

European Council
Cabinet of the President

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Brussels, 18. 09. 2020
CAB PEC/SC/sg

Dear Ms Magryta,

Thank you for your letter addressed to the President of the European Council, Mr Charles Michel, on 28 July in which you express your concerns over Poland's steps towards its withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention.

As stated in the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, Europe must be a place where people feel free and safe. The EU Strategic Agenda also acknowledges that we need to do more to ensure equality between women and men, as well as rights and equal opportunities for all. In particular, as we have seen with the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on women, more than ever we need a gender-sensitive approach in our responses.

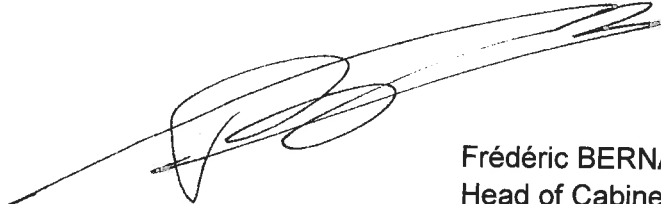
As you know, the EU signed the Istanbul Convention in 2017 and the Council of the EU has been working to finalise the accession process ever since. The 2017 Council Decisions on the signing of the Convention by the EU expressed the intention to proceed with the conclusion of the Convention. Since July 2018, all rotating Presidencies of the Council have striven to further advance this critical issue.

The Istanbul Convention is indeed a landmark international treaty on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Any misconceptions or misunderstandings about it should be discussed and clarified among Member States so that the Union and all Member States can ultimately accede to it. Given the pressing need to act on the matter, the Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 provides that, in the event of the Union's accession to the Convention not being possible, the Commission in 2021 would propose measures within the limits of its competence in order to achieve the same objectives as the Convention.

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The declarations on Poland's possible withdrawal from the Convention are indeed alarming. In view of the current surge in domestic violence throughout the EU during the pandemic, we should all join forces to ensure robust legal protection for women and girls against gender-based violence throughout the EU and, as necessary, engage in constructive dialogue with the Polish authorities without delay.

Yours sincerely,



Frédéric BERNARD
Head of Cabinet

CC:

Co-signing organizations and informal groups affiliated in the Great Coalition for Equality and Choice:

- 1 ADDP l'Association Défense de la Démocratie en Pologne (Stowarzyszenie na rzecz obrony demokracji w Polsce)
- 2 ASTRA Network
- 3 BABA Lubuskie Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Kobiet
- 4 Berliński Kongres Kobiet
- 5 Black Brussels Balloons
- 6 Czarny Protest Gliwice
- 7 Democracy is OK (DOK)
- 8 Demokratyczna Unia Kobiet
- 9 Dolnośląskie Forum Kobiet Stowarzyszeń i środowisk Kobiety
- 10 Dziewuchy Berlin
- 11 Dziewuchy Dziewuchom Francja
- 12 Dziewuchy Kieleckie
- 13 Dziewuchy Londyn
- 14 Dziewuchy Szczecin
- 15 Farsa
- 16 Federacja na Rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny
- 17 Federacja Polskie Lobby Kobiet
- 18 Femini Berlin Polska
- 19 Feministyczne Stowarzyszenie Polonijne Elles sans Frontières ASBL
- 20 Fundacja Klamra
- 21 Fundacja Centrum Praw Kobiet