# The 8th Edition of the Paris Peace Forum

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## Stunning views, harsh realities

In the heart of Paris, right next to the Trocadéro and its breathtaking view of the Eiffel Tower, the global community presented itself in its best light during last week's 8th edition of the Paris Peace Forum. Numerous chic attendees, dressed in elegant attire and gathered in one of the world's most exquisite venues, came together to discuss and explore this year's thematic umbrella: New Coalitions for Peace, People, and the Planet. The invited experts, policymakers, state representatives, and scholars could hardly have

had a more urgent agenda. Battered by wars, failing ceasefires, risky geopolitical shifts, rising inequalities, and a downward spiral in Paris' own climate goals (celebrating their 10th anniversary during this edition), the international community is in desperate need of answers.

Russia's assault on Ukraine continues to define Europe's security landscape, pushing the frontline of European defence further east and exposing the vulnerabilities of an Atlantic Alliance that is largely unprepared for renewed hard power politics. Putin's recent probing of NATO's eastern border has underscored how fragile Europe's security architecture has become and how urgently the continent must rediscover its own agency. At the same time, the climate crisis is accelerating at a pace that shocks even seasoned experts, narrowing the window for humanity to preserve a liveable planet. The EU, confronted with a fractured global order it once helped shape, now finds itself navigating a world where multilateral norms are eroding and self-interest is resurgent.

Amid this turbulence, the question of who gets to lead – and whose voices shape global solutions – has become impossible to ignore. The role of women and female leaders is no longer a matter of representation alone but of strategic necessity. Feminist foreign policy offers one possible counterbalance, even as right-wing governments attempt to co-opt the language of inclusion without embracing its substance. What kind of leadership will emerge from this moment? And will it be enough to meet the scale of the challenges ahead? Two days at the Paris Peace Forum did not answer all these questions. Yet the event raised them, encouraged deep discussion of their essence, and offered insights that call for closer examination. This article will give an overview of a few panels and interesting takeaways.

## Europe under Pressure: Finding agency amid a changing geopolitical climate

With regard to the problems the EU is facing, the picture is clear. As the German Minister of State for Europe, Gunther Krichbaum, noted, the era in which the EU could rely on cheap Russian energy, inexpensive Chinese goods, and American security guarantees is over. Instead, Europe now faces simultaneous pressure on competitiveness, security, and values; challenges that are interlinked and pressing. Between Russia's invasion of Ukraine, an increase in tariffs, US-China tensions and growing dependencies in technology and raw materials, Europe must find its voice. To meet these challenges Krichbaum and his co-panellists Ignacy Niemczycki (Polish State Secretary), Benjamin Haddad (French Minister Delegate for Europe), representing the countries of the Weimar triangle, argued that Europe's response must be one of unison: act together, take responsibility together, and articulate a clear European will together. This requires playing to the Union's strengths: its vast consumer market, economic strength and global attractiveness can help it face both allies and rivals on equal footing.

Among these challenges, ending the war in Ukraine and the urgency of the moment was underscored in a separate panel on Ukraine. The panel was attended among others by the foreign minister of Latvia, Baiba Braže and Ukraine's deputy foreign minister Olegsandr Mischenko, who emphasised that appeasement toward Russia is not an option. Discussion centred around the question of how Europe can step up its support to Ukraine and restore international norms of non-aggression, given the war is raging on. Beyond sustained military assistance, the panellists stressed the need for Europe, civil society and leadership alike, to take the Russian threat seriously. Ms Braže especially warned against naivete in face of ongoing Russian hybrid operations across Europe and the Baltic Sea. To meet these challenges, the EU must increase its unity and strengthen its agency.

## Feminist Futures: Reimagining global governance

The question of women's role in facing current global challenges presented a central theme at the Peace Forum. In 2025, women still occupy fewer than a third of parliamentary seats worldwide, and their presence in senior political and ministerial roles is even slimmer. According to the UN, the share of women serving as heads of government has slipped from 23.3% in 2024 to 22.9% in 2025. Only 27 countries are currently led by women. These figures reveal how fragile recent gains in gender equality remain amid rising authoritarianism, political instability, and anti-minority policies. Yet new strategies continue to emerge, feminist foreign policy frameworks, quotas, and representation targets. As one panellist put it, "Policy can't be good when it ignores half the world's population." But technical fixes alone won't suffice. What deeper shifts are needed to ensure women gain real access to decision-making, and real agency in shaping political agendas?

"To liberate their potential, you have to liberate their time" said Michelle Morse, Vice President for Girls and Women Strategy at the UN Foundation. Across much of the world, women shoulder the burden of unpaid care work; in many developing countries, they spend hours each day fetching water or tending to households. Without dismantling these unequal burdens and the patriarchal structures behind them, women cannot participate meaningfully in public life. Even those who rise to the top face a different set of obstacles. Panellists stressed the need for supportive infrastructure: networks, mentorship, and visible role models. "You can't be what you can't see," one speaker noted. Huma Abedin, former chief of staff to Hillary Clinton, added that women often doubt their own readiness: "The right age to run for office is when you're a man." Encouragement, sponsorship, and collective support remain essential. Moving beyond the logic of simply "adding women and stirring," real equality requires reshaping the systems around them, so that women are not merely included, but empowered.

## 10 Years of the Paris Agreement: Implementation, innovation and inclusion

A decade on, the Paris Agreement remains a cornerstone of global climate policy. Laurent Fabius, former COP21 President, stressed that multilateralism, the rule of law, and science still anchor the accord; yet it is increasingly under pressure. Some countries have walked away; others question whether Paris has achieved anything at all. Science says it has, though science itself is now under attack. Consequently, it is crucial to remind the public that Paris is a success grounded in evidence, even if many of its facts remain little known. The next decade must be about delivery, and this is tackled through a three-fold strategy: Implementation, Inclusion, Innovation. No new goals: implementing the ones already promised. And that means broadening the actors involved: not only states, but cities, businesses, and local authorities – Inclusion is essential.

Innovation is reshaping the landscape too. With the ICJ confirming that states can be held legally accountable for climate inaction, climate policy is shifting from ambition to obligation. Clean energy is booming, but fossil fuels still dominate. The core message: economic competitiveness and climate action now go hand in hand. For any country seeking security and sovereignty, transforming its energy system is not optional – it's strategic. The Paris Peace Forum offered no illusions of quick fixes, but it made one thing clear: in a fractured world, leadership demands courage, cooperation, and a willingness to finally act.