoslovakia's international commitments. According to Baun and Marek (2013), "The Czech Republic did not start from scratch in foreign policy. It was the legal successor state to Czechoslovakia and inherited the latter's international treaty obligations, property, and debts" (BAUN and MAREK, 2013 p. 53).

In the immediate years following the Velvet Divorce, the Czech Republic was in the process of transitioning from a planned economy to a market economy. The country's new leadership, led by President Václav Havel, undertook an ambitious agenda of economic and political reform, which had a significant impact on its diplomatic activities. The Czech Republic needed to renegotiate numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements and develop new ones to attract foreign investment, facilitate trade, and integrate with the global economy. As Pickering (2015) explains, "Czech diplomats were thrust into a maelstrom of negotiations, compelled not only to establish new diplomatic relations but also to renegotiate economic, trade, and investment agreements that were vital to the country's transition to a market economy" (PICKERING, 2015, p. 142).

The Czech Republic became a member of the United Nations in 1993, a milestone in its diplomatic journey. It also managed to secure membership in NATO in 1999, despite initial reservations among some member states. The most significant achievement, however, was joining the European Union in 2004. Pickering (2015) noted that these efforts were largely shared across the political spectrum, indicating a national consensus on the direction of Czech foreign policy.

The establishment and maintenance of diplomatic relations with neighboring countries has been another key feature of Czech diplomacy. The Czech Republic had to navigate historical tensions and ongoing disputes with countries such as Germany, Poland, Austria, and Slovakia. Dempsey (2013) noted that despite these challenges, Czech diplomacy managed to maintain stable relations with its neighbors. The handling of these relationships

showcased the maturation of Czech diplomacy and its ability to balance national interests with maintaining positive international relations.

According to the majority of the interviewee, the political scenario changed during the early 90s reflecting the changes of how diplomacy was managed and through that women had more space to be inserted in their career:

“So the changes were really huge. And Czech diplomacy, which was first a federal one for Czechoslovakia and later the main part became Czech diplomacy. It chose a bit different than some other countries because in foreign service you had quite a difficult decision to make” (Interview 1).

The Czech Republic, to establish a “new order” regarding its policies and image, also regarding its diplomacy and the message that the current government wanted to give, was the disengagement with the former social regime. It was necessary to avoid those people who worked and served the interests of the former regime had any association with high representative diplomatic positions.

As stated by interviewee 6, the intentions of the government were to “let's keep this out and just to get rid of some cases or some people who left voluntarily and go ahead and gradually fill the system with new diplomats of all generations, let's say and then later on especially they are once in the system” (interviewee 6). Also the interviewee 8 pointed out that “the Czech Republic has chosen quite radical change where most of the diplomatic corp was changed and some countries had it fallen in the middle. The system was that they were not like somewhere left to go but for others, there was a system used” (interviewee 6).

In the early 1990s, legislation was instituted with the objective of transitioning away from socialist ideologies, curbing the influence and participation of former socialist employees - a statute that technically remains in effect today, albeit less stringently enforced. This law proscribed individuals who had previously served in higher governmental positions under the socialist regime from assuming leadership roles within the new government. The legislation was instrumental in facilitating the formation of a new diplomatic corps, as it provided a mechanism for transition without necessitating the outright dismissal of the entire existing socialist staff. As mentioned by interviewee 2:

“It was required that for certain functions you had to have, let's say a cleaner registry - as the criminal records, nowadays, but regarding the relations with

the former regime. This was a special certificate of a special agency which was issuing it that you didn't have up to certain level functions in the state system.” (interviewee 2)

Interviewee 1 also explained the impact of that new legislation:

“Foreign Affairs Ministry decided to apply this law on all nominated functions, which means the diplomats were not obliged to leave, but they had to make a career choice under this law, for example they couldn't work as diplomatic staff abroad. No one was forcing them to leave, but their careers were ending, because there was no knowledge how long this law would be applied. They were presented with this like “free choice” and many of them left and had very successful careers in the private sector because they were quite knowledgeable people with a lot of experience working especially in foreign trade. It was not like, you know, giving them some hard times. They could have good jobs because the private sector was not touched by that law” (interviewee 1).

The diplomats statement about this period of time is very important to understand how women were inserted into the career, they understood this as an opportunity to start or be valued on this work field “I am explaining this is that because of that decision, we think we women got space in the Ministry, that this also meant that big spaces opened in the Foreign Ministry to fill with new people” (interviewee 6). Also stated by interview 7 “I rotated the department. I think that 90% of personnel left because of their ties with Communist Party, with everything and we became new.”

The 90's marked an era of inclusion and acceptance, where in the need of replacement the typical rule of diplomacy being a “male land”, was - for a moment - left aside:

“And in that revolutionary era in the 90s, we laughed at that. Even women were “good enough” to be it was much, actually much more of equality, I would say, in this Euphoria and this atmosphere of building new states when men and women it was not looked at, really, and it was just search for skilled, good, intelligent, capable people to fill the gaps and work as best as we can for that new state which we very much felt as our own state, as something we are happy to give our energy and efforts and to help build it. It was even really a feeling of ownership, feeling of belonging somewhere and working together to make this image of that new country which then from Czechoslovakia we in Czech Republic quite new in further parts of the world” (interviewee 1).

During that period, a considerable influx of women entered the Foreign Ministry, and it was not solely limited to this department. The selection process did not appear to exhibit any discernible bias towards gender. The evaluation was predominantly based on the intelligence of the applicant, their potential promise, and their alignment with the organization's structured objectives, irrespective of whether the candidate was male or female. Women were not only hired for their own skills - regardless the gender, but also promoted to occupied high positions, as remembered by interviewee 7: “ the 90s were wild. There was no legal base. It totally politicized me. I became head of the Middle East department. I was 26. That's not normal. I was one of the globally youngest heads of the Middle East department.”

The significant change in the Foreign Ministry was embraced by the rest of the world, which helped “young countries” to train and establish their staff's own policies and strategies. This movement also contributed to opening the scenario of Czech diplomacy to a less conservator ideology, as mentioned by responded 1:

So I went there and they had a special program for the young diplomats from those new countries. So it was Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, and Czechoslovakia, at the moment. Also some from Yugoslavia. I remember a Slovenian girl and some Croatian people, but also people from some post-Soviet republics like Georgia. One from Georgia, I remember it was such a mixture of diplomats who before would never have other contacts than official at the meetings. So now Kringendell, as other academies I know, was offering the formation courses, education, investment style for those diplomats. I remember some of my colleagues went to Madrid or Barcelona. There are some diplomatic institutions there as well, or some other places (interviewee 1).

The Prague Diplomatic Academy, established in 1997, is responsible for the training of diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. With over 250 graduates, the Academy tailors its educational programs to the evolving needs and priorities of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while also adhering to general civil servant education standards outlined in Czech laws, regulations, and government priorities. Diplomatic training is comprehensive, including lectures, seminars, workshops, e-learning, and self-study. Core programs include a one-year general diplomatic training for junior diplomats and a manager training program, with additional specialized courses available. The Academy's establishment

followed an analysis of the training needs of Czech diplomats and a comparative study of foreign diplomatic training systems (Czech Foreign Affairs Ministry - MZV website, 2023).

Czech diplomacy in the 21st century has been marked by significant strides in gender representation. Despite initial slow progress, the presence of women in Czech diplomacy has seen considerable growth, reflecting a broader social shift towards gender equality. This has been a critical development, bringing a greater diversity of perspectives and experiences to the formulation and execution of Czech foreign policy. The changes in Czech diplomacy since 2000 have been driven by both the broader changes in the international order and the country's specific national interests and values. This period has seen the Czech Republic solidify its position within Western institutions, establish strong bilateral partnerships, and champion greater gender equality within its diplomatic environment.

