

*Council of Europe*  
*The Secretary General*

Strasbourg, 16 January 2017

Dear Chairpersons,

It was a pleasure to have met and exchanged with you last month in Moscow. I am writing to you today to express my concern at the progress being made through the State Duma by legislation which, if adopted, will decriminalise domestic violence within the Russian Federation. I call upon you to do anything within your powers to strengthen the right of Russian families to live free from violence and intimidation.

The physical and psychological abuse of women is an extremely serious crime and an assault on their human rights. Domestic violence also harms children, either as its direct victims or as witnesses. Reducing "battery within the family" from a criminal to an administrative offence, with weaker sanctions for offenders, would be a clear sign of regression within the Russian Federation and would strike a blow to global efforts to eradicate domestic violence.

The proposed legislation also goes against the grain in Europe. Of the Council of Europe's 47 member states, 22 have ratified the Istanbul Convention ("Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence") and a further 21 have signed and are advancing towards full accession. This groundbreaking treaty criminalises all acts of physical, sexual or psychological violence within the family and between former or current spouses and partners. The Russian Federation is presently among only four member states who have neither signed nor ratified the Convention.

I should also remind you that the Russian Federation is bound by the European Social Charter, which requires State Parties to protect children against violence.

The Council of Europe has important expertise in this area and we stand ready to offer our assistance to the Russian Federation.

Yours sincerely,



Thorbjørn Jagland

Ms Valentina Matviyenko  
Chairperson of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation

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