



Provisional version

Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

Violence against women in Europe^{*}

Report

Rapporteur: Mr José MENDES BOTA, Portugal,
European People's Party group

A. Draft resolution

1. Violence against women affects one in four women in Europe. It is a widespread human rights violation as well as a major health problem. Regrettably, it is so embedded in society that most people fail to understand its extent, gravity and nature.
2. In March 2013, the 57th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 57), entirely devoted to violence against women and girls, represented a turning point in the fight against this plight: it gave visibility to the issue, resulting in the adoption of strong Conclusions, and encouraged States all over the world to take stronger measures, also in the context of the COMMIT initiative to end violence against women, launched by the Secretary General of the United Nations.
3. Thanks to the efforts of the Council of Europe and France, the CSW 57 was also an opportunity to have the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, henceforth 'the Istanbul Convention') better known at global level. This Convention has been rightly referred to as a 'gold standard' because it is the most comprehensive international instrument specifically dealing with violence against women.
4. The Assembly welcomes the positive response given by 25 Council of Europe member states to the COMMIT initiative. It acknowledges that most Council of Europe member states are strengthening their legal and policy framework to tackle violence against women and hopes that, despite budgetary constraints due to the economic crisis, they will continue to consider this matter as a priority by allocating adequate resources to it.
5. The Assembly also welcomes the increasing support for the Istanbul Convention, which to date has been signed by 31 Council of Europe member states. Amongst them, Albania, Italy, Montenegro and Portugal have already deposited the ratification instruments; Austria and Bosnia and Herzegovina should shortly do the same, while Andorra, France, Serbia and Spain are examining ratification.

^{*} Draft resolution and draft recommendation adopted unanimously by the Committee on 1 October 2013.

6. In the light of this positive momentum, the Assembly believes that no effort should be spared to achieve the ten ratifications that are necessary for the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention by the end of 2013. In this context, it recalls the crucial role played by parliamentarians, especially through the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence, in promoting the signature of the Istanbul Convention and ensuring a rapid and efficient ratification process.

7. The Assembly therefore calls on Council of Europe member states:

- 7.1 to sign and/or ratify the Istanbul Convention without any further delay if they still have not done so;
- 7.2 to refrain from making declarations and reservations to the Istanbul Convention or, in any case, not to renew them;
- 7.3 to adhere to the initiative COMMIT to end violence against women and implement their commitments within the promised deadlines

8. In so far as its work is concerned, the Assembly should:

- 8.1 renew the mandate of the General rapporteur on violence against women;
- 8.2 ask the General rapporteur on violence against women to represent it in the monitoring mechanism of the Istanbul Convention, once it starts to operate, and to submit a periodic report to the Assembly on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, with a view to complying with its Article 70.3;
- 8.3 continue to promote the signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention through activities targeting primarily parliamentarians;
- 8.4 step up activities aimed at raising awareness on violence against women amongst the general public, also in co-operation with the media sector;
- 8.5 organise activities to enhance the capacity of national parliaments to monitor the implementation of the Istanbul Convention at national level, once it enters into force;
- 8.6 expand the outreach capacity of the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence by creating a status of Network friend, which the Parliamentary Network will be able to award to members of the European Parliament and other members of parliaments;
- 8.7 encourage its members to set up informal groups or caucuses to end violence against women in their national parliaments.

B. Draft recommendation

1. Recalling its Resolution(2013), the Assembly reiterates that violence against women is a major human rights violation and an offence to human dignity which does not spare any Council of Europe member state.
2. The positive response given by the majority of Council of Europe member states to the United Nations initiative COMMIT to end violence against women, and their active involvement in the 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, are signs of their political resolve to tackle this plight.
3. The Council of Europe should strive to assist its member states in this endeavor, with a special emphasis on data collection, reinforcement of the legal and policy framework and cooperation.
4. The Council of Europe has set itself as a pioneer in standard-setting in this area through its Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (henceforth 'the Istanbul Convention', CETs No. 210). The Assembly looks forward to the prompt entry into force of this Convention, which will have a tangible impact on the lives of millions of people.
5. The Assembly welcomes the recognition of an explicit role for national parliaments and the Assembly itself in monitoring the implementation of the Convention set out in its Article 70 as an increased safeguard for the independence of the process.
6. In the light of the above, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 6.1 explore the feasibility of playing a role in the area of data collection by:
 - 6.1.1 elaborating common guidelines on data collection, to be recommended to all Council of Europe member states, in order to facilitate harmonisation and comparability;
 - 6.1.2 co-operating with the European Union, in particular its Fundamental Rights Agency, with a view to conducting a survey on violence against women for all the Council of Europe member states.
 - 6.2 contribute to strengthening the national legal and policy framework in the area of violence against women, in particular by:
 - 6.2.1 providing legal advice and expertise on draft legislation;
 - 6.2.3 supporting the organisation of training on violence against women addressed to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals;
 - 6.2.4 reinforcing knowledge of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights in the area of violence against women and domestic violence;
 - 6.2.5 stepping up project and co-operation work in the area of violence against women, addressed to member, observer states and partners for democracy;
7. In so far as the Istanbul Convention is concerned, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:
 - 7.1 step up activities to further promote the signature and ratification of (or accession to) the Istanbul Convention, including by non-Council of Europe member states and the European Union;
 - 7.2 ensure that the Assembly is represented in the GREVIO as an observer and is invited to attend the meetings of the Committee of the Parties.