4.2 Women and Czech Diplomatic Career: Gender and Diplomacy

The history of women and diplomacy started before diplomacy could be led by female stakeholders, this initial role entitled to women has shaped a pre-concept of what kind of job women should follow in diplomacy. According to Fellegi (2023):

“Since the formal presence of women in diplomacy was scarce in past centuries, women influenced diplomacy mainly through the informal institution of diplomatic wives (Aggestam and Towns 2019, 14). Even though foreign services counted on the logistical and representational work of diplomatic wives, they were hardly credited for their contributions (McCarthy 2014). Nevertheless, most diplomatic wives regarded themselves as associates rather than “helpmates” (a term used by U.S. State Department employees)—they viewed their experience as a “career” in itself, and often referred to “we” when talking about their experiences in missions (FELLEGI, 2023 p, 223).”

As in most countries, the major issue in the history of Czech diplomacy has been the gender disparity in the field. Cassidy and Althari (2017) argue that the realm of diplomacy was historically an institution lacking in female participation, leading to an environment dominated by masculinity. They state that women were perceived as "weak and passive" to handle diplomatic challenges (CASSIDY & ALTHARI, 2017 p. 122).

During the construction of this new diplomatic infrastructure, women were largely invisible. Cassidy and Althari (2017) argue that this lack of representation mirrored global

patterns, stating that "diplomacy has been historically an institution lacking women participation, building an environment by masculine dominance" (CASSIDY & ALTHARI, 2017, p. 122). In its nascent stage, Czech diplomacy adhered to this gendered tradition, with women confined to the peripheries of power.

Presently available statistics confirm that regardless of formal declarations advocating for gender parity, the representation of women in high-ranking diplomatic circles (as well as overall political decision-making) was minimal under prior state-socialist governments, and such inequality continues to be prevalent in the region. As such, insights gained from the Czech scenario may offer a depiction of unique national characteristics that are presumably common to other Central and Eastern European nations (FELLEGI, 2023). As said by Fellegi (2023):

“it is to be expected that top female diplomats who work (a) in a traditionally male-dominated field, (b) in positions with heavy workloads and long working hours, (c) with a larger number of subordinates, and (d) in conditions of constant mobility are very likely to be exposed to a greater possibility of work-family conflicts. In the CEE region, the situation is worsened by structural conditions and prevailing conservative gender ideologies, which still assume women to be responsible for child and elder care in families (Grunow, Begall, and Buchler 2018). This conclusion is well demonstrated by recent data from the European Institute for Gender Equality, in which Central European countries, particularly Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland, occupy the bottom positions in the EU data set (EIGE 2020)” (FELLEGI, 2023 p, 227).

Women's underrepresentation in Czech diplomacy post-independence was not a spontaneous phenomenon but stemmed from deep-seated social, cultural, and institutional biases. According to Cassidy and Althari (2017), gender stereotypes were a significant barrier, as "women were seen as weak and passive to deal with diplomatic struggles, with lack of military experiences and not understanding completely the structure and dynamics of foreign policies" (CASSIDY & ALTHARI, 2017, p. 122). This bias against women's capacities was reinforced by the masculine, militaristic image of diplomacy that prevailed in this period.

Despite these structural obstacles, the years following the Czech Republic's formation witnessed gradual changes in women's roles within diplomacy. Cassidy and Althari (2017) observe this shift, remarking that "women have been present and increasing the number of

representatives, but mostly in the private sector, as for diplomacy women are still under-represented and seen as weak to deal with 'hard' diplomatic issues, mostly working with 'soft' diplomatic matters" (CASSIDY & ALTHARI, 2017, p. 127). This quote exemplifies the persistent dichotomy between 'hard' and 'soft' diplomatic issues, which tended to relegate women to the latter, less prestigious category.

While examining women's evolving roles in Czech diplomacy, it is vital to engage with the feminist International Relations theory, which emerged alongside these changes. The theory critiques gendered power dynamics, with authors Tickner, Enloe, Nairan, Sjoberg, Stockmann, and Maliniak asserting that "a political construction of genres implies an appreciation superiority of masculine and masculine activities... making identities and activities that are conceived as belonging to men, or masculine characteristics, have greater prestige, in the face of identities and activities associated with women or characteristics considered feminine" (Tickner et al., 2018, p. 154). This insight draws attention to the pervasive gendered dynamics within diplomacy and emphasizes the need to reconsider these inherent biases.

Reflecting on the decades since the Velvet Divorce, Czech diplomacy has witnessed considerable change. Women's presence in the diplomatic sphere has increased, albeit slowly. Yet, as Cassidy and Althari (2017) argue, "Identifying and understanding how women are seen (by the other and themselves) in the Czech diplomatic environment, can contribute to further gender equality discussion in the country and central Europe region" (CASSIDY & ALTHARI, 2017, p. 131).

In recent years, however, there has been a positive shift with increasing female representation in Czech diplomacy. But according to Fellegi (2019) "Nevertheless, the regional post-socialist specificity remains present – women are expected to work in addition to their caring duties and they continue to have the same dual burden as during the socialist period" (FELLEGI, 2019, P, 56).

Efforts are being made to dismantle traditional gender stereotypes and ensure that women are adequately represented in all diplomatic spheres. Thus, the pursuit of gender equality in diplomacy requires not merely increasing the number of women in diplomatic roles, but also understanding and addressing the systemic and entrenched biases that have kept them marginalized. The continued presence and growth of women in Czech diplomacy will hopefully pave the way for a truly gender-balanced diplomatic landscape. However, while progress has been made, gender stereotypes and biases continue to influence the distribution of diplomatic roles. Achieving gender equality in Czech diplomacy, therefore,

remains an ongoing challenge that requires continued attention and concerted efforts (Cassidy & Althari, 2017).

4.2.1 Gender and Diplomacy: Barriers faced by women diplomats

The traditional language used in the Czech diplomatic sector was highly gendered, reflecting a male-centric focus. This language was inherent in everything, including official discourse and etiquette, as well as more casual conversations. The terms used often assumed a male diplomat with his wife accompanying him on foreign postings. However, this began to change in the 1990s with the influx of women into the diplomatic service. The increasing presence of women, both in roles at home and abroad, as well as the need to accommodate realities such as maternity leave, necessitated a change in the gendered language. As a result, the sector had to adapt and evolve to better represent the diverse workforce it encompassed. As mentioned by interviewee 2:

“All these were in the language which was totally dependent on the man and his wife. All the language was like that because in Czech you have *mangel mangelka*. And so it was that when you are sent abroad, you do this and your wife follows the discourse of etiquette or anything like that. And even in a normal language on things which were not like that people do different things for example, before being sent abroad it was just always a diplomat in a masculine so we started to change this because obviously we were forced to do that by the situation because we had so many women now from the 90 on in the jobs and being sent and on maternity leave as well” (interviewee 2).

From that moment women were allowed to represent the country abroad, and their entry into the diplomatic service introduced completely new challenges, particularly around the issue of pregnancy. Previously, it was typically the wives of male diplomats who became pregnant while abroad, with little impact on operations. However, the rise in career women becoming pregnant necessitated a rethinking of protocols. Initially, attempts were made to send these women home to give birth, but many resisted this notion. These women were committed to their jobs and preferred to arrange for their support systems, such as hiring nannies, rather than returning home. Furthermore, some preferred to remain with their

husbands, even if they were also working abroad, rather than being separated for extended periods. This evolution brought about a radical shift in the landscape of diplomacy, presenting new challenges to be addressed:

“This was a totally new issue. People who become pregnant at the embassies. And before it was just the wife always and she was sent to deliver the man nothing. Captain but then you had a career, I mean, becoming pregnant, we have no system for that. What do we do? At the beginning, our HR department also tries to send them home to deliver. But then those women rebelled: no, we are here for the job, we have no supportive family or we hire nanny or whatever and we want after a few months to continue and many of them, even those who were wives, they started to want to deliver there abroad, where their husband is not to go home and spend I don't know how many months apart without their husband. So it has become a totally new world and many new challenges” (interviewee 6).

The maternity topic - specially the maternity leave - is still a topic in discussion, the existing regulatory and legislative framework of the Czech Foreign Ministry indicates an impending evolution that holds the potential to transform the future landscape for women in diplomatic service. The need for reform has emerged starkly from the prevalent gender disparities and structural impediments to women's progression within the diplomatic corps. The formulation and adoption of a new law, inherently more flexible than its predecessor, is forecasted to revolutionize the gender dynamics in diplomacy, precipitating the rise of more female leaders in this sphere (interviewee 2).

