

**Exchange of views between the President of GREVIO and
Committee of Ministers Deputies
24 October 2018**

Opening

Ambassador Mr Miroslav Papa, Chairman of the Minister's Deputies

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a great honour and a pleasure for me to be here with you today. I would like to thank the Chairman of the Minister's Deputies and the members of the Council of Europe for the invitation to address you in my capacity as President of the GREVIO.

Progress with ratification and implementation of the Convention

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

- In 2018 we welcomed **five new state parties to the Convention** (Croatia, Greece, Iceland, Luxembourg and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), bringing the number to a **total of 33 ratifications**. An additional **12 member states and the EU have signed the Convention**. We hope we will welcome more parties to the Convention between now and the end of the year. Ratification by all member states will harmonise legislation and policies and strengthen efforts across the Council of Europe member states to eradicate violence against women and domestic violence.

- On yet another positive note, I am glad to inform you that in 2018 **GREVIO completed its membership (15 members)**. The ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Germany in October 2017 brought the total number of ratifications to 25, thereby triggering the procedure to fill the remaining five seats of GREVIO. The Committee of the Parties, **chaired by H.E. Ambassador Elisabeth Walaas**, subsequently elected five additional members whose mandate of four years started on 1 September 2018 - two men and three women, thereby slightly improving the gender balance in GREVIO's membership.
- The mandate of the initial ten members of GREVIO comes to an end on 31 May 2019. The information about designation of candidates for new elections has already been sent out to the state parties. This will be **an important moment in the functioning of GREVIO**. We hope that GREVIO will continue to benefit from the experience and expertise of some of the current members I believe it is very **important to ensure that there is some continuity so that transfer of know-how and expertise to the new members is possible**.
- **GREVIO has fully assumed its important role to ensure the implementation of the Convention** by the state parties. Through its evaluation process, it receives first-hand information of how the Convention works and what change it brings to women's lives on the ground.
- Let me share with you some headlines from such information. The monitoring of the implementation of the Convention shows that it is already having a positive impact on the lives of women across Europe: **laws are being changed and protection and support services stepped up. This is happening even in a number of countries that have signed but not yet ratified the Convention. Specific criminal offences of forced marriage, stalking and female genital mutilation are being**

introduced and rape provisions changed – resulting in important public debate around consent to sexual acts. Such services as telephone helplines for victims and shelters for domestic violence victims have also increased.

- **GREVIO monitoring also provides state parties with information about gaps in their legal and policy frameworks and it provides useful recommendations on measures and action they need to take. As a result of monitoring good/promising practices** which may help other member states in their efforts to comply with the requirements of the Convention are identified.
- **So far, GREVIO has published six evaluation reports** (Albania, Austria, Denmark, Monaco, Montenegro and Turkey); an additional two will be published in the near future (Portugal and Sweden).
- Let me bring to your attention also some of **the challenges** that state parties face in their efforts to implement the Istanbul Convention. These include, but are not limited to, gaps in national legislation, inadequacy of services (including insufficient shelters, regular functioning of phone lines and services for children witnessing violence), and absence of or limited nature of funding to tackle VaW and DV. Also, very important, is the lack of mechanisms to ensure effective coordination among relevant stakeholders. In some states, gender neutral laws, policy documents and measures can actually negatively impact protection of women in violence against women and domestic violence cases. Similarly, absence of reliable gender disaggregated data and statistics and insufficient support and protection for victims during legal processes also constitute significant challenges to the full implementation of the Convention.

- **GREVIO reports generate a great deal of interest with government authorities in the countries concerned as well as all other key stakeholders. These reports are also gaining recognition at European and global level thus demonstrating Council of Europe leadership in the field of combating violence against women and domestic violence.**
- **So far, media, both traditional and new media, have also covered GREVIO reports extensively.** This is very important as it contributes to **raise awareness and generate a debate on issues around violence against women and domestic violence.** It also contributes to **raise visibility about Council of Europe standards** in this area, in particular the Istanbul Convention.
- I would also like to stress the **close cooperation between the two arms of the monitoring mechanisms of the Istanbul Convention: GREVIO and the Committee of the Parties.** The Committee of the Parties has endorsed the GREVIO reports in their entirety and agreed with the priority recommendations set by the Committee. This is very important as it **significantly strengthens the implementation of the Istanbul Convention in the member states.**

Backlash against Istanbul Convention

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

- I would like to share with you some of the concerns regarding what appears to be a current backlash in Europe and beyond against women's rights in general and the Istanbul Convention in particular. In the latter context, we continue to witness **growing attempts to hinder**

progress with the signature and ratification of the Convention by spreading misconceptions and misinformation about the scope and the main aim of the Convention.

- These attacks are part of a deliberate strategy which goes beyond the Convention itself to include women's rights in general. But the Convention is particularly targeted because **it promotes the idea of women as equal to men in all spheres of life, particularly in the family; because it challenges gender stereotypes and patriarchy and because it recognises diversity in women and women's agency in the life choices they make.** None of these are actually new standards. They are part and parcel of the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to which all of the member states are party. However, to the extent that the Convention requires a **change in mentalities** and the **re-negotiation of power relations between women and men in the particularly sensitive area of violence against women,** they are bound to come up against opposition by those with vested interests and those who are not ready to accept this yet.
- GREVIO's reply to such efforts has been to **focus on the real aims and added value of the Istanbul Convention, as the most advanced legally binding treaty to tackle violence against women and domestic violence in a very comprehensive manner.**
- It is obvious to all those with an open mind that the Convention and GREVIO's evaluation reports on its implementation and the recommendations contained therein are not challenging family structures, nor do they contest or replace the definitions of "woman" and "man". Nor do they undermine non-discriminatory traditions and our shared values of democracy and human rights. **But they do ask the state to take its responsibility in line with the due diligence**

requirements to ensure prevention of violence, protection of women and prosecution of perpetrators, in a comprehensive and coordinated manner.

Concluding

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

- GREVIO is aware of the difficulties as regards the financial future of the Council of Europe. We hope that **measures to address such difficulties will not have a negative impact on the work and activities of GREVIO.** In the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence, we have a ground-breaking, unique and comprehensive instrument to tackle this serious violation of human rights. Its implementation in practice means keeping all women and girls safe, keeping families safe, keeping our societies safe from violence.
- We count on all of you, and in particular on the **representatives of the Parties to the Convention to stand up for the Convention and the positive impact it has in putting in place and implementing laws and policies to eradicate gender based violence.** By doing so, we also contribute towards **the achievement of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in particular goal 5: gender equality** - which also seeks to eliminate all forms of violence and harmful practices against all women and girls.

Thank you!