



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES

European Women's Lobby
Brussels, Belgium

22 March 2021

Subject: The EWL condemns the President's Executive order of Turkey to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention

Your Excellency High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell,
Your Excellency Portuguese Foreign Minister

We are writing to you concerning today's EU Foreign Affairs Council, in which an exchange of views will be held on the Southern neighborhood and Turkey. We, the undersigned, are jointly writing to you as President and Vice-President of the European Women's Lobby (EWL), representing over 2,000 women's associations across Europe, with members from EU Accession countries including the EWL Coordination for Turkey - Avrupa Kadin Lobisi Turkiye Koordinasyonu (AKL-TK).

The EWL would like to express its grave concerns and condemnation of the Presidential Executive order 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 sign onto the Convention, as a message to the world of its political commitment and ambition to eliminating male violence against women and girls.

The Istanbul Convention is the most comprehensive legislative instrument to date, which provides measures to address all forms of violence against women and girls.

This decision which represents a clear regression on the rights of all women and girls cannot be tolerated, and is in direct contravention with EU fundamental values as per Article 2 TEU, Article 8 TFEU ('gender mainstreaming' clause) and in EU Charter for Fundamental Rights under Article 23. This decision is a manifestation of the growing political backlash against women's rights in Europe, in which our members of the EWL Coordination for Turkey, have been fighting against at the forefront alongside the women's movement in Turkey and across Europe, within an increasingly shrinking space for civil society.

In light of this, the EWL recognises that this decision to withdraw has yet to come into effect, and that Turkey still has the opportunity to reverse this decision and step up to actively ensure the protection of all women and girls from all forms of violence as per its current legal obligations to the Istanbul Convention.

Your Excellencies, **we call on you to urgently step up in this crisis and demand that the government of Turkey reverse its decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. We urge you to call upon Turkey, to fulfill its current legal obligations to the Istanbul Convention and fully implement the provisions of the Convention without any reservations, in solidarity of upholding EU fundamental rights.**

We also welcome the opportunity to meet with you urgently to ensure significant steps are taken to not only prevent this backlash, but to ensure the continued advancement of the rights of all women and girls, which have faced devastating impacts from COVID-19.

As with its approach to the COVID-19 pandemic, Europe now has the opportunity to stand together in solidarity and take concerted action to protect EU fundamental values, including equality between women and men.

Yours sincerely,



Gwendoline Lefebvre
President, European Women's Lobby



Ana Sofia Fernandes
Vice-President, European Women's Lobby
President of Plataforma Portuguesa para os Direitos das Mulheres (PPDM) - Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights



Aslihan Tekin
EWL Board Member, EWL Coordination for Turkey - Avrupa Kadın Lobisi Türkiye Koordinasyonu (AKL-TK)

In copy:

President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen

Vice-President of the European Commission, Věra Jourová

Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli

President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli