



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL JUSTICE AND CONSUMERS

Directorate D: Equality and Union citizenship  
Unit D.2: Gender equality

Brussels  
JUST.D.2/KV/CA

Mrs Pinella Bombaci  
Executive BPW International  
Business and Professional Women  
Europe

Dear Mrs Bombaci,

I wish to thank you for your letter addressed to Commissioner Dalli and received on 27 March 2021, registered under Ares(2021)2179370. In your letter, you express your concern over Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and the situation of women in this country. As the Head of the Gender Equality Unit, I was asked to reply to your letter on behalf of Commissioner Dalli.

The Commission shares your concerns and is fully committed to eradicate violence against women in the EU and outside its borders. This is why the EU signed the Istanbul Convention and why the finalisation of the EU's accession remains a priority for the Commission.

The Commission has clearly stated that Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Convention sends an unfortunate signal at a bad moment. It risks compromising the protection and fundamental rights of women and girls in Turkey with devastating effects on its entire society, at a time when this protection is needed more than ever before. We all recognise that violence against women and girls has increased to new levels worldwide as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and of the many conflicts, where women are primary victims.

The Commission, through Commissioner Dalli's statement at the plenary session of the European Parliament in March<sup>1</sup>, urged Turkey to reverse its decision and called on Turkey to fully commit to defending the rights of women and girls, a fundamental element of human rights, peace, security and equality.

During her recent visit to Turkey in April, President von der Leyen more generally expressed to President Erdogan the Commission's concerns about the continued backsliding of Turkey on the rule of law and fundamental rights – against the international commitments it had taken. In relation to this, she particularly focused on Turkey's decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, as well as the situation of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/withdrawal-from-the-istanbul-convention-by-turkey-opening-statements-by-council-and-commission I203761-V v>

human rights defenders. She explicitly underlined that progress on the rule of law is an integral part of the EU-Turkey relationship<sup>2</sup>.

The Commission is monitoring the aforementioned developments and will assess the situation in its next annual report. It will also continue to raise its concerns in all fora and in its bilateral contacts with the Turkish authorities.

Rest assured that the Commission will continue to support women and girls victims of gender-based violence both in the EU and outside its borders. We will continue to keep prevention of violence against women and domestic violence, as well as the protection of the victims high on the EU and international agenda.

Progress on women's rights is hard won, but easily lost. We recognise that strong women's rights are an asset and an achievement, which the whole of Europe should be proud of. We must push forward, not backwards. Backsliding is not an option for a continent that aims at a fair, just and prosperous future for all. I warmly welcome your commitment to the defence and preservation of women's rights.

Yours sincerely,

Karen VANDEKERCKHOVE  
Head of Unit

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/pr/statement-president-von-der-leyen-joint-press-conference-president-michel-following-their>