



## **CALL FOR URGENT ACTION**

*Ref - The harmonisation of the crime of rape based on lack of freely given consent should be part of the new EU Directive on combating violence against women and domestic violence. Directive to be adopted until the end of this political term.*

Geneva, 3 February 2024.

To Whom it may concern,

***Soroptimist International of Europe urges all countries to ensure the inclusion of rape in the EU Directive on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and its swift adoption.***

***At international level, Soroptimist International represents 5 Federations with 65.000 members working for more than 100 years to transform the lives of women and girls. At Soroptimist International of Europe we represent over 30.000 members. We are urging for the inclusion of rape in the new EU policy. There should be no gender-based violence protection package that does not address rape or any form of violence as per the Istanbul Convention.***

***We expect Germany and France, as all EU, to commit to one equal and non-violent society.***

Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) would like to thank those of you who work to protect women from violence, but a lot still needs to be done. SIE is a member of the European Women's Lobby (EWL). Together we raise our voice to demand the use of the Istanbul Convention in defence of the fundamental human right of women to live a life free of all forms of violence. We must make sure that our different countries, who have all signed the Istanbul Convention, as the EU has also done, do not jeopardize the achievements reached.

Recently, after six years of discussions, the EU's accession in June 2023 to the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence finally became a sign of hope and social justice to all women across the EU, either in danger or suffering from this horrific violation of human rights and gender-based discrimination.

The Istanbul Convention defines violence against women as falling under four key forms: physical, sexual, psychological, and economic. It is considered as the golden standard on prevention, protection, prosecution and coordinated policies in the domain of violence against women and domestic violence.

To prevent all forms of violence and to prosecute and protect all women across Europe is an obligation of the EU.

The criminal offence of rape constitutes a serious crime and one of the most severe attacks on a person's physical, psychological, and sexual integrity and autonomy.

Not including “lack of consent” as the main constituent element of the crime, is a breach to the obligations set by the Istanbul Convention and leaves all women in Europe in a *limbo*.

Specifically, the definitions based on the use of force as the main constituent element of the crime, do not offer adequate protection to victims: the requirement of higher evidentiary standards of physical resistance and a shifting of the focus onto the victim’s behaviour rather than on the accused’s actions, often results in secondary victimisation. Many victims have committed suicide.

A harmonised approach across the EU is fundamental to address this serious crime and ensure the same level of protection to victims. The adoption **NOW** of the EU Directive on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence is an imperative of respect to all women in the EU.

Yours sincerely,



Hafdis Karlsdóttir  
President 2024-2025  
Soroptimist International of Europe