A prominent barrier to female ascendancy in the diplomatic hierarchy, presently, is the stipulation of requisite years of service for advancement to higher-level positions. This criterion has served as an inadvertent deterrent to women, especially those who have chosen to avail of their maternity rights. Maternity leave, albeit a fundamental right, results in a shortfall of service years, thereby disqualifying a significant number of women from qualifying for directorial roles. The result is a dearth of female representation at senior levels, an inequity that demands urgent rectification (interviewee 2).

Anticipated changes in the new staff regulation are expected to alleviate this problem by adopting a more inclusive approach towards service years calculation. Such a transformation, while procedural in nature, is symbolic of a shift towards a more inclusive

and equal diplomatic service, where career advancements are not penalized due to biological differences (interviewee 2).

The introduction of more flexible policies to accommodate maternity leaves within the service year requirements would signify the acknowledgment of the distinct challenges women face and the structural impediments they encounter in their career progression. This change would undoubtedly signify a crucial step towards ensuring that women are no longer at a disadvantage when they decide to balance their diplomatic career with parenthood.

Therefore, it is essential that the Foreign Ministry and relevant stakeholders expedite the process of ushering in these new regulations. This would pave the way for a more egalitarian diplomatic service where opportunities for career progression are unbiased and unimpeded by gender. It will also send a clear message that the diplomatic service values the contributions of its female diplomats as much as their male counterparts and is committed to ensuring equal opportunities for career advancement (interviewee 2).

The proposed changes in the regulatory framework of the Czech Foreign Ministry represent an opportunity to eradicate systemic gender biases and achieve parity in representation at all levels of the diplomatic corps. This is a tangible move towards instituting a culture that respects and promotes gender equality, demonstrating progressiveness and evolution in the diplomatic sphere (interviewee 2).

As said above, the future perspective towards gender inclusion in diplomacy is evolving, as the number of women in diplomacy is growing. But, the gender balance should not be measured only by the number of women working in this field, the representativity in high positions and the role of women should be taken into account. Also, the role of women and their expectations are different from men.

Following a high position in a career is not easy for women even after they achieve it. As the role of women is imposed by the patriarchal society where we are inserted, regarding their personal life women still face prejudice and judgment about their decision-making and the role that she represents as a wife and mother. According to Fellegi (2023):

“...it is possible to identify three main levels of female leadership barriers: (1) the individual level, including social pressure, risk aversion, work-family balance considerations, lack of confidence, and nonrecognition of discriminatory practices;

(2) the institutional level, including gender bias and stereotyping, lack of networking opportunities, and nontransparent selection processes; and (3) the state level, including unfavorable laws and policies regulating work and family matters. These barriers have multiple negative effects and often result in horizontal and vertical gender segregation, which effectively bars women from working in certain fields and in top positions. Furthermore, it has been confirmed that such disadvantages are stronger at the top of the hierarchy (the glass ceiling notion) and worsen with age. Working mothers face additional systematic disadvantages. Because of maternity leave and caring duties, they endure career interruptions that result in lower salaries and pensions, as well as negative evaluations and perceptions. Many working mothers bear the double burden of working and caring activities and struggle to reconcile their family and career plans” (FELLEGI, 2023 p 222).

As a woman occupying a high position, she is expected to be competent in her work, but also be the one responsible for the household duties. The research further substantiates that there's a notable divergence in how male and female employees perceive their role identities. Men are often seen placing a higher emphasis on their professional responsibilities at the expense of family obligations, while women typically exhibit a greater level of involvement and dedication toward their domestic life (FELLEGI, 2023).

Presented by all interviews they feel not having only a double journey but a triple one. As they feel that they have to work harder to attend to the expectations deposited on them as diplomats, as multiple times they were questioned about their decision-making and approach towards their work and face judgment about their role as wives and mothers.

According to Fellegi (2023), “Almost 90% of female diplomats questioned in two polls conducted in London (in 2002 and 2012) agreed that women have to make tough choices between family life and their careers and cited a lack of support in this area as the major obstacle holding women back” (FELLEGI, 2023, p 222).

Moreover, working mothers commonly deal with feelings of guilt for not dedicating more time to their children, particularly when accessing childcare facilities. These social perceptions also impact female diplomats who must navigate pre-existing norms and expectations that assign them primary responsibilities for childcare and care of the elderly, as said by interview 7:

“For example, once in my career, I have chosen to stay like four or five years in Prague in a row instead of taking another job abroad because it was the age of my son. I wanted him to check routes to get friends because people who you know from not when you are five, you don't remember people that you were with when you are five if you are not still with them like that you are growing up in the same apartment building or something” (interviewee 7).

Additionally, the prevalent archetype of the "ideal worker" - characterized as males unencumbered by caregiving duties and entirely committed to their professional roles, tends to make working mothers more vulnerable to prejudice. Consequently, working mothers often encounter explicit or implicit discrimination (FELLEGI, 2023).

To understand the complexities inherent to families' experiences within the diplomatic sphere, one must critically acknowledge the challenges posed, particularly with regard to the education and cultural adaptability of children. The historical backdrop demonstrates that state systems have long struggled with the dichotomy of wanting to facilitate their diplomats' international assignments while also striving to retain cultural singularity among the children of these diplomats. This struggle culminated in the inception of unique institutions that sought to perpetuate the native educational system and inherent cultural values, regardless of geographical location.

However the change, precipitated by inexorable globalization and shifting paradigms, have progressively altered this landscape. It is now increasingly recognized that the children of diplomats, who often enjoy a privileged perspective afforded by international exposure, linguistic proficiency, and accelerated maturation, simultaneously deal with distinct stressors. These stressors primarily revolve around the recurrent relocations and the subsequent need for continual cultural adaptation. The intensity of these challenges is notably amplified during adolescent years, a critical epoch characterized by profound personal growth, identity formation, and social development. Hence, decisions surrounding diplomatic relocation and educational pathways demand a judicious appraisal that not only accommodates the diplomat's career trajectory but also prioritizes the well-being of the family unit.

Within the discourse on familial dynamics, the topic of responsibility allocation and adaptability surfaces with notable prominence. It is widely acknowledged that women typically shoulder the mantle of orchestrating the family's transition during international

assignments. However, there is an emerging trend of shared responsibility among couples, with both partners increasingly participating in facilitating their family's adaptation to new environments. This trend mirrors a broader social transition towards a more equitable distribution of familial responsibilities, reflective of evolving gender roles and norms.

The diplomat's lifestyle, with its inherent privileges and challenges, bequeaths a dualistic experience upon their children. On one hand, they gain cultural richness and a broadened perspective that provides them with a unique understanding of the world. On the other hand, they are faced with the daunting challenges of constant adjustment and the potential loss of a fixed cultural anchor, which could lead to a sense of rootlessness. The immersion in multiple cultures from an early age often leads these children to grasp the relativity of cultural norms, a realization that can be both intellectually stimulating and disconcerting.

The complexities of family life within the diplomatic career needs the formulation and implementation of comprehensive policies to address those issues. Such policies should strive to promote a more balanced and closer approach to diplomatic life, ensuring that the needs of diplomats' families are adequately catered to, thereby creating a conducive environment for their personal and professional growth. This pursuit underscores the importance of maintaining an equilibrium between fostering global exposure and ensuring emotional stability, further highlighting the intricate dance between change and constancy that lies at the heart of diplomatic life. These implications span both the psychosocial and educational domains, with children encountering unique obstacles and opportunities at various stages of their development.

In the early years, children's inherent plasticity and resilience enable them to adapt to new surroundings with relative ease. Their perceptions are readily mouldable, and a shift in location can be positioned as an exciting exploration of a novel cultural landscape, as stated by interview 5 “They are very easily influenced by yourself and they feel safe with you and don't think that much about other things and you can even present them, the new country is an interesting place to be. I remember my son looking forward to our stay in Italy because he liked ice cream.”