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr José MENDES BOTA, Rapporteur

1. Violence against women: disbelief and misunderstandings

1. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines violence against women as ‘a global health problem of epidemic proportions’.¹ This definition is fully justified:

- worldwide, 35% of women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence;
- almost 30% of all women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner;
- 38% of all murders of women are committed by intimate partners.

2. However, the WHO definition does not capture the gravity of the situation. Violence against women is not only a health problem. It is also a global, systematic and pervasive human rights violation. And why does it occur? Exactly because its victims are women. Gender is the most frequent ground for violence and discrimination worldwide. Europe is no exception.

3. During my many years of political engagement in this area, I have been confronted with disbelief and gender-blindness. Discrimination against women is so engrained in people’s way of thinking that most people do not understand the link between gender and violence. There is often a reason being put forward to justify the perpetrators, to minimise their responsibility, to make the victims at least partly accountable, or to prefer impunity to justice. This happens whether violence against women occurs at home, at the hands of a partner, or whether it occurs on a large-scale in the context of armed conflicts.

4. In March 2013, many of us saw their convictions accurately reflected in the following passage:

‘Violence against women and girls is rooted in historical and structural inequality in power relations between women and men, and persists in every country in the world as a pervasive violation of the enjoyment of human rights. Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women and girls of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Violence against women and girls is characterised by the use and abuse of power and control in public and private spheres, and is intrinsically linked with gender stereotypes that underlie and perpetuate such violence, as well as other factors that increase women’s and girls’ vulnerability to such violence’.

5. It was an outstanding achievement that these words could be included in the Conclusions of the 2013 Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 57) of the United Nations. They echo what can be found in many Council of Europe instruments and declarations. I regret, however, that these concepts struggle to sink in the minds of ordinary people. Surveys confirm my concerns. The article below, published by a known non-governmental organisation, gathers the findings of several surveys conducted in the UK²:

Society’s attitudes to violence against women

More people would call the police if someone was mistreating their dog than if someone was mistreating their partner (78% versus 53%) [ICM (2003) Hitting Home BBC Domestic Violence Survey]

Over a quarter of people think a woman bears some responsibility for being raped if she is wearing revealing clothing. 18% think rape can be a woman’s fault if she is known to have had many sexual partners [Rape Crisis Scotland, Rape Crisis Scotland Public Awareness Campaign, in Rape Crisis (England and Wales) National Conference. Leeds (5 February 2008)]

Nearly half of people believe that domestic violence is something that happens behind closed doors and is for the partners to sort out [ICM (2003) Hitting Home BBC Domestic Violence Survey]

30% of people believe that domestic violence is acceptable in certain circumstances.

¹ WHO, Global and regional estimates of violence against women - Prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence, 2013. See also Appendix I.

² <http://www.avaproject.org.uk/our-resources/statistics/society%E2%80%99s-attitudes-to-violence-against-women.aspx>

Nearly a third of men think that domestic violence is acceptable if their partner has been nagging them.

6. I am afraid that surveys conducted in other Council of Europe member states would give similar frightening results.

7. Violence against women will continue to thrive unless we change people's mindsets. We should challenge the social norms, customs, traditions – and even the language – that perpetuate inequality and the existence or the perception of a hierarchy between sexes. As long as we accept inequality we condone violence against women; as long as there is violence against women, there will be inequality.

2. Aim of the present report

8. The present report is not meant to be an extensive analysis of the phenomenon of violence against women in Europe or of the legal and policy measures introduced by Council of Europe member states to counter it. This work is currently being conducted by the intergovernmental side of the Council of Europe, in the context of monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec(2002)5 on the protection of women against violence.

9. This report is above all a policy document: it aims at taking stock of where we stand in Europe with the awareness of this problem and the political will to tackle it, what are the challenges and opportunities that present themselves at this particular point in time, and what can be the added value of the Council of Europe for its member states.

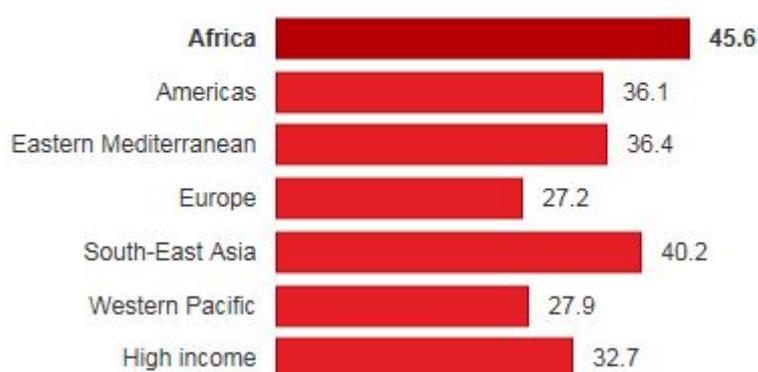
10. This reflection is the result of my work as General Rapporteur on violence against women of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination. My objective is to encourage Council of Europe member states to make a leap forward in this area, without any further delay.

