

Coalition to End VAWG

c/o EWL
Brussels, Belgium

15 April 2021

Subject: Letter signed by thirteen CSOs from the European Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls on the President of Turkey's Decision and Poland's actions to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention

Dear President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen,
Dear President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli,
Dear President of the European Council, Charles Michel,
Dear representative of the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, Ambassador Nuno Brito,

We, the undersigned, members of the [European Coalition to End violence against women and girls](#) consisting of civil society organisations, networks and trade unions fighting for gender equality and the rights of women and girls to live free from violence, **are writing to express our grave concerns and condemnation of the Presidential Decision issued by President Erdogan on March 20 2021, announcing his intention to withdraw Turkey from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention.** This shocking decision comes 10 years after Turkey, then also led by Prime Minister Erdogan's government, was the first country to ratify the Convention, as a message to the world of its political commitment and ambition to eliminating gender-based violence against women and girls in all their diversity.

The Istanbul Convention, which is an internationally agreed framework for zero-tolerance for violence against women and girls and gender-based violence, is a human rights guarantee. Within the scope of its field, it is the international benchmark and "gold standard" for legislation and policy, not only in Europe, but also much beyond. The Convention is a blueprint document in the sense that it recognizes the structural nature of violence which is both a cause and a consequence of unequal power relations between women and men. As the first legally binding international instrument on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention establishes a comprehensive framework of legal and policy measures for preventing such violence, supporting victims and punishing perpetrators.

As of today, the Convention has been signed by all European Union Member States and ratified by 21 of them. The EU signed the Convention on June 13, 2017 and there are ongoing efforts for the EU to accede to the Convention swiftly.

We have observed with alarm the growing political backlash against the Istanbul Convention and the threat this poses to the safety of women and girls in all their diversity across Europe who are at greater risk of violence. Notwithstanding the Turkish government's claims, domestic law n-6284, as it stands, is far from being a substitute for the Istanbul Convention and the problems in its implementation continue since the day it came into force due to lack of political will to implement the Convention. The withdrawal will encourage misogynist radical movements and cultural fundamentalists' attacks on the rights of women and girls and will violate democratic principles and values. Some governments have a tendency to restrict the application of the Convention in line with their own ideologies, through reservations or declarations in the process of signature or ratification.

We express concern at the announcement of Poland's intention to withdraw from the Convention, by way of an alternative draft bill titled "Yes to family, no to gender", or through a request to the Constitutional Tribunal to examine the constitutionality of the Convention, noting that the legitimacy and independence of the Tribunal have been seriously questioned and that it no longer constitutes an independent and legitimate judicial body. We note that on 06 April 2021, the Polish Representative at the EU High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity stated during an event on the Istanbul Convention that the Polish government has not been undertaking actions towards withdrawing from the Convention. We call on the Polish government to follow through on that statement, and to not withdraw from the Convention, take proactive steps to implement it and promote public support for it. The actions of Poland to withdraw from the Convention are in clear contravention to EU fundamental values as per Article 2 TEU, and we cannot see their like again from Poland nor any other EU country. In addition, the fact that six EU Member States have yet failed to ratify the Istanbul Convention remains an unacceptable reality, posing a literal threat to the lives of women and girls in the European Union.

Presidents and Your Excellencies, we therefore turn to you to ensure your obligations in upholding EU fundamental values and rights. The EU and its Member States must urgently step up and demonstrate their political leadership and commitment to the rights of women and girls in all their diversity, by:

- **Continuing work during the recent visit of Presidents Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel to Turkey in denouncing the President of Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, and urging him to revert this decision.**
- **Denouncing Poland's intention to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, and ensuring their recent statement in support of the Convention be followed through with proactive measures;**
- **Urging Turkey and Poland to reaffirm their commitments to women and girls' rights by fully implementing the Convention without delay, and without reservations.**
- **Urging all EU Member States to urgently ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention without delay, and without any reservations.**
- **Complete the process of the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention without delay in line with the [European Parliament Resolution on EU Accession to the Istanbul Convention](#) adopted in 2017 and the recommendations from the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities adopted in 2015.**
- **Clearly respond to and refute assertions that the Istanbul Convention establishes "special rights" for certain minorities, and reinforce the EU's commitment to the protection of all women and girls.**

We also would like to underline that we will be closely monitoring the response of all authorities regarding Turkey's withdrawal decision to ensure significant steps are taken not only to mitigate the impacts of this backlash, but also to ensure the continued advancement of the rights of all women and girls, which have disproportionately faced devastating impacts from COVID-19.

Women and girls in all their diversity deserve to live their lives free from all forms of violence; it is essential that action be taken without delay!

Yours sincerely,

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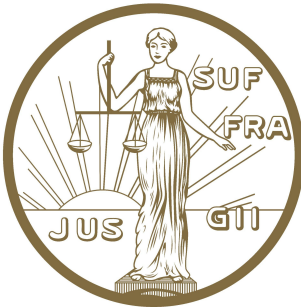
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