However, as children traverse the developmental threshold into adolescence, this narrative undergoes a dramatic transformation. This period, characterized by rapid

physiological and psychological changes, is inherently stressful. Adding the challenges of recurrent relocation, abrupt separation from established social networks, and the need to continually adjust to new environments can compound the existing stressors. The newcomers, the struggle of integrating into an already established social insecurity, further exacerbates the strain.

The demand for international schools represents an attempt to mitigate the disruption caused by frequent transitions. These institutions provide continuity in curriculum and foster a globally-minded community, which can be a source of comfort for transient families. Women diplomats have been particularly vocal in advocating for this shift, recognizing the necessity for stability in their children's education amidst the flux of diplomatic life:

“Everyone is already established somehow so of course international schools help. That's where we were very much as women pleading in the ministry to open this that ministry pays for education in international schools instead of local schools because that's one part of it. Because in the society that we live, even though I believe that you, as a woman, need to change and adapt from your job, but also to adapt to the family system, because usually it's something that women do.”
(interviewee 4)

It was perceived by the interviews that society continues to evolve, so too must the approach to managing these transitions, particularly from a gender perspective. Traditionally, women have been expected to shoulder the primary responsibility for managing the domestic sphere, including the education and care of children. However, this paradigm is becoming increasingly antiquated. In contemporary diplomatic families, it is vital to foster a more equitable division of these responsibilities, acknowledging the shared role of both parents in navigating these complex dynamics.

Those challenges inherent to diplomatic life, particularly those pertaining to the children of diplomats, demand a comprehensive, empathetic approach from all involved. The recognition and understanding of these complexities are paramount, and more flexible, supportive structures should be implemented to accommodate the unique needs of these families. This includes revising traditional gender roles, recognizing children's voices, and prioritizing their well-being in the policy and practice of diplomatic service.

The double journey imposed by the patriarchal society where we are inserted affects not only the professional life of the women diplomats but also their personal life and conjugal life. Actually, presented by all interviews they feel not having only a double journey but a triple one. As they feel that they have to work harder to attend to the expectations deposited on them as diplomats, wives and mothers. As presented by Fellegi (2023) the “enormous growth in the number of single, divorced, or unaccompanied female diplomats, from 50% to 75%, indicates that the situation in this field is not improving (FELLEGI, 2023, p 222).

There is an appreciable progress towards gender inclusion in diplomacy, with a growing number of women working in this field, the journey towards equitable representation remains an arduous one. The struggle is not only about increasing the sheer numbers of women but also about ensuring their representation in higher roles and breaking through the glass ceiling. The challenges women face in their roles go beyond professional hurdles, as social expectations and judgments about their personal lives continue to exert pressure (Fellegi, 2023). The social imposition of women as primary caregivers creates an additional layer of difficulty in their professional lives. Not only are they expected to excel in their roles as diplomats, but they are also burdened with the expectation to fulfill the responsibilities as wives and mothers. This social expectation effectively creates a triple burden for these women. The growing number of single, divorced, or unaccompanied female diplomats underscores the severity of this issue (Fellegi, 2023). As we move forward, it is crucial to challenge and transform these entrenched social norms and expectations, along with promoting policies that support and facilitate women's equal and active participation in all spheres of life. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a more inclusive and equitable diplomatic landscape.

4.3 Women and Czech Diplomatic Career: data and statistics

The dynamics of diplomacy have long been a focal point of global political discourse, with gender representation emerging as a significant issue. Historically, the realm of diplomacy has been dominated by men, a pattern reflected globally and within the Czech Republic. This essay aims to dissect the landscape of gender distribution within Czech diplomacy, highlighting the roles, challenges, and achievements of women in this critical sector.

According to Fellegi (2023):

“Regarding the Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region, only a few studies have been conducted so far—on equal opportunities in Slovenian diplomacy (Jazbec et al. 2011), descriptive representation in Czech diplomacy (Borčany 2017), and practices in the Czech Republic and select European Union (EU) countries (Dopita, Kočí, and Cmolíková 2020). These studies affirm very low female representation in top diplomacy (with the lowest rate of 9% in Slovakia [Pető 2015]), which might be affected by the overall negative situation in the field of gender equality in the region (Gender Equality Index 2020)” (FELLEGI, 2023 p. 222).

The presence of women in Czech diplomacy has undergone significant changes over time. The disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1993 provided a political reset, opening opportunities for the increased inclusion of women in diplomatic roles (Cermakova, 1999). However, the initial years saw slow progress. For instance, as per illustrative data, "In 1995, women constituted merely 20% of the Czech diplomatic corps" (Cermakova, 1999, p. 23).

The gender gap in Czech diplomacy is only a reflection of a non-gender balance society, according to Fellegi (2019):

“Although Czech women account for more than 60% of all university graduates, they only make up 16% of the representatives on the boards of major listed companies³⁴ and less than 25% of the representatives in state organs.³⁵ At the same time Czechs have one of the biggest European pay gaps, reaching 22%. The main question here is why, in this period when women form the majority of university graduates and most of the laws enable full female participation in society, women still underperform in the public sphere and are not represented in leading political and economic positions. The answers are very likely to be tied to the previously analyzed Czech historical development, which still influences and constructs the gender perception of political and business leaders as well as the ordinary population” (FELLEGI, 2019, P, 56).

Regarding the current scenario of Czech Diplomacy, there has been a considerable improvement, but the imbalance persists:

“as of December 2019, the Czech Republic had 97 male and 16 female ambassadors (14%), which confirms both serious underrepresentation of women in top diplomacy as well as uneven progress in this field (MFA 2021). This seems to be

rather surprising, considering the fact that equal numbers of females and males pass through the MFA's Diplomatic Academy" (FELLEGI, 2023 p, 229).

The numbers from 2019 to 2021 didn't evolve much, according to the Czech Diplomacy Report 2021, made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the number of women employed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has grown and it is higher than men.

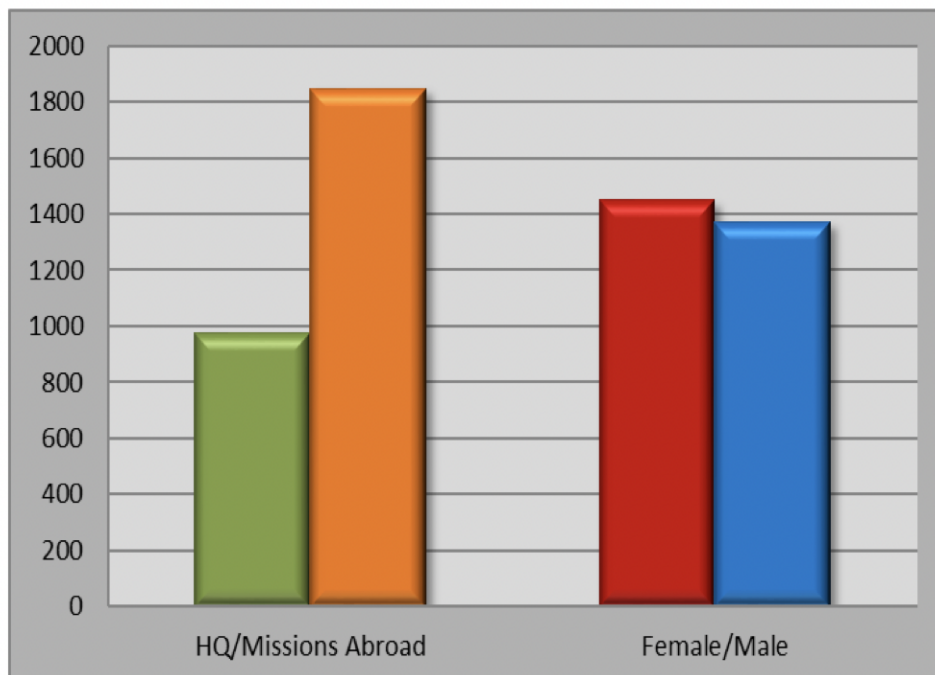
Table 1 - Number of Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs staff

Total		2822
Headquarters (974)		Female (1450)
Missions Abroad (1848)		Male (1372)
Posted Staff (1134)	Locally Hired (714)	

31/12/2021

Source: Czech Diplomacy Report 2022

Graphic 1- Quantity Female and Male employees



Source: Czech Diplomacy Report 2021

This data and statistics, agrees with the International Relations Theory, presented at the theoretical framework, as according to the Czech Diplomacy Report 2021 from the 96 open czech embassy only women represented only 16,7% of ambassadors. In the same year where there are more women employed the representation on higher positions is still extremely low.