3. Prevalence in Europe

11. The WHO study I mentioned at the beginning of this memorandum is the first global report ever on the prevalence of violence against women and girls of 15 years of age and above.

Violence against women

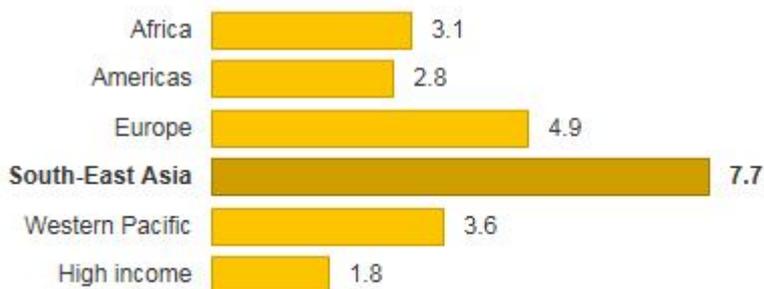
Lifetime prevalence of intimate partner violence/non-partner sexual violence among all women (15 years and older) by WHO region



12. According to it, 27,2% of women in Europe will experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. With a pattern which is identical in all the world's regions, intimate-partner violence accounts for the greatest proportion of cases also in Europe, the ratio between domestic violence and non-intimate partner violence being nearly 5 to 1. Unfortunately, this data does not enable us to fully understand the situation in Council of Europe member states, because some western European countries are included in the group which is called 'high income'.

Ratio of intimate partner to non-intimate partner violence

Ratio of intimate partner violence to non-intimate partner sexual violence by WHO region



Infographic: The Guardian

13. However important to estimate the phenomenon of violence against women and identify regional trends, the WHO report has a weakness: it is based on national and regional data which is not collected through a harmonised methodology.

14. Indeed, each country has its own more or less developed system of data collection on violence against women. Often, these systems have serious shortcomings: they do not cover all forms of violence against women, or cover only incidents which attain a certain threshold of gravity, or result in the information being already outdated when it is published. In addition, the information is not comparable with data collected in other countries.

15. The lack of robust and comparable data on violence against women in Europe is a well-known problem, as recognised by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in its Recommendation Rec (2002)5 on the protection of women against violence and reiterated in the context of the monitoring of the implementation of such an instrument.

16. In order to bridge the information gap, in 2009 the European Parliament asked the Fundamental Rights Agency of the European Union (FRA) to carry out a survey on violence against women. This survey will be published in March 2014.³ It will be based on interviews of 40,000 women throughout the 28 EU Member States, and focus on the extent, frequency and severity of violence against women, access to and quality of police, healthcare and victim support services.

17. The collection of reliable and comparable data is essential with a view to elaborating evidence-based policies and legislation. This is also recognised by the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (henceforth the Istanbul Convention), which sets out the following obligations:

Article 11 – Data collection and research

1. For the purpose of the implementation of this Convention, Parties shall undertake to:

a collect disaggregated relevant statistical data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention;

b support research in the field of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention in order to study its root causes and effects, incidences and conviction rates, as well as the efficacy of measures taken to implement this Convention.

2. Parties shall endeavour to conduct population-based surveys at regular intervals to assess the prevalence of and trends in all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention.

³ Exchange of views with Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos, Head of the Department of the Equality and Citizens' Rights of the FRA, Strasbourg, April 2013.

3. Parties shall provide the group of experts, as referred to in Article 66 of this Convention, with the information collected pursuant to this article in order to stimulate international co-operation and enable international benchmarking.

4. Parties shall ensure that the information collected pursuant to this article is available to the public.

18. In my opinion, the Council of Europe should explore the feasibility of playing a role in the area of data collection, in two ways:

- elaborating common guidelines on data collection, to be recommended to all Council of Europe member states, in order to facilitate harmonisation and comparability;
- co-operating with the European Union, in particular FRA, with a view to conducting a survey on violence against women for all the Council of Europe member states which are not covered by the forthcoming FRA report. In this way, the two studies would be fully complementary and provide a reliable picture of the situation in the whole of Europe.

19. A final point: figures and data, however reliable, should always be interpreted and put in context. For instance, just a few weeks ago data released in the United Kingdom indicated a 13 percent drop in cases of domestic violence being referred by the police for prosecution.⁴ Unfortunately, as it has been pointed out by non-governmental organisations and some politicians, this figure hides a failure of the system because the number of complaints presented to the police has actually gone up of 10 percent.

4. Challenges posed by the economic context

20. The debate in the United Kingdom leads me to raise another important consideration, which applies equally to all Council of Europe member states: women victims of violence should not be kept hostage of the economic crisis and the ensuing budgetary cuts.

21. One of the main explanations for the 13 percent drop in referrals in the United Kingdom is a 20 percent cut in funding for the police. This led to job cuts in the police and reduced its capacity to investigate criminal cases and bring them to court.

