



To the President of the Council of Europe – Hon. Angela Merkel

To the President of the European Commission – Hon. Ursula Von der Leyen

To the President of the European Council - Hon. Charles Michel

To the President of the European Parliament - Hon. David Sassoli

To the President of the Italian Council of Ministers - Prof. Mario Draghi

To the Italian Minister for Equal Opportunities - Prof. Elena Bonetti

To the President of the Italian Senate of the Republic - Sen. Maria Elisabetta Alberti Casellati

To the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies - Hon. Roberto Fico

To the President of the Special Commission on Femicide, Italian Senate of the Republic -
Sen. Valeria Valente

CC To the Association "We will stop femicide".

As professors and researchers in Italian universities who have established the Academic Network UN.I.RE. (UNiversità In REte against gender-based violence), and have been committed for years to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, with particular regard to the part relating to prevention, we present the following appeal to the higher European and Italian institutions:

On 20 March, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signed the decree withdrawing Turkey from the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known as the Istanbul Convention); the decree will become effective on 1 July 2021. Minister of Family, Labour and Social Services Zehra Zumrut Selcuk justified the decision, by stating that women's rights are guaranteed by the national legislation, and in particular by the Turkish Constitution.

Actually, such legislation is not implemented by the State does not really implement this legislation. Women in Turkey are facing a condition of real emergency. According to the Association "We will stop Femicide", at least 474 women were killed in Turkey in 2019, 300 women in 2020, and 77 women since the beginning of this year. Most of them were killed by their partners or exes, family members or strangers who wanted to have a relationship with them. Both law enforcement agencies and judges do not respond adequately to women's requests for help, and there are numerous cases of penalty reduction for men who display respectful behaviour in the presence of the Court.

Several Eastern European states - Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary - have decided not to ratify the Convention, effectively rejecting it. In addition, Poland has announced its intention to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention and has started the procedure. This is so, notwithstanding that femicide is tragically present in these countries.

It has been widely demonstrated that a social organisation based on unequal power relations between men and women encourages feminicides and violence against women in general. Negligence of by the authorities only serves to exacerbate the problem by legitimising habituation to and tolerance of violence against women. Gender-based violence, which is recognised as a violation of human rights, is first and foremost a cultural problem. The firm stance of the Institutions in every country is fundamental, in order to eliminate this culture.

For all these reasons, as representatives of the UN.I.R.E. Academic Network, engaged to the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the tool provided by the Council of Europe for combatting and preventing gender-based violence, we interpret the decision of Turkey, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Bulgaria as an attack against the fundamental European values, which all Member States are required to safeguard.

Thereby we call on our national institutions, the Council of Europe and the European Union to:

- activate all useful initiatives to counter the decisions of countries that want to weaken the Istanbul Convention, if necessary also through strong actions, such as the possible exclusion from the distribution of funds and/or subsidies or by adopting sanctions;
- urge the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by those European countries that so far have merely signed it;
- proceed with the approval of the Istanbul Convention by the European Union;
- take all necessary measures to implement all the parts that constitute the Istanbul Convention, especially prevention, education, training and awareness-raising activities to build a culture of gender equality.

With this appeal not only do we want to dutifully denounce what is happening in Europe on the issue of violence against women, but we also wish to emphasise—the need for the commitment of all institutions to the full implementation of the Istanbul Convention, starting with the social and cultural prevention actions that we have been strenuously and convincingly pursuing for a long time in Italian schools and universities.

The UN.I.R.E. Academic Network for the implementation of the Istanbul Convention

For information and membership:
E-mail: unire-academicnetwork@unimib.it
Website: <https://unire.unimib.it/>