One of the reasons for those numbers not increasing significantly, according to Fellegi (2023) is:

“The composition of the Council of Appointments, which nominates ambassadors, has traditionally been gender imbalanced and currently consists only of men. Thus, even though the process is claimed to be gender-blind and based on meritocracy, it is influenced by political and personal ties and by informal rules that are highly gendered” (FELLEGI, 2023 p 229).

This exploration into the gender dynamics within Czech diplomacy underscores an essential truth: while progress has been made, there remains an undeniable disparity in gender representation at higher echelons. Evidently, despite the increasing presence of women in diplomatic roles, they remain significantly underrepresented in top-tier positions.

This status quo challenges us to interrogate the structural and social barriers impeding the ascension of women to these roles, a conundrum that seems intricately tied to the broader gender imbalance in Czech society. Furthermore, it aligns with the International Relations Theory which suggests a prevailing gender imbalance in influential roles within international politics. As we move forward, it is important that we embrace the understanding that a more balanced gender representation in diplomacy is not just desirable, but integral for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to global politics and diplomacy.

5. How Do Czech Women Diplomats Perceive Themselves Inside the Czech Diplomatic Environment

From an analytical perspective, responses to the central key questions and the accompanying factual exposition presented by the interviewees allow for an in-depth exploration of the self-perceptions of Czech women diplomats within the context of the

Czech diplomatic environment. Additionally, these narratives shed light on the strategies they employ to navigate the challenges inherent in their professional trajectories. This segment encompasses the key findings distilled from the interviews conducted with a group of Czech women diplomats who hold senior positions within the hierarchy of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, three of whom are based in the Czech Republic, while the remaining seven are stationed abroad.

The group of interviewees exhibits a significant degree of homogeneity with regard to their demographic and professional profiles. Their ages predominantly range from mid-forties to late fifties, pointing to a considerable breadth of experience and a maturity that likely influences their perspectives on their diplomatic roles. Furthermore, their personal lives are characterized by familial commitments, as all interviewees are married and have at least one child, a facet of their lives that inevitably interweaves with their professional duties and potentially shapes their experiences within the diplomatic sphere.

A temporal factor is their entry into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which for all interviewees, occurred during the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. This shared temporal starting point suggests that their experiences and perspectives are likely informed by the sociopolitical context and transformations within the Czech Republic and the broader international landscape during this pivotal decade.

The examination of these diplomats' experiences and perceptions provides valuable insights into the lived realities of women diplomats in the Czech Republic, thereby offering an understanding of gender dynamics within this professional domain. Such insights bear significant implications for policy development, organizational practices, and the ongoing discourse on gender equity within the diplomatic field.

In order to establish an in depth analysis of the interviewees' perceptions of their professional roles and the respective host country environments, this chapter will be segmented into distinct sections. This structural organization aims to create a focused and systematic inquiry, enhancing the clarity and precision of the analysis. Each section will delve into specific dimensions of the diplomats' experiences, with particular attention given to their self-perceptions within the professional domain and their viewpoints on the cultural, socio-political, and diplomatic contexts of the countries where they are currently posted.

Conducting this academic research it's possible to recognize the importance of grounding the analysis in the voices of the diplomats themselves, allowing their experiences and perspectives to shape the narrative and understanding of women in diplomacy. The analysis intends to bring to light the varied and often unspoken challenges and triumphs experienced by these professionals, thereby enriching the scholarly discourse on gender, diplomacy, and international relations.

5.1 Perceptions of Gender Representation and Balance in the Czech Diplomatic Environment

The discourse surrounding gender equality and balance in the professional realm has been a focal point of contention and discussion for decades. All the interviewees agreed that the existence of an evolution regarding gender balance inside the Czech diplomatic environment: “I say that years ago there might be an issue of the composition of a gender balance in this is no more true. I think that actually we have more women in selection committees than we do have men” (interviewee 10).

This perception of an equal environment comes from the compilation and analysis of data concerning gender representation within organizations, propelled further by government initiatives and international regulatory bodies. For example, national programs, such as those initiated by the Prime Minister's office, necessitate ministries to submit comprehensive reports encompassing gender, salaries, functions, and other relevant factors. However, the accuracy and interpretation of these statistics can be subject to bias, manipulated to portray a more favorable image of gender parity within these entities, as affirmed by interviewee 3:

“You always work with numbers in a way to make your ministry look good and some of the, let's say, angles or types of stuff, as if you just don't do them or don't use it. But that's done. And the European Commission, European Union is definitely forcing all of the member states to follow and asking reports on a national level. That's why ministries are up on insight at national levels as well. So officially it yes, officially you have the same rights inside the job, in your employment and in your career as men.” (interviewee 3)

The interviewee believes that supranational bodies such as the European Commission and the European Union enforce stringent guidelines compelling all member states to produce

detailed reports on gender equality at a national level, and have contributed to the construction of a welcoming environment for women. Those institutions subsequently incited a heightened level of accountability within each ministry.

One important takeaway pointed out that the majority of the interviewees have never felt discriminated against as a woman or that my gender has been a determining factor in my career trajectory. This mindset, largely shaped by my role models, has allowed me to pursue my ambitions without feeling restricted by social gender norms. Officially, equal rights and opportunities exist across genders concerning employment and career advancement. Yet, the paradoxical reality of this ostensibly balanced scenario becomes manifest when the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon is taken into consideration.

Although they feel more welcomed and perceive the czech diplomatic environment moving forward a gender balanced one, the concept of the 'glass ceiling,' a somewhat invisible, but perceptible, barrier that obstructs women from climbing the professional ladder to higher echelons, is more intricate than it appears on the surface. The thickness and transparency of this barrier are often subject to flux, contingent upon variables such as changes in ministry leadership or personnel department heads, thus emphasizing its persistent presence: “it changed not enough, but enough” (interviewee 5).

Despite the apparent discrepancies, strides have been made towards gender parity in the professional realm. For instance, the composition of selection committees, which was once predominantly male, now sees an equal, if not greater, representation of women. Similarly, the leadership stratum of many organizations, including managing directors and directors of security and communications, now exhibits a near-equal gender distribution. This is a dramatic shift from past norms and a testament to progress made. However, despite reaching this level of parity, challenges still persist, particularly in the underrepresentation of women in ambassadorial roles. This indicates that the journey towards true gender balance is far from over and that concerted efforts must continue to be made to ensure equal representation at all levels: “We have more or less reached parity, and we still have some rotations during summertime and in the autumn, actually, there will be more women in the leadership than men, so that's going well, I see the issue is a lack of ambassadors” (interviewee 10).

Regarding the work environment, the majority of the diplomats interviewee understand the existence of certain female individuals who have managed to navigate the intricate labyrinth of political relations and ascend the professional ladder without exerting an equivalent quantum of effort or work, relative to their peers. Despite these instances providing a potential narrative to the predominant theme of gender imbalance, they are deemed as exceptional occurrences rather than emblematic of a broader, transformative trend.

This narrative is seen by them as the presence of a minority within the professional community who harbor entrenched misogynistic behavior. These individuals, although limited in number, represent a residue of gender bias that subtly permeates the work environment. However, the social norms and professional standards of conduct, particularly stringent within a European context, largely circumscribe their ability to openly express such discriminatory viewpoints. Consequently, their sphere of influence remains marginalized, thus preventing them from significantly impacting the broader dynamics of the work culture.