22. Similar fears have been raised in a number of Council of Europe member states as regards the availability of shelters and assistance measures, which are threatened by horizontal cuts,⁵ as well as access to free legal aid for victims of violence, which is also being reduced.⁶

23. I believe that these are new challenges confronting those who are engaged in the fight on violence against women, in particular legislators who have to weigh the pressure to reduce expenditures and the need to ensure effective protection and assistance for women who are victims of violence. As violence against women is a human rights issue, I have no hesitation in recommending that it is given high priority.

5. 2013: a turning point

24. Despite the challenges posed by the economic crisis, 2013 has been a milestone year in the fight on violence against women. The choice of 'violence against women and girls' as the main theme of the annual meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 57) polarised general, media and political attention around this topic.

25. The CSW 57 has brought about remarkable progress, at several levels. First of all, it has been a great success that Final Conclusions could be agreed upon (this had not always been the case in the past). Secondly, these Final Conclusions are strong:

- they place emphasis on prevention, and on education as an empowering factor;
- they call on the responsibility of men and boys;
- they recognise women's sexual and reproductive rights;
- they call for an end to the impunity of perpetrators;

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/sep/03/police-referrals-domestic-violence-cases-drop>

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/jan/31/domestic-violence-victims-risk-cuts>;

http://www.repubblica.it/solidarieta/volontariato/2011/07/22/news/tagli_donne_senza_assistenza_chiudono_di_centri_anti-violenza-19461349/; <http://genderview.wordpress.com/2012/11/23/europe-needs-54000-more-women-shelter-places/>

⁶ <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/jan/18/domestic-violence-victims-legal-aid>;

<http://www.theguardian.com/law/2011/oct/31/abused-women-suffer-legal-aid-cuts>;

- and they make it clear that religion, culture and tradition cannot be used to excuse violations of the human rights of women and girls.

26. During the negotiations, no agreement could be found on several important issues. Some key concepts are therefore missing from the Conclusions. They are:

- 'sexual orientation and gender identity': due to the opposition of some UN Member States and Observers, there is no mention of the multiple discrimination and specific situation experienced by LGBT women; and
- 'intimate partner relations': there is no recognition of the fact that intimate partner violence may occur outside marriage.



Mr Mendes Bota, Ms Quintanilla Barba and Ms Bonet-Perot with Ms Bachelet, first Executive Director of UN Women, in New York during the CSW 57

27. Lobbying, pressure and efforts to ensure that these concepts are acknowledged at UN level should continue. Despite its limitations, my personal assessment of the CSW 57 Final Conclusions remains very positive. We should not focus on what the CSW 57 has not achieved but on what it has achieved, and this is outstanding. In this regard, I should mention the role played at national as well as international level by civil society and non-governmental organisations, which has been crucial to gather the necessary political backing for the Conclusions.

28. The CSW 57 has not only been important in itself; it has also given decisive impetus to legal and policy change at national level. Responding to the appeal by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon on 'a promise is a promise' and the initiative 'COMMIT to end violence against women', States from all over the world have committed to strengthening their action in this area.

29. Amongst them, are 25 Council of Europe member states.⁷ Many of them have declared their engagement to ratify and implement the Istanbul Convention. Other frequent pledges include strengthening activities in the area of data collection, awareness-raising, access to justice, availability of shelters and assistance measures for victims. I welcome these commitments, which focus on what I consider priority areas. I look forward to them being translated into concrete action.

30. Indeed, the general atmosphere gives reasons to be optimistic: in Europe, the interaction between the pressure created by the CSW 57 and the debate over the signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention has led to fresh dynamism. This is clear from the great attention that politicians have devoted to violence against women, the number of NGO and civil society initiatives – including the collection of signature and petitions in support of new legislation – , and the visibility that it has had in the media.

31. By now, some major newspapers and TV channels such as *The Guardian*, *El Pais*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, *BBC* and *Rai* report on violence against women and intimate-partner violence on a regular basis. In doing so, they do not describe it any longer as a succession of punctual and isolated episodes but as a major social problem which needs to be tackled. I am pleased about this development: the media is an indispensable ally for awareness-raising amongst the general public, which is crucial to changing people's mind-sets.

⁷ A summary of the commitments that have been undertaken by member states can be found in the appendix.

32. I like to think that, also thanks to the CSW 57, 2013 will not only been a turning point but a point of non-return in the elimination of violence against women, especially in Europe.

6. 2013: the year of the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention?

33. I have another reason to hope that 2013 will be a year of non-return: I trust the ten ratifications which are necessary for the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention to be achieved this year!

The side event on the Istanbul Convention organised by France and the Council of Europe during the CSW 57



34. The Istanbul Convention has been opened for signature since May 2011. To enter into force, it requires the deposit of ten ratifications, eight of which should come from Council of Europe member states.

