



Statement of the CEMR Standing Committee for Equality on the Turkish Government's Decision to Withdraw from the Istanbul Convention

Brussels, 7 April 2021

The CEMR Standing Committee for Equality, a group of local and regional elected politicians from across Europe championing the cause of local equality, is deeply troubled by the 20 March Presidential Decree to withdraw Turkey from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). We condemn this cowardly decision taken in the middle of the night on a Saturday which effectively removes the protections from violence that girls and women, unfortunately, are in dire need of.

Given the current political landscape, increasingly marked by human rights backlashes in numerous countries, and in light of the “shadow pandemic” of domestic violence that has erupted during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is extremely worrying to see the first signatory of the Istanbul Convention turn its back on the girls and women of Turkey.

The Convention is the first and only binding instrument in Europe to combat and prevent all forms of violence against girls and women, including domestic violence, marital rape, child marriage, female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C). The decision taken by the Turkish government will impact not only the daily lives of girls and women in Turkey, but will echo loudly across the region and potentially influence other states to pursue similar policies. This is a harsh message from the Turkish government to its citizens and to the world; it is a message that risks undermining the progress made in ending violence against girls and women.

In many countries where the Convention is currently in force, local and regional governments and administrations have specific competences that make them key players in the implementation of the Convention, particularly as concerns service provision for victims and survivors of domestic violence and the monitoring and reporting of violence against women.

We express our solidarity with the girls and women of Turkey who will undoubtedly pay the price for this political manoeuvring. We support women's rights organisations in Turkey who are mobilised and pushing back. We call on the Turkish signatories of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life to continue their commitment and encourage all other local governments that take action to address and eradicate violence against women and girls.

We urge the Union of Turkish Municipalities to support their members in their work to prevent, protect and prosecute violence against women in their territories, regardless of the national government's stance.

The CEMR Standing Committee for Equality cannot remain silent on this issue. Our goal is for all girls and women in Europe to have full human rights, including the ability to move about freely in their communities and to feel safe in their homes.

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Local and regional governments across Europe can count on the solidarity of an over 1,800-strong community of signatories to the European Charter for Equality, which reads:

“Gender-based violence, which disproportionately affects women, constitutes a violation of fundamental human rights and is an offence to the dignity and to the physical and emotional integrity of human beings.”

Our presence and solidarity extend across all borders in the fight to prevent violence against women and girls, assist victims and survivors, hold perpetrators accountable and raise awareness about all forms of violence against women.

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