



WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE EUROPE

WAVE Network and European Info Centre against Violence

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**The Women against Violence Europe Network (WAVE) deeply regrets and condemns the decision of the President of Turkey to withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the ‘Istanbul Convention’.**

The President of Turkey signed the Presidential Decree no. 3718 to redraw from the convention on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2021, the decree being published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey at 2:00 AM, Istanbul time.

Such actions represent in any case an **enormous setback, but particularly in times when concerted international actions and commitments to end violence against women are more important than ever**. As [violence against women and girls has increased to new levels worldwide as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic](#), it is of great importance to adequately protect **women’s human lives** from violence. Restricted movement, isolation and economic insecurity increase women’s vulnerability to domestic violence in Europe and worldwide. Many women have been forced to share their homes with their abusers 24 hours a day, without respite or access to support services, many of which have been disrupted or rendered inaccessible.

For a Europe that claims to guarantee the human rights of all people, that recognizes the need to protect the human rights of women and their children victims of violence, it is unacceptable that political will is placed above human rights, and that state actors are able to just ‘retract’ their undertaken commitments to fight and combat violence against women.

**Along with other European and international stakeholders<sup>1</sup>, the WAVE Network urges Turkey to reconsider its withdrawal of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.**

The ‘Istanbul Convention’ represents the first legally-binding instrument creating a comprehensive legal framework and approach to combat violence against women, focussing on preventing violence, protecting victims and prosecuting the accused offenders. Such standards build upon standards enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Convention)<sup>2</sup> as well as its general recommendations<sup>3</sup> and case law.

The Convention sets **minimum standards and measures** State authorities need to implement in order to effectively respond to violence against women and reiterates **the obligation of states to diligently prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for all acts of violence against women**. Such aspects are also highlighted in the European Court of Human Rights case law, such as the ‘Opuz v. Turkey’ case<sup>4</sup> from 2009. The European Court of Human Rights found a violation of Article 2 (right to life), Article 3 (prohibition of torture and of inhuman and degrading treatment) and Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) in conjunction with Article 2 and 3 of the **European Convention on Human Rights**. ‘Opuz v. Turkey’ represents a landmark decision, as it was the first

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2021/3/statement-un-women-turkey-withdrawal-from-the-istanbul-convention>; [Council of Europe leaders react to Turkey’s announced withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention - Newsroom \(coe.int\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [OHCHR | Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#)

<sup>3</sup> [OHCHR | General Recommendations](#)

<sup>4</sup> <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22003-2759276-3020932%22%7D>



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time the Court held that gender-based violence constitutes a **form of discrimination against women**, and that the Turkish state has a **positive obligation to protect the right to life of women**. Upholding the positive obligation of protecting women from violence entails furthermore state's political **commitment to adhere to international and European instruments that protect women and their children from violence, such as the 'Istanbul Convention'**.

Turkey's decision to redraw from the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is **devastating** considering **violence against and killings of women is on the rise in Turkey**<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the COVID-19 crisis has a disproportionate impact on women, since the outbreak of the pandemic, reports of violence against women, particularly domestic and sexual violence and femicide, have increased dramatically.

Protecting women's human rights and upholding international commitments should not be left at the political discretion of a country, but rather be seen as an international obligation. **The WAVE Network, representing 160 women's NGOs in Europe, joins the Council of Europe, UN Women and other international actors urging the Government of the Republic of Turkey to continue protecting and promoting the safety and rights of all women and girls, by remaining committed to the full implementation of the Convention.**

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<sup>5</sup> According to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, a total of 77 women have been killed since the start of 2021. Some 409 women were killed in 2020, with dozens found dead under suspicious circumstances, according to the group. Source: <https://apnews.com/article/world-news-turkey-europe-istanbul-violence-f096c185314cde20dce2504a70ee6889?fbclid=IwAR0z2AMyhb7fjkqV-UE21eSJsNDBf8ssaEtKCXe6PXag9JRkonr4aiVLT1Q>