

**Speaking Remarks by the Director General Snezana Markovic on  
the occasion of the award of the Council of Europe Pro Merito  
Medal to the President of GREVIO Professor Feride Acar**

**Strasbourg, 23 of May 2019**

Madame President, dear Feride,

Ambassador Walaas, dear Elisabeth,

Your excellencies,

Dear members of GREVIO, guests and partners from other organisations,

Dear colleagues,

This is a special occasion. For a very special person. The Istanbul Convention, in which we rightly take immense pride, and GREVIO, are closely associated with Feride.

Flash back to **2006**;

- **you were nominated to serve in the Council of Europe Task Force to Prevent and Combat Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence** – the “body” that was behind the Council of Europe Campaign on Violence against Women, including Domestic Violence which ran from 2006-2008 across the Council of Europe member states.
  
- It was the **Final Activity Report of this Task Force** that first talked about the need for harmonised legal standards on violence against women in the form of a convention. Together with our honoured guest, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and its Consequences Dubravka Šimonović, who was also a member of the Task Force, you are among those who we can thank for **the very idea of creating the Istanbul Convention**.

**On to 2009;**

- The first meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – CAHVIO tasked to prepare a legally binding instrument “*to prevent and combat domestic violence including specific forms of violence against women, other forms of violence against women, to protect and support the victims of such violence and prosecute the perpetrators*”. **Representing Turkey: Ms Feride Acar**, Professor, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Middle East Technical University.
- By the way, you were one of only two renowned academics, chosen by your respective governments to be on such an important working body. Also indicating the importance of working closely with civil society and academia to be able to grasp the realities on the ground and best respond to the needs of European citizens.

**2011 - nine meetings later and two years after**, the final draft of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence – that came to be known as the Istanbul Convention, was born.

- This moment was one of those that can be defined as **history making**: a historic moment for women’s rights – **their right to be safe. Their right to live a life free from violence.** I am sure, that for you and your colleagues, two of whom we have the privilege to have with us here today - **Dubravka Šimonović**, at the time representing Croatia and Co-Chairing the CAHVIO, **and Rosa Logar**, who represented Austria - it must have been a moment of tremendous pride. And rightly so - **the idea you put on the table – became a reality in the form of a Convention: your ideas put into words and your words into action.**
- Turkey, and you as representative of Turkey, were instrumental in the process of drafting the Convention and its opening for signature and ratification. In the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, it was **Turkey’s political leadership that led to the**

**opening for signature of the Convention in 2011** in the beautiful city of Istanbul which later lent its name to the Convention.

**Fast forward to 2014;**

- **Entry into force of the Istanbul Convention**, hailed by everyone as the most advanced and progressive treaty to address the issue of violence against women as a serious breach of human rights. You have always been a **steadfast believer in the Istanbul Convention**. With your vision, commitment, passion, and forward-looking attitude, you always believed that - despite its ambition, complexity and vision, which many said would keep member states from ratifying – **the Convention will enter into force and will make a difference in women’s lives**. And you were right.
- The Convention marked a turning point in efforts to end gender-based violence. From breaking taboos, changing mentalities and attitudes, challenging gender stereotypes to holding governments accountable to put in place legal and policy measures to keep women safe.
- Another milestone: **23 September 2015, the first meeting of GREVIO**, during which you were unanimously elected **as its first President**. Since then, you have presided over a total of **17 GREVIO meetings**, preparing the key documents for its functioning, and adopting the reports which have built **GREVIO’s positive reputation**. They also set the tone for the excellent cooperation with the political body of the monitoring – the **Committee of the Parties** which is currently Chaired by Ambassador Walaas.
- During your four-year tenure as President of GREVIO, you presided over, were a speaker for and an advocate of the Istanbul Convention at **over 50 regional, national and global events**. Your leadership, vision and personal commitment have very much shaped the work of the GREVIO and have helped make it the respected treaty body on women’s rights, in Europe and beyond, that it is now.
- You are described by your colleagues and collaborators as **very committed, passionate and generous, sensitive to the views and ideas of everyone. A very tactful leader,**

one who has the ability to say the right words at the right time. **A woman of great integrity and dignity.**

- Your **par excellence professional expertise** combined with your **vision and wisdom**, your ability to build **consensus, compromise and alliances**, your **diplomatic skills** have made you a real authority who commands respect from all those involved in upholding and promoting women's rights. For you, **doing what is just and right - ending discrimination and violence against women - is** not just a professional obligation or a civic duty. This **is a matter close to your heart** – one to which you have devoted your whole professional career and personal life. And for that, **we are very grateful.**

Dear Feride,

- It has been a privilege for the Istanbul Convention, for GREVIO and all of us at the Council of Europe, to learn and benefit from your expertise and leadership since 2006 up until today. You have been a true “**ambassador**” of the **Istanbul Convention** and I am sure, in the future, you will continue to be one of the most dedicated and prominent ones, because your **professional competence and authority goes beyond the borders of the member states of the Council of Europe**: whether you travel to UN headquarters in Geneva or New York – to the World Bank or the Organisation of American States in Washington DC, to the OSCE in Vienna or to our partner countries in the South Med, people know you and look to you for advice, guidance and leadership.

Madame President, dear Feride,

- It is both an honour and privilege for me, on behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to present you with the **highest distinction in recognition of your commitment to the Council of Europe's values and work – the Council of Europe Pro Merito Medal**. I couldn't think of anyone else who deserves it more than you Madame President - Congratulations!