35. At the moment, although 31 countries have signed the Convention, only five of them have deposited instruments of ratification: Turkey – which did so in record time –, Albania, Portugal, Montenegro and Italy – the latter also having concluded the process in record time, as it signed the Convention only in September 2012. The parliaments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Austria have ratified the Convention. The deposit of the instruments of ratification by these countries therefore should be soon. In addition, the governments of France and Spain have given their green light to ratification, which will shortly be examined by parliament. On 5 June, the Serbian Parliament started to examine the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. Ratification is also currently being discussed in Andorra.

36. In my opinion, politically, it would be a strategic mistake if states that support the Convention try to achieve complete adaptation with its provisions before ratification. This would give the wrong signal to those that are hesitant and delay the entry into force of the Convention and this, in turn, would lead to more women suffering and being killed.

37. It should also be recalled that, although not for all its provisions, the Istanbul Convention allows for the possibility of reservations, which can be maintained for a provisional period of 5 years, renewable once. This would give an additional lapse of time for states to align their national laws with the Convention.

38. The Council of Europe should take advantage of the political momentum created by the CSW 57 to push for additional and prompt ratifications.

7. The Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence and the role of national parliamentarians

39. In the last few years, the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence has proved to be very dynamic and effective in pursuing its main objective, namely the promotion of the Istanbul Convention.

40. It disposes of several tools: a handbook on the Istanbul Convention, which is primarily addressed to parliamentarians but can be used as a reference document by any other interlocutor who is interested in the issue (this exists in 14 languages); a Newsletter which is published before every session; a Facebook page. I attach in annex I a list of the activities of the Network in order to give an idea of the extensive work carried out by the Network and its members.

41. Upon being elected General rapporteur on violence against women and Political Co-ordinator of the Network, I took the initiative of contacting more than 300 interlocutors all over Europe, with a view to presenting the Assembly's activities and establishing synergies. Since then, I have participated in many events, meetings and missions, in international fora and at national level. I consider this representation work as an example of parliamentary diplomacy, aimed at raising awareness on violence against women and speeding up the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention. I have also issued a number of statements on violence against women and established contacts with human rights film festivals all over Europe, in view of organising joint activities.

42. The Parliamentary Network has achieved tangible results. In 2012, Network members organised parliamentary events on the Istanbul Convention in Rome, Sarajevo, Lisbon and Brussels, to mark the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women in Europe and promote the Istanbul Convention. These conference and seminars received great media attention, were attended by national parliamentarians and included high level speakers, such as Speakers of parliament and competent Ministers. What happened next?

- Portugal ratified the Convention following a unanimous decision of parliament, just a few days after the seminar;
- in Italy, the main political parties reached political agreement on a prompt ratification of the Convention, which was finalised in 2013 with a unanimous vote by both chambers of parliament (this was the first legislative act of parliament following the general election of February 2013);
- after the seminar, Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Convention; parliament ratified it in July 2013;
- in Belgium, the seminar highlighted that was political agreement on ratification; the process is underway, even if it might take time due to the country's federal structure.

43. In the light of these successful results, I think that the way forward for the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence in the medium-run (for the next two years) is expanding its membership and deepening its work.

- **Expansion**

44. To date, the Network counts 42 members, of whom 39 from Council of Europe member states; 2 from observer states; and 1 from a parliament holding the status of Partner for democracy. The objective is for every parliament which is represented in the Assembly with a status to have one representative in the Network via a member of the national delegation.

45. In addition, following the active involvement of members of the European Parliament in Network activities, and contacts established with parliamentarians from Latin America during the CSW 57 in March 2013, I would like to suggest that the Network sets up a status of 'Network friends'. This would enable the Network to have a greater outreach capacity, to exchange good practice and experience with other parliamentarians, and to have the chance of influencing legislation and policy on violence against women also outside Council of Europe member states. 'Network friends' could be engaged in networking activities thanks to Facebook or other social media, and could be partners in the organisation of events.

- **Deepening**

46. The Network should strengthen its activities at national level, empowering its members and giving them appropriate tools to organise national events to promote the Istanbul Convention and raise awareness on violence against women in general.

47. The organisation of national events around 25 November 2012 proved to be successful, and could be replicated in 2013 and next years. In addition, other activities to be undertaken, focusing on two main directions:

- **information and awareness-raising towards the general public:**

- the Network could establish a link with national human rights film festivals by ensuring that films on violence against women are included in the programme and that a debate on the issue is organised on the occasion of the projection, with the participation of Network members and distribution of information material on the Istanbul Convention;

- in addition to the Facebook page, the possibility of using other social media should be explored;
 - subject to the availability of extra-budgetary resources, a media campaign could be organised every year in the context of the '16 days of activism on gender-based violence', with Network members participating in TV debates, blogs, social media discussions, giving interviews and writing articles on violence against women and the Istanbul Convention.
- **empowerment and capacity-building of parliamentarians as legislators and in the context of monitoring:**
 - once the Istanbul Convention enters into force, the Network should differentiate its work addressed to parliamentarians: while information events and activities aimed at promoting the Convention amongst parliamentarians will continue to be useful for parliamentarians from countries that still have not ratified the Convention, it will be most appropriate to envisage activities to build the capacity of parliamentarians to monitor the implementation of the Convention by countries in which it is already applied.
 - Network members should promote the setting up of special caucuses/informal groups on violence against women in national parliaments.
- **Resources**

48. The Network activities have been possible thanks on the one hand to the Assembly budget, on the other to voluntary contributions, including a particularly significant one by the German government. In order to conduct these new activities which will deepen understanding of the plight of violence against women amongst the general public while strengthening the technical knowledge of legislators it will be necessary to seek extra-budgetary funding, including from private donors and the European Union.

