

Brussels, 25th April 2018

To: **Hon. Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland,**
Secretary General of the Council of Europe

CC: **Hon. Michele Nicoletti, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,**
Hon. Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights,
Hon. Feride Acar, President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women

We, the European Coalition to End Violence against Women, write to you today, in this important time of political discussion, to reaffirm our full support for and confidence in the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence, the Istanbul Convention.

The European Coalition to End Violence against Women is an extensive strategic alliance of more than 25 cross-European human rights and social justice civil society organisations, convened by the European Women's Lobby, working collectively to ensure that women and girls across Europe can live their lives free from all forms of violence. The Coalition is joined by a number of supporting civil society organisations in this call, to highlight the vast amount of support for the Istanbul Convention; our collective voice represents over **3,835 NGOs in 49 countries**.

The European Coalition to End Violence against Women and Girls and associated members believe that the Istanbul Convention is the most comprehensive treaty tackling violence against women and domestic violence in Europe. The Istanbul Convention provides effective and proactive measures to prevent violence against women, protect victims, prosecute perpetrators and contribute to the elimination of multiple forms of discrimination against women. The Convention is a key tool for improving legislation and policies as it provides national governments with the necessary framework to protect all of their citizens from violence.

It has recently come to our attention that a letter has been sent to you recommending changes to the text of the Convention. The rationale outlined in that letter is based on deliberate misrepresentation of the Convention and is not supported by the conclusions of the Convention's explanatory report. As reiterated by the Executive Secretary of the Istanbul Convention, Mrs. Bridget O'Loughlin, the only purpose of the Convention is to ***“prevent violence and prosecute perpetrators.”***

The European Coalition to End Violence against Women strongly disagrees with the recommendations brought forth in the recent letter you received and provides factual clarification as follows:

1) The letter argues that under Article 3c, the Convention advances a definition of “gender” as a social construct, which differs from the definition of “gender equality” used in the EU Treaties. This interpretation, however, is incorrect; the explanatory report of the Convention reiterates that the use of the term “gender” in the Convention text is not intended to replace the terms for “women” and “men”. The article in question expressly states, ***“gender shall mean the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men.”*** Defining constructed gender roles does not in any way contradict the concept of gender equality. We believe that gender equality can only be achieved if we take into consideration how societies attribute specific roles, behaviours and activities as appropriate for either men or women.

2) Regarding the reference to the Convention articles on education, the letter presents a clear misrepresentation of State Party obligations to provide teaching materials. Article 14 expressly states that the materials should include issues such as ***“equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity.”*** Education remains a sustained

measure of prevention that addresses root causes of violence against women. The goal is to change attitudes, gender roles and stereotypes that make violence against women acceptable.

3) The letter recommends enabling State Parties to provide reservations to the Convention, specifically on **“controversial and ideological parts of the Convention.”** We recall that reservations to the Convention are generally not permissible under Article 78 and this provision explicitly outlines the specific Articles that may be subject to State reservations, namely Article 30, paragraph 2 (on award of adequate compensation); Article 44, paragraphs 1.e, 3 and 4 (on jurisdiction); Article 55, paragraph 1 in respect of Article 35 regarding minor offences (on ex parte proceedings); Article 58 in respect of Articles 37, 38 and 39 (on statute of limitations); and Article 59 (on residence status). Reservations to any of the other provisions of the Convention can be considered contrary to its object and purpose and are therefore not permissible.

The European Coalition urges the Council of Europe not to initiate or support any changes to the text of the Convention that would allow States parties to enter additional reservations. Such reservations would weaken the core provisions of the Convention, which aim to protect victims of violence, to prevent gender-based violence and to make sure perpetrators are held accountable for their actions. If any of such measures are considered by State Parties as "controversial and ideological" and excluded, the aim of the treaty cannot be achieved in their respective States.