Most of the speakers offer a unique, first-hand perspective of having navigated this gendered landscape without facing overt instances of discrimination. Interviewee 9 stated that this kind of experience is attributed to a fortuitous synchronicity between her entry into the ministry and a personal phase characterized by an audacious spirit and an unencumbered approach toward professional commitments. Their statement underscores the complex matrix of gender, social norms, and professional culture, with diplomacy serving as a representative microcosm. As such, it underlines the imperative need for continuous dialogue, concerted action, and policy interventions to mitigate gender inequities and foster a more balanced and inclusive professional environment.

The topic of women and their representation is part of the gender balance agenda, but it actually can be analyzed in a separate form, as it was possible to understand through the interviews that the environment is gender balanced but the women do not feel as represented as equal as men, bringing to light the complex relationship between gender and professional representations in the realm of diplomacy. Through the interviewee lenses, it is evidence that significant strides have been made towards gender equality, reflecting broader social advances in human rights within the European context.

It is indeed heartening to note the significant presence of women at various hierarchical echelons within diplomatic professions. Women are perceived by their presence

in roles that necessitate an extraordinary commitment to work, professionalism, and dedication.

Through the interviews it was possible to understand that this prevalence of women at both entry-level and mid-level positions signifies a remarkable shift from historically male-dominated environments. However, as the professional hierarchy ascends, there is an observable diminution in the proportion of women in leadership roles. This pattern, often described as the 'pyramid' or the 'glass ceiling' effect, signifies an embedded gender inequality that is less about overt discrimination and more about unconscious biases that permeate decision-making processes. It emerges that when contemplating candidates for high-ranking positions, decision-makers - often unconsciously - tend to favor male candidates, reflecting social “norms” and perceptions.

These diplomats interviewees understand the landscape of gender dynamics in the diplomatic profession mirrors broader social patterns and challenges. They agree that considerable progress has been made, and it is apparent that the pursuit of gender equality remains an ongoing endeavor, as stated by diplomat 3 “Because how the job is in reconstruction, let's say, on all diplomacy because you don't do the old time diplomacy anymore” (interviewee 3). Addressing these persistent, often unconscious, biases necessitates a multipronged approach that combines policy interventions, educational initiatives, and an ongoing dialogue about gender and equality. Only then can we hope to fully dismantle these deep-rooted biases and ensure a truly equitable representation in the realm of diplomacy and beyond.

But also that misrepresentation and the perception of diplomacy and politics being a male environment, is still present not only among men but also insert into the professional culture. During the interview with diplomat 5, she talked about a dialog with a male colleague regarding his daughter thinking about following a diplomatic career. The male colleague concerning the career trajectory of the latter's daughter, manifested himself against it of bias, the father, despite his firsthand experience within the field, articulates a dismissive stance towards the prospect of his daughter joining the diplomatic corps, deeming it an inappropriate career path for women.

This prejudice largely stems from long-established hurdles that women have historically faced in the field, including the expectation for spouses to adopt a nomadic lifestyle due to the necessity of international relocations for work. This attitude sparked

surprise and was shared by both the interviewee and another female colleague who overheard the conversation.

5.2 Perception of Gender Representation regarding High Positions and Role Played by Women in the Czech Diplomatic Environment

One of the most important subtopic of this thesis is the relations and role of women, regarding their skills to manage hard issues or are fated to only deal with soft issues. It was important to this thesis analysis, to understand how Czech women diplomats perceive the topic regarding their daily lives.

After being - briefly - explained what the International Relation Theory means by women being considered restricted to engaging in 'soft' diplomacy, thus conceding 'hard' topics to their male counterparts, all of the interviewee agree that their reality is not related to the applied theory. They said it should be clarified that this assertion is patently false, as evidenced by the prominent female figures within the ministry who have established themselves as hardline authorities on security issues: “Or I will tell you right away some of the most hardliners in security issues at our ministry are women. And through all my career have been some with very much cut ideas and very much capable of decision making.” (interviewee 10)

They understand the competence of women is not limited to particular domains; rather, it is contingent upon the individual's proclivities and aptitudes, akin to their male counterparts. I have encountered male diplomats who excel remarkably in the realm of cultural diplomacy, not due to any imposed stereotypical orientation, but due to their inherent knack for human interaction and historical insight. Similarly, there are women who are accomplished political scientists or security analysts, armed with astute analytical minds, and demonstrating long-standing expertise and successes within their respective fields. As said by interviewee 7:

“If they like to work with human rights or the environment or the culture, diplomacy or whatever, let them do it. But it's not sad that they are much better in that than in others. It depends on each woman. Each woman is different, like each one. I know some men who are fantastic in cultural diplomacy, they are just naturally skilled in human interaction and history. They love history and studying and there are women. We have some very good political scientists, analytical minds and we have some, as I

said, very much with a long history in different studies and security issues very skilled in that be successful in those careers” (interviewee 7).

According to them the topic of complexity and kind of tasks is thus unnecessary, and perhaps even counterproductive, to perpetuate gender-based occupational assumptions, women should be allowed to navigate their careers based on their individual strengths, preferences and skills.

Notwithstanding the assertions made by the interviewees that the Czech environment regarding women's diplomacy is ostensibly gender-neutral in its delegation of diplomatic missions and task complexities, the issue of female representation in high-ranking positions evoked unanimous agreement among all interviewees. They all concurred that there remains a conspicuous deficiency of women occupying these high-ranking offices, signifying an underlying gender disparity that needs addressing.

According to the interviewees throughout the history of Czech diplomacy, women have performed outstandingly, having women excelling in their diplomatic roles. These individuals not only contributed significantly to the past achievements but continue to do so today, and they could serve as role models for aspiring female diplomats. It has been observed that since a particular point in time, around 2010 to 2015, there has been a decrease in the number of women in higher positions within their organization. Granted, there are many women who are heads of units or directors of departments, but as we ascend the hierarchical ladder, the female representation becomes more sparse: “And I think we really moved as women in Czech diplomacy concretely, we did fantastic jobs. I have so many friends and colleagues who are excellent diplomats and did so much in the past and are still doing great jobs and they could become inspiration for others” (interviewee 4).

Currently, one of the biggest issues is the significantly lower number of female applicants for higher positions compared to male applicants. A notable factor contributing to this discrepancy is the prerequisite for a certain number of years in a directorial or management role, which many potential female applicants may not fulfill. As a result, the rate of female to male applicants for ambassadorial roles is one-third female and two-thirds male. This not only reflects a cultural and psychological issue but also indicates a problem with low motivation among potential female candidates. The complexity of the legal requirement of service years for eligibility, may deter some women from applying, as already

mentioned in the previous chapter, the responsibilities of women regarding managing their families' lives and maternity leaves, for example.

It was perceived that unfortunately, the prevailing unconscious bias tends to overlook these competent women. Noted by interviewees 1 and 2, when considering nominations for critical roles, the initial thought often leans towards male candidates. This unconscious 'boys club' mentality has deep social roots, and it can only be changed gradually. During the 1990s, we had numerous women in decision-making circles who prioritized advancing the careers of their female colleagues; women were frequently nominated and appointed as ambassadors.

The interviewees affirmed that as the Czech professional system matured, it seems that the glass ceiling, once shattered, began to repair itself. The mental process of men considering men for roles subtly perpetuated, and with time, women were increasingly left out of decision-making circles. They feel the need to be proactive in nurturing potential successors for critical roles, to avoid last-minute decisions and ensure the most competent individuals are considered, irrespective of gender. Therefore, the discourse on gender bias in diplomacy should be revisited, ensuring that competence and aptitude, rather than gender, become the determining factors in professional assignments and promotions. Men started to prioritize other men for job opportunities, although the revolutionary and enthusiastic spirit of the 1990s, coupled with the influx of women into the diplomatic corps, kept this bias.

5.3 The Imperative of Addressing Gender Equality within the Czech Diplomatic Environment

Addressing the relevance and importance of discussion of the presented topic during the course of the interviews, it becomes critically important to elucidate the reflective insights that emerged from this process. The interviewees distinguished in their respective roles, demonstrated an acute understanding that conversations surrounding gender disparities, underrepresentation of women in senior roles, the systematic barriers encountered by them, the negotiation with socially constructed expectations, and the interplay of managing professional obligations with personal responsibilities, are not only significant, but crucial.

The complex construct of gender within the diplomatic domain, specifically the disparities and unconscious biases that persist, were acknowledged and underscored by the

respondents. They elucidated upon the potential of such conversations to act as catalysts for meaningful dialogue about gender dynamics in diplomacy. This would be instrumental in laying the groundwork for significant, structural transformations in the field.

Additionally, regarding these complex gender issues would contribute to altering long-held perceptions of women in diplomatic roles. These discussions bring to the forefront the necessity of redefining the role of women in diplomacy, not merely in terms of their participation, but in terms of their leadership and influence in shaping policy and decision making.

The shared recognition of the importance of these discussions points towards a growing awareness of the need to dismantle gender stereotypes and to challenge the sociocultural constructs that have historically circumscribed women's roles in diplomacy. This awareness signals an important step towards the pursuit of equality in diplomatic representation, and the evolution of a more inclusive and equitable diplomatic sphere.

Although they understand the importance of replicating this discussion, all of the interviewees admit that they, as women in high positions, should do more for each other, as pointed out by interviewee 9 “ I think we don't do enough for ourselves”, complemented by interview 8 “we have to understand that we need to fight this system by ourselves, help and support each other. No man will understand and get this battle as his issue.”

A salient theme elicited from the interviewee's discourse was the underrepresentation of discourse regarding their unique experiences as Czech women diplomats. They articulated that the urgency and commitment associated with their professional duties rendered them oblivious to the need to actively support and guide younger women aspiring for advancements in their careers. They confessed that their primary focus was directed towards fulfilling their professional obligations to the best of their abilities, often at the expense of advocating for gender equality within the diplomatic sphere, as reflected by interviewee 1:

“we should think more about the experience we have earned and gained to pass it more to young women in diplomacy. And we are not thinking about that because no one cared about us in the past when we were starting our jobs and we made it. So somehow we like this thinking that it could be done and it should be done. To work more and to pass this know-how

and help them to create their own circles and experience sharing among them and with us” (interviewee 1).

The formation of female alliances, as expressed by the respondents, was portrayed as a spontaneous and organic development within their day-to-day activities, rather than a calculated strategic initiative aimed at dismantling gender disparities in diplomacy. However, this unintentional networking, although impactful in creating a supportive community, fell short of serving as a deliberate, concerted effort toward addressing and redressing gender inequity within the realm of diplomacy.

Consequently, these experiences underscore the necessity of fostering a heightened consciousness regarding the active role established women diplomats need to undertake in mentoring the next generation. The onus lies on these pioneers not only to break the glass ceiling but to ensure they leave the ladder behind for those who aspire to follow in their footsteps.

The interviewee 2, as the first female ambassador from the European Union in her assigned country, played an instrumental role in establishing an “ambassadors' club” that included other women from the Dutch, French, Swedish and Canadian delegations. This group's formation was driven by the shared recognition of the unique challenges faced by women in diplomatic roles, fostering an environment of mutual support and collaboration. Notably, the group leveraged its collective influence to invite significant political figures to social gatherings, demonstrating the potential of collaborative diplomatic engagement. Invitations extended by multiple women ambassadors were perceived as compelling, facilitating access to high-ranking officials that might otherwise be challenging for individual ambassadors to secure.

The interviewee (2, 5 and 7) emphasize the necessity for furthering such shared experiences, acknowledging that the diplomatic profession, traditionally dominated by men, presents distinct challenges and opportunities for women. This assertion underscores the ongoing need for support networks and strategies tailored to women's unique experiences within diplomacy.

They reveal a profound introspection of the lack of formal mechanisms within diplomatic institutions to pass on the collective experiences and knowledge of women navigating the field. This reflects the approach adopted in the 90s, where women, engulfed by

the demands of their profession, had to independently decipher the intricate balance between personal obligations and professional expectations.

Over time, unofficial networks among women diplomats developed, functioning as support groups where they exchanged experiences and solutions to shared challenges, such as managing familial responsibilities. Notably, these informal circles were even perceived as a formidable force within the ministry. The bonds established within these groups were not solely professional; they permeated personal spheres, fostering a deeper understanding and empathetic response to the unique struggles faced by women in diplomacy.

However, the interviewees saw the necessity for these informal exchanges to evolve into more structured mechanisms of mentorship and support within diplomatic institutions. While the solidarity among women diplomats in environments with limited female representation, like in certain Arabic countries, is noteworthy, the need for more formalized, institutionally-supported avenues for sharing experiences and knowledge remains apparent. The evolution from informal circles to established support systems is crucial for enhancing the inclusivity and effectiveness of diplomacy in the future.

5.4 How Do Czech Women Diplomats Perceive Themselves Inside The Czech Diplomatic Environment

This subchapter aimed to understand how Czech women diplomats perceive themselves inside the Czech diplomatic environment, taking into consideration the gender bias existing and also exploring their perception and experiences towards the profession. It is interesting how their perception of the profession was so different but with the same essence of being proud women to represent and do the best for their country.

It was possible to understand that the self-perception of the role of Czech women diplomats is seen as extremely important, both in a historical temporal period and in the present day. This role, however, is perceived to be underrepresented in terms of hierarchical and leadership positions, even though the general environment of Czech diplomacy is open and inclusive in its treatment and reception of women who practice the profession. Furthermore, it is possible to understand their anxieties and difficulties regarding their daily

professional life, concomitant with their private lives - implying care for the home and family (husband and children).

Also, it was identified that women diplomats do not perceive themselves as weak in dealing with issues and topics classified as soft. They do not understand the necessity of this type of classification, as many, since the beginning of their careers, have held hierarchical positions, in war-torn countries, dealing daily with matters of risk and international security, for example.

The statements obtained for the construction of this research, particularly in this subsection, demonstrate the self-perception of the lack of support within the female community itself. Moreover, it illuminates how this topic should be replicated so that the evolution and pursuit of equity - particularly regarding hierarchical positions - remains present in Czech diplomacy.

The interviewees understand it as embarking on a reflective journey recounting their experiences in the dynamic world of diplomacy, they vividly described her time in the early 2000s as, "really, really adventurous times. It was an adventurous ride, like in a lunar park", said interviewee 7. The sheer unpredictability and novelty of the experiences, in her words, felt like stepping into a "miraculous place where things were appearing you have never heard of" Interviewee 7. She regarded the opportunities for personal growth, the chance to make a difference, and the sense of purpose she derived from her work as an enriching experience.

Furthermore, it was observed that meritocracy played a more significant role. As recalled by interviewee 8 "The first thing was is that person a good one and almost the best one for the job, for the country? There it was always a major factor in consideration." Over time, the landscape shifted towards favoring "connections, of your reputation," which they perceived as detrimental to women's advancement.

Reflecting on long-term foreign assignments, it is possible to articulate the risks of disconnection from the home country, stating, "Because when you serve ten years and more continuously abroad and you come home only for vacation for some time, you inevitably lose a bit of feeling. How is the situation at home?" But they perceive themselves in a friendly environment with no strict rules to return home.

Also, this individual's responsibilities encompassed a wide range of tasks, lending opportunities to engage in diverse experiences. From engaging in high-level diplomatic discussions with "kings, queens and presidents" to mundane tasks such as "checking on the budget" and managing family life, the multiplicity of roles they played added depth and complexity to their experiences, however, it was not oblivious to the evolving nature of diplomacy.

It is considered a challenging and complex profession in which initially they couldn't see all of the daily challenges, especially regarding their family life, saying, "You didn't Consider how you will raise Your family, how It Will be with Your kids or with your relations." Over time, she learned to adapt to these complexities, even making decisions such as spending "four or five years in Prague in a row instead of taking another job abroad because it was the age of my son."

