

Ref: CommHR/DM/sf 013-2022

Mr Kiril PETKOV

Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria

Ms Nadezhda IORDANOVA

Minister of Justice of the Republic of Bulgaria

Strasbourg, 12 May 2022

Dear Prime Minister, Minister,

I am writing to you in relation to the ongoing work carried out by your authorities with respect to the protection of victims of violence against women and domestic violence.

I was informed that the review of a draft law including amendments to the Act on Protection against Domestic Violence and to the Criminal Code, in preparation since 2020, is currently being finalised by the Ministry of Justice. It is my understanding that this draft law, prepared in co-operation with the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria and other actors, includes a proposal to amend the text of Article 93, item 1 (Additional Provisions) of the Criminal Code so as to eliminate the requirement of “systematic” violence in the definition of crimes committed in the context of domestic violence.

I very much welcome this work and the upcoming opportunity to amend the above-mentioned provision of the Criminal Code, which has been in my attention for some time. As I stressed in my [report](#) following my visit to Bulgaria in November 2019, I am particularly concerned that the requirement of “systematic” violence, which is interpreted by the prosecution authorities as requiring three separate acts of violence committed by the same perpetrator for prosecution to be opened, not only exposes victims of domestic violence to serious risks, but also limits the possibilities to sanction perpetrators and sends a dangerous message to society that domestic violence is acceptable.

Repealing the requirement of “systematic” violence from this provision appears all the more necessary as recent reports, including the records of calls to the helpline for victims of domestic violence, show a dramatic increase in the number of incidents of violence against women and domestic violence in Bulgaria since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is of serious concern to me that in the past two years, some 50 women in Bulgaria have reportedly lost their lives as a consequence of such offences. I therefore urge you to submit the relevant amendments for public consultation and to the National Assembly without delay.

I also take this opportunity to bring to your attention my previous recommendations to your authorities to urgently address the severe lack of support services for victims of domestic violence in your country. In this respect, I learned with concern that the only crisis centre for women victims of domestic violence operating in Sofia, which I had visited in 2019, has temporarily closed down because of an outbreak of the COVID-19 virus and that no measures were taken to increase the number of such centres, which to date are still not available to victims in all geographical regions of Bulgaria.

Lastly, I would like to reiterate that these steps should be taken in conjunction with broader measures to promote equality between women and men, including through awareness raising, training and education to fight sexist prejudices. In this regard, I draw your attention to the Committee of Ministers Recommendation [CM/Rec\(2019\)1](#) on preventing and combating sexism, which provides detailed guidelines on tackling sexism, including in the justice sector.

I thank you again and look forward to continuing our dialogue on these matters.

Yours sincerely,



Dunja Mijatović