8. The Council of Europe action in the area of violence against women in the next years

49. The approaching entry into force of the Convention shall by no means imply that the Council of Europe's efforts should relent. On the contrary, this is the time for the Council of Europe to upgrade its engagement in this area, first of all politically: violence against women should occupy a central position amongst its priorities, for two reasons:

- it is a serious human rights violation affecting all Council of Europe member states;
- the majority of member states have committed to take action. The priorities of the Council of Europe as an organisation should better reflect the commitments taken by its member states. The main role for the Council of Europe should be helping member states turn their commitments in the area of violence against women into tangible changes.

50. As a consequence, I would like to propose that the Council of Europe expands its activities in the area of violence against women, by developing the following dimensions in synergy and co-ordination:

- awareness-raising on violence against women towards the general public;
- contributing to strengthening the legal and policy framework of Council of Europe member states in the area of violence against women, in particular by:
 - providing legal advice and expertise on draft legislation;
 - supporting the organisation of training on violence against women addressed to police officers, judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals;
 - reinforcing knowledge of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights in the area of violence against women and domestic violence;
 - project and co-operation work in the area of violence against women, addressed to member, observer states and partners for democracy;
 - further promotion of the signature and ratification of (or accession to) the Istanbul Convention, including by non-Council of Europe member states and the European Union;
 - monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention;

- development of a solid and structured partnership with UN Women, FRA and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE).

51. I believe that, through its Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence, the Assembly should be closely involved in these activities.

9. Special focus on monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention

52. In view of the approaching entry into force of the Istanbul Convention, it is particularly urgent for the Assembly to open a reflection on how it will take part in the monitoring process.

53. The monitoring provisions set out in the Istanbul Convention are particularly innovative, as they foresee the twofold participation of parliamentarians:

- at national level, parliaments are invited to participate in the monitoring of the measures taken for the implementation of the Convention; in addition, the Parties shall submit the reports drawn up by the independent monitoring body (the GREVIO) to their national parliaments;
- at international level, the Assembly is invited to take regular stock of the implementation of the Convention.

54. I have already mentioned that the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence should add to its work programme activities aimed at enhancing the capacity of national parliamentarians to carry out the monitoring of the Convention at national level.

55. As regards the involvement of the Assembly as an institution in the monitoring procedure, I would like to make the following proposals:

- the Assembly should continue to have a General rapporteur on violence against women, who should submit a periodic report to the Assembly on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention;
- the Assembly should be represented in the GREVIO by the General Rapporteur on violence against women, as an observer;
- the Assembly should be invited to attend all the meetings of the Committee of the Parties.

56. In my opinion, these recommendations are the logic consequence of the innovative provisions laid down in the Istanbul Convention, which is the first binding instrument in the world to require the direct participation of parliamentarians in the monitoring mechanism. At the same time, they are the recognition of the role played by the Assembly in relation to the inception, elaboration, conclusion and promotion of the Istanbul Convention.

57. Finally, I think that the participation of an Assembly representative in the GREVIO could be particularly useful in the context of the urgent procedure which is set out in Article 68, para. 13 of the Istanbul Convention, which reads:

'If GREVIO receives reliable information indicating a situation where problems require immediate attention to prevent or limit the scale or number of serious violations of the Convention, it may request the urgent submission of a special report concerning measures taken to prevent a serious, massive or persistent pattern of violence against women'.

58. Given the presence of a General Rapporteur on Violence against Women in the Assembly as well as the existence of the Parliamentary Network Women Free from Violence and the way in which it works – holding frequent meetings and maintaining a regular flow of information covering geographically all Council of Europe member states – the Assembly representative would be well placed to provide prompt and reliable information to the GREVIO on actions that may require urgent action.

10. Conclusions: if not in 2013, when?

59. Unfortunately, 2013 may not be the year in which violence against women is eradicated. But all the conditions are there for 2013 to be the year in which the world makes an unprecedented leap forward in the eradication of violence against women.

60. For Europe, despite the lingering shadow of the economic crisis and the constraints it places on our budgets, 2013 can also be the year in which the Istanbul Convention comes into force. I hope that the Turkish authorities will be able to host the ceremony to mark this important event.

61. The Istanbul Convention has often been referred to as 'the gold standard' because of the high legal and policy standards it requires on the State parties and because it is a yardstick for any legal and policy framework in the area of violence against women. But for me this Convention is worth more than gold: it can save millions of lives and change the mindsets of millions of people.

62. Whether 2013 will bring these results greatly depends on us parliamentarians, on the political weight we want to attach to the fight on violence against women, on our efforts to pass legislation and introduce effective policies and the pressure we can apply to our governments.

