



**YES to the protection of victims of violence, NO to the impunity for perpetrators!
The Istanbul Convention is a milestone for protection and equality!**

Dear European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen

Dear EU Commissioner for Equality, Helena Dalli

Dear President of the European Council, Charles Michel

Dear President of the European Parliament, David Sassoli

Dear German Chancellor, Angela Merkel

Dear German Minister for Women, Youth, Family and Sport, Franziska Giffey

Dear Prime Minister of Portugal, António Costa

Dear Prime Minister of Slovenia, Janez Janša

Berlin, 05 August 2020

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Germany is deeply concerned about the announcement of Poland by Marlena Maląg, Polish Minister for Family, Labour and Social Policy, to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence – the so-called Istanbul Convention. The legally binding document was signed in Istanbul in 2011 and has currently been ratified by 34 Council of Europe countries, including Poland on 13 April 2015.

In solidarity and close cooperation with Polish women's organisations and our partners in a project co-funded by the European Commission¹, we have been resisting attacks against the Istanbul Convention in Poland and our other neighbouring and partner countries for many years - especially more recently increasingly in Central and Eastern Europe. As NGO member of the European Women's Lobby, we support its recent declaration². We explicitly welcome commissioner Dalli's statement regarding antidiscrimination and the European gender strategy, as well as the clear positioning of the German minister Giffey.

We are shocked by the wording of the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, claiming that the Convention is "unnecessary" because Polish law sufficiently protects the victims of violence. The Deputy Minister of Justice recently described the discussion about violence against women as "gender gossiping?" - a scandalous act of misogyny! For WILPF, a women's peace organisation, the current backlash against women's rights is an attack on internal peace in Germany, in Europe and worldwide.

A few days ago, in Poland the fundamentalist-religious organisation, Institute Ordo Iuris, together with the Christian Social Congress announced a citizens' initiative to leave the Anti-Violence Convention as part of the initiative "Yes to the family, not to gender". From a feminist point of view, this claim is absurd because family policy can never replace women's rights and gender policies.

¹ www.womenvotepeace.com

² <https://womenlobby.org/EWL-rejects-attempt-to-withdraw-Poland-from-Istanbul-Convention?lang=en>



We know about previous attempts by MRPiPS to change the law to combat domestic violence that contradicts the standards laid down in the Convention. In the current political situation in Poland, decision makers are dismantling the protection and safety of women and their children affected by violence even further. Statistics show that in all countries of the European Union, 62 million women over 15 years of age have experienced physical and/or sexual violence. Violence affects not only the health of women, but also that of their children and other family members who are abused. Without effective state assistance, many women, and often their children, lose their lives by the hand of perpetrators. In Poland alone, between 400 and 500 women lose their lives every year because of domestic violence. This figure includes victims of murder, beatings with fatal consequences, killing and suicides. In addition, some 200 women are in prison for the murder of the perpetrator even though they acted in self-defence due to not receiving adequate protection.

All European countries - including Germany - lack adequate protective facilities for women threatened by violence. The situation is particularly difficult for migrant and refugee women. As a result of the lockdown, statistically proven, domestic violence has drastically increased - without any expansion of protection capacities. The social and economic costs of violence against women are enormous and the state's disregard for the problem is callous.

IFFF/WILPF Germany demands:

- It is high time to guarantee the citizens* of the European Union the right to a life free from violence!
- Within the framework of the EU Council Presidency, Germany must work more actively to prevent violence and to protect women and children more effectively. It is also important to do so within the framework of the whole trio (Portugal and Slovenia).
- The European Union must break the deadlock in ratifying the EU Anti-Violence Convention. The EU's silence on violence prevention creates space for fundamentalist organisations in the Member States, for whom the adoption of the Convention at EU level is a central stumbling block in moving forward.
- The EU should speed up the introduction of mechanisms for periodically monitoring the implementation by Member States of Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards for the rights, assistance and protection of victims of crime. This requires a comprehensive EU strategy to prevent and combat violence against women and the adoption of legally binding legislative solutions that will allow the standards set out in the Convention to be harmonised and implemented across the EU.
- EU member States must provide adequate financial and human resources to implement the Istanbul Convention.
- Reducing domestic violence is a task for generations. (Sex) education, non-violent communication and conflict solution, diversity and intersectionality are a must!

Kind regards,

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Germany