The European Coalition to End Violence against Women urges the Council of Europe to undertake efforts to dispel mischaracterizations of the Convention and its aims in various member states. We also urge all member states of the Council of Europe and the European Union to ratify the Istanbul Convention as soon as possible.

It is vitally important that the progress already made be continued, to prevent the situation for women and girls from becoming increasingly more severe. The Coalition will continue to advocate for the effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention, which will truly make a difference in the lives of the over 400 million women across Europe.

All women and girls deserve a life free from violence and have a right to safety.

Thank you for your attention and please count on our continued support

Yours Sincerely,

The undersigned European Coalition to End Violence against Women & co-signatories



Co-Signatories

Austria

1. Afrikanische Frauenorganisation
2. Business and Professional Women Austria
3. Die Grünen Frauen
4. Frauennetzwerk Medien
5. Verein Frauen*volksbegehren
6. Verein Sprungbrett
7. SPÖ Frauen
8. Club alpha
9. AMS Frauenorganisation
10. Katholische Frauenbewegung
11. Evangelische Frauenarbeit
12. Verein Frauen-Rechtsschutz
13. Verein Autonomer Österreichischer Frauenhäuser – AÖF
14. Österreichische Plattform für Alleinerziehende
15. Frauen* beraten Frauen*
16. Lefö
17. Frauenhetz
18. Frauenabteilung des AMS Österreich
19. FrauenLesben für das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Frau
20. Die Juristinnen
21. Netzwerk der Frauen- und Mädchenberatungsstellen
22. KPÖ Frauen
23. FFZ - Forum Feministische Zukunft
24. ABZ*AUSTRIA

Belgium

1. Réseau Mariage et Migration

Bulgaria

1. Bulgarian Fund for Women
1. Bulgarian Family Planning and Sexual Health Association (BFPA)
3. Society for Justice Foundation / One Billion Rising - Bulgaria
4. Pulse Foundation
5. Centre Dinamika Association
6. National Network for Children
7. H&D Gender Perspectives
8. Center Maria
9. Bulgarian Helsinki Committee
10. Foundation for Access to Rights – FAR
11. Association NAIA
12. Umenie -2003
13. Gender Alternatives Foundation
14. Tzvetan Tzanov foundation
15. Centre for inclusive education
16. Cedar” foundation
17. “Smile” association
18. Single Step
19. “Future for children” association
20. Women’s association “Ekaterina Karavelova”
21. “Child and space” association
22. “Kids” foundation

23. "Law and Internet" foundation
24. Foundation "Blagotvoritel"
25. Association "National network of the health mediators"
26. Association "Sustainability of progressive and open communication" \SPOC\
27. Joy for our children" foundation
28. FICE – Bulgaria
29. M & M Physio foundation
30. Human Rights Project
31. "Knowledge" association
32. Social Activities and Practices Institute
33. "Health problems of the minorities" foundation
34. Worldwide Orphans Foundation
35. Club of NGOs - Targovishte
36. National Association of Resource Teachers
37. Association "Equilibrium"
38. AMALIPE
39. "Future now 2006"
40. for Our Children Foundation
41. Applied Research and Communications (ARC)
42. Gender Project for Bulgaria
43. Tulip Foundation
44. Animus Association Foundation
45. Association Demetra
46. National Campaign "Being A Dad"

Croatia

1. PETRA Network for the prevention and elimination of trafficking in women for sexual exploitation
2. Center for Civil Courage