63. The Council of Europe should lend its support to this fight, as it has the expertise, the authority and the credibility to work hand in hand with its member states and help them translate political commitments into tangible facts.

Appendix I

Activities of the Parliamentary Network “Women free from Violence”

Network meetings

The Network organised a series of exchanges of views/hearings on themes related to violence against women to actively promote the signature and ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

25 January 2012, Zero tolerance for so-called “honour crimes”, Strasbourg

25 April 2012, Police response to women victims of violence, Strasbourg

28 June 2012, Marital rape, Strasbourg

18 September 2012, Conference on “Legislators to make freedom from violence a reality”, Tirana

4 October 2012, A strategy to campaign for the Istanbul Convention, Strasbourg

23 January 2013, Refugee women and the Istanbul Convention, Strasbourg

24 April 2013, Prostitution and trafficking, Strasbourg

26 June 2013, Women, violence and art, Strasbourg

16 September 2013, ‘The economic dimensions of violence against women’, Madrid

Upcoming: 2 October 2013, Violence against women: does the rehabilitation of perpetrators work?, Strasbourg

National parliamentary events

Network members organised events on the Istanbul Convention in their national parliaments, to enhance knowledge of the Convention among parliamentarians and smoothen out the ratification process.

Sarajevo, 21 November 2012 – followed by the approval of the ratification by the Parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina (23/7/2013)

Rome, 22 November 2012 – followed by the ratification of the Convention by Italy on 10 September 2013

Brussels, 30 November 2012

Lisbon, 3 December 2012 - Followed by the ratification of the Istanbul Convention by Portugal (5/2/2013)

Baku, 7 May 2013

Activities of the Political Co-ordinator

In my capacity as political coordinator of the Network, I conducted several visits to Council of Europe Member states to discuss with officials the state of signature/ratification of the Istanbul Convention. I also participated in international conferences to raise awareness about the Convention and publicise the activities of the Network.

2-3 July 2012, visit to Georgia

7 July 2012, Conference ‘L’approche genre dans le développement de la femme en Méditerranée’, Tétouan, Morocco

9 July 2012, Visit to Rabat

24-25 September 2012, Regional Conference on preventing and combating violence against women, Rabat

8-9 October 2012, Seminar on violence against women, European Women's lobby, Brussels

18 October 2012, 14th WAVE Conference, London

4-6 November 2012, International Conference on “The Political and Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women based on Women’s Stories, Istanbul

15 November 2012, meeting of the Gender Equality Commission (GEC), Strasbourg

17 November 2012, Conference organised by Soroptimist International on “The Istanbul Convention: for women free from violence”, Lisbon

21 November 2012, Seminar on “25 November: International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women”, Sarajevo,

30 November 2012, Seminar on “Violence against women and the Istanbul Convention : on the way to ratification”, Brussels

3 December 2012, International Conference on “Violence against women and the Istanbul Convention”, Lisbon

5 December 2012, International Conference on “The role of the international organisations in combating gender violence: international and regional juridical framework”, Lisbon

17-18 January 2013, Regional conference on the Istanbul Convention, Helsinki

4-7 March 2013, 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York

7 May 2013, Parliamentary Seminar about the Istanbul Convention, Baku

27- 28 June 2013: High level expert Conference “Vienna+20: Advancing the Protection of Human Rights”

2 July 2013, Conference “Risk assessment saves lives”, Lisbon

Upcoming:

10 October, Colloque on “Violences faites aux femmes: dévoiler ce qui est rendu invisible”, Strasbourg

14 October 2013, Meeting of the Network of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas, Brasilia

10 November 2013, Conference on “Coordinated efforts – Towards new European standards in the protection of women from gender-based violence”, Belgrade

11-12 November 2013, Conference on “How women’s movement influenced state policies”, Belgrade

Appendix II

Synoptic table of commitments undertaken by Council of Europe member states under the COMMIT initiative (summary)⁸

Country	Change to national policy/legislation on violence against women and related areas	Istanbul Convention
Albania	Better implementation of criminal code; improving access to justice; Training for law-enforcement; awareness-raising and education campaigns	
Austria	Gender responsive budgeting	Commitment to ratify
Belgium	Implementing more than 120 new measures to fight against various forms of violence against women, including intimate-partner violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, honour-related violence; efforts to improve the co-ordination of different services in addressing intimate-partner violence; focus on young people and awareness-raising.	Commitment to ratify and implement
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Devising a strategy to implement the Istanbul Convention; implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 through the Action Plan for the Implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security	Commitment to implement
Denmark	Focus on girls and young women; reducing domestic violence; addressing root causes and awareness-raising.	
Finland	Reforming legislation on sexual offences; Implementing the Cross-Sectoral Action Plan to reduce violence against women	Commitment to ratify
France	Launching a national anti-violence strategy (including a public awareness campaign, education and a professional training programme); creating a dedicated national body to monitor the progress of the gender-based violence response programme.	Commitment to ratify
Georgia	Georgia intends to maintain and strengthen its efforts to prevent and combat domestic violence by carrying out national awareness-raising campaigns to stop domestic violence, promptly responding to reports on violence coming through specially established hotlines, providing victims with shelter facilities, and ensuring the safety of whistleblowers, among other measures. Georgia will actively continue implementing the National Action Plan regarding the 1325 and other relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council on "Women, Peace and Security", which inter alia, envisages an increase of women participation in the security sector decision-making and their further empowerment in this regard.	Commitment to sign
Germany	Improving data collection; establishing a national hotline to report violence against women; developing a concept to evaluate measures to prevent violence against women; developing a National Action Plan to implement the UN Security Council Resolution 1325	Commitment to ratify and implement
Greece	Creation of 9 counselling centres at regional and 27 at local level aiming at providing psychosocial and legal support; upgrading of the existing infrastructure; awareness raising campaigns and dissemination of information materials in various languages; continuing training of social counsellors; creation of 21 shelters for abused women and their children; mainstreaming of gender-responsive policies in government action.	Commitment to ratify and implement
Hungary	Including domestic violence as a specific crime; focus on	