The changing nature of diplomacy still places a burden on women, with social expectations and caregiving roles often falling on them. Despite this, the multitasking and management of house and children they contend, "it's also a certain advantage because it keeps you rooted in real life." This connection to the realities of everyday life provides women with a grounded perspective and honed multitasking abilities, she argued.

However, also perceive that there is much progress that remains to be made for gender equality in diplomacy. Expressing her optimism, she stated, "All those young, bright women, you can't suppress them long enough. Inevitably some of them will break that glass ceiling. Being the goal of feminism, "the freedom that we need if we want to achieve the same." Interviewee 2 reflected on her journey, she perceived changes in management styles, noting that there is now a greater emphasis on "listening to people, paying attention to their needs," with the satisfaction of personnel, including women and diverse individuals, gaining importance.

The narratives and reflections of Czech women diplomats underscore the complex interplay of personal resilience, social change, and institutional practices in their professional journeys. Despite the apparent openness and inclusiveness of Czech diplomacy, their experiences and self-perceptions shed light on the persisting gender imbalances in leadership roles, the challenge of maintaining work-life balance, and the need for more robust support networks within their community. These insights underscore the transformative potential of

women's continued engagement in diplomacy, not just in terms of achieving gender parity in leadership roles, but also in redefining norms and practices in this traditionally male-dominated sphere. The optimism expressed by some interviewees about the future, particularly the anticipation of young, bright women breaking the glass ceiling, is a powerful testament to their resilience and a beacon of hope for the future. Moreover, the shift in management styles towards a more empathetic and personnel-focused approach, as perceived by the interviewees, holds promise for a more inclusive and equitable diplomatic environment. Yet, as these testimonies make clear, the pursuit of gender equity in Czech diplomacy remains an ongoing journey marked by both achievements and challenges, and the experiences of these women diplomats must continue to inform and inspire these efforts.

6. Conclusion

The entrenched patriarchal structure in international relations, politics, and diplomacy continues to obstruct the full and meaningful participation of women, thereby underscoring the persistent gender imbalance in these fields. The prevalence of enduring social and structural barriers, including age, class, ethnic background, religion, and sexual orientation, contradicts the simplification that women's underrepresentation is due to a lack of interest in politics. The dominance of masculine identities and activities, which are conferred with greater prestige in the realm of politics and diplomacy, is a testament to the gender biases that persistently prevail.

The research has brought light on these issues by examining the experiences and perceptions of Czech women diplomats, an area relatively underexplored until now. The insightful reflections these women offered have not only deepened our understanding of their roles but also provoked them to question their own assumptions and practices.

By identifying and understanding how women perceive themselves and are perceived by others in the Czech diplomatic environment, we can catalyze broader conversations on gender equality. This could subsequently influence social structures within the country and the Central Europe region more widely. Therefore, addressing the gender imbalance in international relations and diplomacy is not only critical for the fields themselves but also important for social progression towards gender equality at large.

The fight for gender balance in international relations and diplomacy is far from over. The findings of this research, while illuminating, underscore the need for further discourse and understanding to render gender balance a natural and inherent concept within these spheres. In doing so, we can foster a more inclusive environment that encourages women's participation and acceptance in international politics.

This research was conducted under the exploration of International Relations from the perspective of Feminist Theory, demonstrating the discipline's evolution and its historical dialogue with feminism. Early iterations of International Relations were primarily driven by realist and liberalist theories, which emphasized state-centric international relations, but largely neglected the intricate dynamics within states. These theories fell short in accounting for gender-related concerns and consequently, their influence was challenged by feminist theorists, who shed light on gender bias and strived to redefine foundational concepts of the discipline.

According to International Relations Feminist Theory, these dynamics are a clear manifestation of a social construct designed to uphold the dominance of a particular group. The pervasive and hierarchical politics of identity in diplomatic circles often perpetuate unequal access to resources, power, and authority, thereby placing women at a significant disadvantage.

In analyzing different feminist perspectives, it becomes evident that their shared goal is to resist patriarchal culture. This struggle often necessitates the adaptive use of any space granted by this culture for the development of their theory. Such constant adaptation explains the existence of diverse feminist strands. It is this perpetual theoretical resilience and determination to transform constraints into opportunities for feminist practice that defines the evolution of feminist theory (Nye, 1995).

The work of Cynthia Enloe, particularly her seminal book "Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Relations" (1989), has brought fresh insights to the field. Enloe contends that a people-centric rather than an abstract or state-centric approach is essential for the study of international relations. Her feminist lens redefines global politics by highlighting the profound influence of gender roles and women's experiences on international dynamics (Sylvester, 2001). Through Enloe's work, we understand that making feminist sense of global politics necessitates examining the role of

gender in a broad range of issues, from the dynamics of marriage and sexual relationships to the political economy at both domestic and international levels.

As a political science master student and a bachelor in international relations, the approach to this topic is of extreme importance, as through - increasingly numerous - research on the topic, the existence of gender disparity is known, not only in numbers, but also in female representation in high-ranking positions.

The possibility of talking and interviewing Czech women diplomats, addressing and fueling discussions on this theme, helps us understand the Czech diplomacy environment through the lenses of the people who are most affected by the patriarchal culture in which we live.

Through the interviews it is possible to understand that the Czech women diplomats feel pride in serving their country, but there are structural issues inside the Czech diplomatic environment that need to be changed. Also, they perceive a huge problem not inside the Czech diplomatic environment, but as the society in general. As women have to face and deal with social pressure imposed by a social constructed concept and expectations toward women.

Through this research we can affirm that Czech women diplomats perceive themselves working in a high demand profession, regarding skills and time dedicated to it. They could identify the barriers presented to them as being a woman, a mother and a wife, but those aspects - through their perception - do not overcome their professional choice.

Moreover regarding gender balance and representation, the interviewees diplomats expressed a sense of underrepresentation, particularly in hierarchical and leadership roles. While the general diplomatic environment is perceived as open and inclusive, as the number of women employees of the Foreign Ministry is higher than men, there is a lack of women taking the place of directors or ambassadors.

They understand that the lack of women participation is due to three main reasons: The normative to apply to high positions do not take into consideration situations such as maternity leave, which compromise women's application. The difficulties balancing their professional and private lives, but not because the job is too demanding for women, but due

to the social expectations toward women being a mother and a high skill professional. And, the structural unconscious patriarchal thought of giving preferences to male references to leadership positions.

In regards to female representation in leadership roles, the case of the Czech Republic presents an interesting factor: historical period. Women in the 90s were able to enter the career without suffering any type of disadvantage or discrimination, and also attained leadership positions. This fact arose due to the demand caused by the end of the Soviet regime and the emergence of a new country that sought to disconnect agents linked to the old Communist party.

They perceive their career experiences in challenging environments and in roles not typically associated with 'hard' or "soft" issues, meaning that they do their job and receive missions regardless of their gender. Counteracting the Feminist Theory, as it perceived any weakness toward their work and profession.

The interviewees also notice a shift in management styles towards greater empathy and personnel focus, highlighting the importance of these changes for creating a more inclusive diplomatic environment. Yet, the quest for gender equality in diplomacy is ongoing. The resilience and optimism of these women, as well as the expectation of future women breaking the glass ceiling, are indicative of the transformative potential of continued female engagement in diplomacy.

I believe that one of the highlights of this research was understanding that it had an impact on the interviewees when I addressed their perception of the importance of discussing this topic. This is because they themselves identified a lack of proactivity and commitment in directly disseminating the topic, unconsciously forgetting to provide support and encouragement to young women who are entering the diplomatic career.

After interviewing Czech women diplomats, listening to their perceptions and experiences, it is possible to analyze that the Czech diplomatic environment is making great strides towards gender balance, even though there is a lack of female representation in high-ranking and leadership positions.

Czech women diplomats perceive themselves as free to act as capable professionals and are judged only by their abilities, whether classified as soft or hard, not applying the case

of the Feminist Theory of International Relations towards the Czech diplomatic environment. It is possible to affirm that they perceive themselves as strong women who are doing their best to overcome the patriarchal culture, existent in this study field, by being extraordinary at their job.

7. Literature Review

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