

**To Ms Ursula von der Leyen  
President of the European Commission**

Sent by email to Bjoern.Seibert@ec.europa.eu

**Re: 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Istanbul Convention on preventing & combating violence against women and domestic violence.**

Dear President,

The 11 May 2021 marks the 10th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). On 11 May 2011, ten years ago, ten EU Member States signed the Convention, paving the way to ratifying it thereafter.

We very much welcome your statement today, committing to present legislation on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence by the end of this year.

This day is an occasion to take stock of progress made and to commit to take action for the challenges ahead. Violence against women has increased during the pandemic. In addition, on 20 March 2021, the Turkish president gave an example of challenges the Convention faces with his decision to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. Six EU Member States still have not ratified the Istanbul Convention; Poland may also consider following the dangerous precedence set by Turkey.

On this remarkable day, I am writing to you to bring to your attention the crucial role trade unions play in preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

We are urgently seeking a meeting with you to discuss the workplace dimension of the legislation the Commission intends to bring forward. Often, when the European Commission is considering actions to prevent and combat violence against women and in particular domestic violence, they usually do not think about the workplace or about a role for trade unions and collective bargaining. **But they should.**

Ten years on from the signature of the Istanbul Convention violence against women is very much a workplace issue – even more so with the home turned into the workplace, leaving no escape for women who are victims of domestic violence. Let me underscore the importance of adequate support for our trade unions to play their part. Trade unions are already at the forefront in demanding that the workplace plays its part, by negotiating collective agreements aimed at preventing violence, setting up proper procedures for reporting and recording violence and harassment at work, supporting the victims and dealing with the perpetrators establishing codes of conduct. The ETUC has collected information on 80 union bargained collective agreements on combatting domestic violence as examples of what can be achieved. Trade unions need to be empowered to bargain so that working at home does not put workers at risk.

./..2

To this end, I urge you to ensure that the European Commission recognises the important role played by workers and their trade unions. We ask you to include in the legislation measures to protect workers who raise these issues in the workplace, along with measures to empower trade unions to play their part to negotiate and carry out actions to end violence against women in the world of work. Recognising the role of social partners in addressing this issue and the workplace dimension is crucial.

I attach the [statement adopted at the ETUC Executive Committee](#) on 23 March 2021 and for ease of reference our previous letter from women trade union leaders from throughout Europe sent to you, urging you to prioritize EU accession to the Istanbul Convention.

Let me assure you that the European Trade Union movement remains a vocal agent of change for Women's rights and gender equality and to securing an end to violence at work, at home, everywhere – every step of the way.

I look forward to hearing the date of the meeting from you shortly.

Kind regards,



Esther Lynch,  
Deputy General Secretary

*Annexes: 2*