⁸ <http://saynotoviolence.org/commit>

	preventing, awareness-raising, education.	
Italy	Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women and Peace and Security" through a National Action Plan, which will be reviewed in 2013 to assess its progress; supporting the UN Trust Fund on Violence against Women on projects in the MENA and Sub-Saharan region; advancing the global campaign to end female genital mutilation.	Commitment to implement
The Netherlands	Awareness-raising targeting young people; improving coordination to prevent and respond to intimate-partner violence; focus on forced prostitution and trafficking; implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 through a second National Action Plan, which focuses on enhancing the role of women as powerful agents for peace and security in the MENA region and six other countries.	Commitment to ratify and implement
Norway	Priority area: domestic violence; research to be launched on spousal homicide; rethinking of the system of the burden of proof in cases of domestic violence; continuing to work on forced marriages and female genital mutilation	Commitment to ratify
Poland	Poland commits to ratifying the Istanbul Convention by harmonising Polish law with the requirements of the Convention in all aspects regarding prevention and combating of violence against women and domestic violence, mainly focusing on education, appropriate data collection and victim support. In particular, Poland commits to changing the criminal code so that all rape cases are persecuted <i>ex officio</i> and criminal proceedings are no longer wholly dependent on the victim's complaint.	Commitment to ratify
Portugal	Implementing the National Plan Against Domestic Violence, the Programme for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation and the National Plan Against Trafficking in Human Beings; focus on awareness-raising; strengthening protection measures and intensifying the training of judges, prosecutors and security forces; strengthening the financial capacity for shelters as well as access to housing; launching a study on Female Genital Mutilation; strengthening dialogue with migrant associations; implementing the national action plan on the UN Security Council Resolution 1325.	Commitment to implement
Romania	Developing strategies on family protection and policies on combating and preventing domestic violence; implementing the <i>2013-2017 National Strategy on Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence</i> ; <i>promoting</i> cross-sectoral cooperation, including partnerships with civil society and the private sector. A permanent working sub-group on domestic violence has been set up in the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Protection and Elderly in order to strengthen the institutional capacity of central public administration authorities to manage domestic violence correlated with violence against children.	The current National Strategy to Prevent and Combat Domestic Violence expressly provides for necessary steps towards the signature and ratification of the Convention.
Russian Federation	Focus on prevention, awareness-raising and assistance to victims; elaboration of a new federal law on the prevention of domestic violence.	No mention
Serbia	Introduction an inter-ministerial protocol on violence against women	Commitment to ratify
Slovakia	Improving counselling and shelters for victims; establishing a national coordinating mechanism; opening a free 24h hotline; introducing a new action plan on violence against women.	Commitment to bring national policy and legislation in line

Spain	Improving communication and referrals between police, justice and medical institutions; great attention on particularly vulnerable groups; awareness-raising and partnership with the private sector.	
Sweden	Priorities: women with higher vulnerability; so-called honour crimes; trafficking for the purposes of prostitution; intimate-partner violence. Attention to awareness-raising; greater role for municipalities; inquiry into violence against immigrant women.	Commitment to ratify and implement
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	Establishing a multi-sectoral national coordinating body, to assume a leading role in the implementation of the policies for protection against domestic violence; improving quality of assistance services for victims of violence; strengthening judicial capacity to tackle cases of domestic violence; emphasis on prevention.	No mention
Turkey	Opening a women's shelter in each province; establishing 14 pilot Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers; monitoring and evaluating the National Action Plan on Combating Violence against Women and replicating the national research on domestic violence. In addition to launching national awareness raising campaigns on the issue, Turkey will expand gender equality training for civil servants and law enforcement, as well as for media and students.	Integrating the Istanbul Convention into national legislation
United Kingdom	Continuing its efforts to end all forms of violence against women and girls, the UK will also be using its presidency of the G8 to promote the Foreign Secretary's initiative on preventing sexual violence in conflict. It is working in 21 countries to directly address violence against women and has invested in building the evidence base of what works to ensure that its efforts are targeted and provide value for money. The UK has set out clear ambition to end female genital mutilation within one generation. Specific measures and plans apply to devolved administrations (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).	No mention