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Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence

WOMEN FREE FROM VIOLENCE

Promoting the Istanbul Convention and protecting women's rights: the role of parliamentarians

International Conference

5-6 November 2026

Madrid, Spain

Dates: 5-6 November 2026

Venue: Ministry of Equality, Calle Alcalá 37, 28014 Madrid (Spain)

Time: From 3pm to 5:30pm on Thursday 5 November and from 9:30am to 3:30pm on Friday 6 November 2026

Interpretation will be provided to/from French, English and Spanish.

Background information

Violence against women and girls and domestic violence remain among the most widespread and severe human rights violations in Europe, with profound consequences for women, families and societies, and with direct implications for democracy, the rule of law and social cohesion. The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (the '[Istanbul Convention](#)') is the most comprehensive legally binding international treaty to address these challenges. It sets out clear obligations for Parties to prevent gender-based violence against women, to protect victims, to prosecute perpetrators, and to implement comprehensive and co-ordinated policies that promote gender equality and that address the root causes of violence against women and domestic violence: gender inequality.

To date, 38 Council of Europe member States have ratified the Convention, and the European Union became a Party in 2023, confirming the Convention's relevance and authority as the "gold standard". Nevertheless, ratification, implementation and continued commitment to the Convention remain politically contested in several member States. In some contexts, debates are no longer centred on how to strengthen protection for women and girls, but on questioning the Convention itself – through misrepresentations and false information.

In recent years, organised disinformation campaigns and persistent misconceptions about the Istanbul Convention have gained visibility in public and political discourse. These narratives often mislead by presenting the Convention as being contrary to so-called "national values", "traditional families", or constitutional principles. Such claims mislead about the Convention's core purpose: to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, while upholding women's and girls' human rights.

Disinformation of this nature does not only affect public opinion, but it also directly influences political decision-making. It risks delaying or blocking ratification, weakening legislative and policy implementation, justifying withdrawal debates, and undermining trust in international human rights instruments more broadly. In this sense, attacks against the Istanbul Convention are part of wider trends of democratic backsliding, attacks on human rights, including gender equality and women's rights, polarisation and erosion of evidence-based policy-making.

The Council of Europe [New Pact for Democracy](#) underlines the need to strengthen democratic resilience, counter disinformation, protect human rights and reinforce trust in democratic institutions. Addressing and countering disinformation about the Istanbul Convention directly contributes to these objectives. Ensuring that public debate and parliamentary decision-making are informed by facts, legal clarity and human rights standards is essential for the credibility of democratic institutions and for healthy pluralist societies.

Moreover, violence against women and girls is both a cause and a consequence of democratic fragility. Societies that fail to protect half of their population from violence and discrimination cannot fully uphold democratic values. The effective implementation of the Istanbul Convention therefore supports the New Pact for Democracy by promoting equality, inclusion, accountability and the rule of law.

In this context, the General Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly on violence against women, in co-operation with the Spanish Ministry of Equality, will host a conference in Madrid, focused on countering disinformation against the Istanbul Convention. Spain offers a particularly relevant setting for such a discussion, as it was one of the first countries to ratify the Istanbul Convention, having developed a comprehensive and strong legal and policy framework to combat gender-based violence against women, in particular through the country's State Pact against gender-based violence, which was renewed in February 2025. The State Pact contains 400 new measures including to protect child victims of vicarious violence, and to combat economic, digital and sexual violence, as well as human trafficking and forced marriages.

The role of the Parliamentary Assembly

The [Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe](#) has consistently affirmed that the Istanbul Convention is an essential instrument for preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and it has repeatedly called on all member States to sign, ratify and effectively implement it. Through its resolutions, recommendations and debates, the Assembly has played a key role in keeping the Convention high on the political agenda and in countering narratives that undermine its objectives.

Parliamentarians have a specific responsibility in this field. As recognised in Article 70 of the Convention, parliaments should contribute to monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, as well as playing a decisive role in ratification processes, legislative alignment, budgetary decisions and oversight of

government action. Beyond their legislative functions, parliamentarians are also central actors in public debate, and therefore they are well placed to challenge disinformation, explain the Convention's legal content and objectives, and engage constructively with citizens.

Within the Assembly, the [Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence](#) provides a unique platform for mobilising and supporting parliamentarians from across the political spectrum and from different member States who are committed to advancing the Convention. The Network has facilitated exchanges of experience, supported ratification and implementation efforts, and offered solidarity to members working in politically sensitive or hostile environments.

On 22 April 2026, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted [Resolution 2649 \(2026\)](#) "Promoting the Istanbul Convention and improving its implementation: building on lessons learnt". The Assembly called for "renewed efforts, political will and adequate resources to counter the growing attacks on the convention", while highlighting "its positive impact" and underlining "the need to engage with men and boys to prevent and combat violence against women", as reflected in PACE [Resolution 2480 \(2023\)](#) "The role and responsibility of men and boys in stopping gender-based violence against women and girls". The debate in plenary that led to the adoption of the 2026 Resolution on the Istanbul Convention included the participation of the Spanish Minister of Equality, Ms Ana Redondo, as a guest speaker.

The Madrid conference on the role of parliamentarians in promoting the Istanbul Convention and protecting women's rights

Against this background, there is a clear need for a dedicated event focusing on addressing and countering false narratives about the Istanbul Convention. The growing sophistication and cross-border nature of organised disinformation campaigns, as well as the ongoing political contestation in several member States, call for renewed parliamentary dialogue, peer support and co-ordinated responses at European level.

The conference will bring together members of the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence, and other interested parliamentarians from States Parties, non-Parties and Council of Europe member States, alongside representatives of relevant Council of Europe bodies, including the monitoring bodies under the Istanbul Convention (GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties), and other relevant bodies of the Council of Europe, as well as civil society actors, reflecting the role of national parliamentary structures in advancing and defending the objectives of the Istanbul Convention.

The aims of the conference are to:

- address and unravel misconceptions and false information about the Istanbul Convention, including their sources, through positive narratives and other tools;
- facilitate the exchange of good parliamentary practices in support of ratification, effective implementation and monitoring of the Istanbul Convention, as well as regarding public communication;
- strengthen solidarity and peer support among parliamentarians facing attacks related to the Istanbul Convention, gender equality and women's rights;
- facilitate and enhance parliamentary co-operation with the relevant Council of Europe bodies working to protect and promote women's rights;
- reaffirm the Parliamentary Assembly's long-standing commitment and support to the Istanbul Convention as a major legal standard and a cornerstone of the Council of Europe's work to achieve gender equality by preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence
- contribute to promoting equal, democratic and sustainable societies, in line with the Council of Europe New Democratic Pact for Europe.