



ELDH European Association of Lawyers for Democracy & World Human Rights

EJDM Europäische Vereinigung von Juristinnen & Juristen für Demokratie und Menschenrechte in der Welt
EJDH Asociación Europea de los Juristas por la Democracia y los Derechos Humanos en el Mundo
EJDH Association Européenne des Juristes pour la Démocratie & les Droits de l'Homme
EGDU Associazione Europea delle Giuriste e dei Giuristi per la Democrazia e i diritti dell'Uomo nel Mondo

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Poland, Turkey, ... – to leave the Istanbul Convention means to encourage violence against women

The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention), of May 2011, is an important legal instrument for the reduction of violence against women.

Only 34 of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe have ratified the Istanbul Convention. Poland and Turkey were two of the states which ratified, and Turkey was one of the first. Following the 10th ratification by Andorra on 22 April 2014, the Convention entered into force on 1 August 2014. States which have not ratified are mostly former Soviet, and Eastern European, States – and, to its shame, the United Kingdom which has signed but not ratified.

The Istanbul Convention came into force in Poland in 2015, under the previous centrist government. On 25 July 2020, Poland's Minister of Justice, Zbigniew Ziobro, announced that Poland would begin taking steps to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention. Explaining Poland's reasons for withdrawing, he stated that some of the practices the Convention mandates may be in conflict with Polish citizens' religious beliefs or personal ideologies and therefore violate their constitutional rights.

ELDH fully agrees with the statement of the Council of Europe Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić: "Announcements by government officials that Poland should withdraw from the Istanbul Convention are alarming. The Istanbul Convention is the Council of Europe's key international treaty to combat violence against women and domestic violence - and that is its sole objective. If there are any misconceptions or misunderstandings about the Convention, we are ready to clarify them in a constructive dialogue. Leaving the Istanbul Convention would be highly regrettable and a major step backwards in the protection of women against violence in Europe."

The Turkish government announced in August 2020 that it is working on an alternative to the Istanbul Convention. The ruling AKP has long been discussing whether Turkey should withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, as a result of pressure from ultra-religious groups, who argue that the

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Convention was corrupting family values. They also claim that the Convention promotes LGBTI rights, which they say “harm” Turkish cultural and social norms.

Women associations in Turkey, including conservative groups with links to the AKP, defend the Istanbul Convention as an important tool in pushing governments to take effective measures to end violence against women.

The Turkish lawyer and human rights activist Eren Keskin, said: “The Convention is virtually a constitution for women” and “ When one thinks of the overall prevalence of femicide and violence against women in the country, it is really clear that the written law and the practices in reality are at odds... The withdrawal of the Turkish state from the Istanbul Convention will lead to a legitimisation of violence against women.”

- The EJDH stands in full solidarity with the women and their organizations in Europe who demand the upholding, ratification and implementation of the Istanbul Convention.
- ELDH calls on the Polish and Turkish governments to end all plans to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention and instead increase efforts to implement the Convention.
- ELDH renews its call upon those states which have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to do so without further delay: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom.
- The ELDH calls on the Council of Europe and the European Union to use the mechanisms of the treaties and their political influence to dissuade Poland and Turkey from leaving the Istanbul Convention, and to urge the missing states to sign and ratify, and to promote the implementation of the Convention in the states which have ratified.