

Counteracting violence against women

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Opinion

Implementing the Istanbul Convention throughout the EU will demonstrate welcome leadership and send the appropriate message to other countries, writes Arba Kokalari.



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Violence against women is a daily problem in our society. It occurs at home, in close relationships, online or in public. We need to do more for women in Europe to allow them to be safe and free from violence.

EU accession to the Istanbul Convention would be a step forward in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

My own country, Sweden, is often associated with equality between men and women. However, between 2008-2017 an average of 13 women per year were murdered by men with whom they have or have had a relationship, while only five out of 100 reported rapes resulted in a conviction.

The feeling of insecurity among women has increased and too many feel uneasy about being outside at night.

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These problems are universal; globally, violence against women is widespread: as an act of war, as a form of deep discrimination, as sexual abuse.

Women are most exposed in their own homes. This holds back democratisation, development and growth. In an increasingly digital society, there should be accountability for violence against women online.

The situation needs to change and the Istanbul Convention has proven an effective tool for improvement.

It is the first instrument in Europe to set legally-binding standards that criminalises gender-based violence.

"Violence against women is widespread: as an act of war, as a form of deep discrimination, as sexual abuse"

Ratifying the Convention is in line with the subsidiarity principle; law enforcement remains a national competence and preventing violence against women is primarily a task for national justice systems.

The national police need sufficient resources, preventative measures need to be effective, the punishment should be appropriate and the victim's perspective prioritised.

We need to promote a culture of male and female equality; EU-wide implementation of the Istanbul Convention helps to achieve this.

By doing so, the EU and its Member States will send an important signal; that we are prioritising women's safety and making the issue a priority.

It would provide countries with better tools to combat this type of violence and should increase resources allocated for combating violence against women.

Primarily, it is important that Member States streamline views on gender equality. Adopting the Istanbul Convention will help achieve that.

It will make it possible to narrow down the causes of violence against women and provide a framework for relevant stakeholders to combat, such as law enforcement and civil society.

The EU is - and will remain - an important global actor and the gender perspective is crucial for a modern, effective and results-based foreign policy.

If the EU implements the Istanbul Convention as a whole, it will increase our ability to strengthen perspectives on gender equality in our external actions and counteract violence against women and discrimination outside the EU.

"The Istanbul Convention is quite simply a human rights convention that ought to be implemented and ratified by all Member States without delay"

In the enlargement process in particular, it will strengthen our ability to influence the direction of development, improving the situation for women and decreasing the number of crimes.

Therefore, the fact that the Commission President-elect, Ursula von der Leyen, has pointed out that the EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention is a priority is significant.

In addition, the idea of adding violence against women to the list of EU crimes demonstrates her commitment.

In the coming years, we have to intensify work on reducing violence against women, both at home and abroad.

The Istanbul Convention is quite simply a human rights convention that ought to be implemented and ratified by all Member States without delay.

When we act together, we can achieve more. However, hard work lies ahead. I am well aware that there will be criticism and resistance of the Istanbul Convention.

I am determined to initiate constructive dialogue through cross-committee work, raising awareness through civil society and, of course, enabling discussion with the Council of Europe.

Furthermore, data collection will be essential to monitor progress. I am also convinced that we need to discuss and overcome many misconceptions on the ratification of the Convention.

One of them is the use of the word 'gender'. The purpose of the convention is not for Member States to pursue their own interests or to give a negative perception of traditional values.

The aim is to stop violence against women and to ensure basic human rights and freedom. I hope that the EU can stand united on such an important and fundamental issue.

We are a union based on common values of democracy and freedom. Violence against women and domestic violence deeply challenge those values.

About the author

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