Malta

1. Men against Violence
2. Women's rights Foundation

Montenegro

1. Women's Rights Center

Romania

1. Asociația TRANSCENA/TRANSCENA Association, Bucharest city.
2. Asociația Femeilor Împotriva Violenței ARTEMIS/ARTEMIS Women against Violence Association, Cluj-Napoca city.
3. Fundația SENSIBLU/ SENSIBLU Foundation, Bucharest city.
4. Asociația GRADO – Grupul Român pentru Apărarea Drepturilor Omului/ GRADO Romanian Group for Defense of Human Rights Association, Bucharest city
5. Fundația Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate/Partnership for Equality Center Foundation, Bucharest city
6. Asociația pentru Libertate și Egalitate de Gen, A.L.E.G./A.L.E.G. Association for Freedom and Gender Equality, Sibiu city
7. Asociația Centrul de Dezvoltare Curriculară și Studii de Gen: FILIA/ FILIA Association for Curricular Development and Gender Studies, Bucharest city
8. FRONT/ FRONT Association, Bucharest city
9. Asociația ANAIS/ ANAIS Association, Bucharest city
10. E-ROMNJA – Asociația pentru Promovarea Drepturilor Femeilor Rome/ E-ROMNJA Association for Promotion of Roma Women Rights
11. Institutul Est European pentru Sănătatea Reproducerii – IEESR/ IEESR East European Institute for Reproductive Health, Tg Mureș city

12. Fundația Centrul de Mediere și Securitate Comunitară – CMSC/ CMSC Community Safety and Mediation Center Foundation, Iasi city
13. PAS ALTERNATIV/ ALTERNATIVE STEP, Brașov city
14. Asociația pentru Promovarea Femeilor din România/ Association for Promotion of Women in Romania, Timișoara city
15. Societatea Doamnelor Bucovinene/ Bucovina Ladies Society, Suceava city
16. Asociația ATENA DELPHI/ ATENA DELPHI Association, Cluj-Napoca city
17. Asociația „Victorie Împotriva Violenței, Abuzului și Discriminării – V.I.V.A.D/ V.I.V.A.D. Association “Victory against Violence, Abuse and Discrimination”, Cluj-Napoca city
18. Asociația SEVA – Șanse egale – Valoare –Autoritate/ SEVA Association, Equal Chances –Value-Authority, Suceava city
19. Asociația SPICC – Solidaritate, Participare,Incluziune, Comunicare, Cooperare/ SPICC Association –Solidarity, Participation, Inclusion,Communication, Cooperation, Timișoara city
20. Asociația Quantic/ Quantic Association, Bucharest city
21. Asociația All for family, All for family Association, Constanța city
22. Asociația Femeilor Universitare/ Association of University Women, Bucharest city
23. Asociația Viitor – Integritate – Succes (V.I.S)/ Association Future- Integrity –Success (VIS) - Constanța city
24. Asociația Psihosfera/Psihosfera Association –Brasov city
25. Asociația Szentkereszty Stephanie Egyesület, Covasna city
26. Asociația Business Professional Women -Romania
27. Asociația Plural
28. Asociația Societatea de Analize Feministe - AnA
29. Asociația EMA
30. Asociația CeSiP

Serbia

1. Belgrade Centre for Security Policy / Beogradski centar za bezbednosnu politiku
2. BeFem – culture & action, Belgrade / BeFem – kultura i akcija, Beograd
3. Women's Forum of Prijepolje / Forum žena Prijepolja
4. Women's Alliance for Development, Nikšić / Ženska alijansa za razvoj, Nikšić
5. Viktimology Society of Serbia, Belgrade / Viktimološko društvo Srbije, Beograd
6. Association of Women Femplatz, Pancevo / Udruženje građanki FemPlatz, Pančevo
7. ASTRA – Anti trafficking action, Belgrade / ASTRA, Beograd

The Netherlands

1. Netwerk VN-Vrouwenverdrag (Dutch CEDAW Network)
2. ATRIA, Institute on gender equality and women's history
3. TIYE-International
4. VON/ Vluchtelingen-Organisaties Nederland (Refugees Organisations Netherlands)
5. Association Women and Law Clara Wichmann
6. Femmes for Freedom
7. SEDA, Women Centre Curacao
8. Emancipator
9. WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform
10. RIghts4Change
11. RESPECT Network Europe (Migrant Domestic Workers)
12. CoMensha, Coordination Centre Human Trafficking
13. Movisie
14. Women's shelter in The Netherlands part of Federatie Opvang