

VĚRA JOUROVÁ
Member of the European Commission

Brussels, 07/05/2018

Dear Ms Kirton-Darling,

I would like to thank you for your letter of 15th March 2018. We are grateful for your interest in the Commission's efforts to combat violence against women and for being a valuable ally within the European Parliament.

I fully understand your discontent with the fact that there has been no official designation of a "European Year of Combating Violence against Women". At the same time, as you know, neither EU Treaties nor interinstitutional agreements impose any obligation to establish European Years. Any decision on establishing a European Year would need to be adopted under the ordinary legislative procedure, thus fully involving the European Parliament and the Council. Such a decision would need to demonstrate how the action would be complementary and could add value to the range of activities that are already being carried out by the Commission and by Member States on the specific theme retained for the European Year.

In this context, I am convinced that what we achieved with dedicating 2017 to focused actions to combat violence against women¹ across the EU, including making €15 million available to 12 national authorities and 32 grassroots projects tackling gender-based violence, is not undermined in any way by the lack of official designation of 2017 as a European Year. Furthermore, combatting gender-based violence (GBV) is a priority of the Commission's Strategic Engagement for gender equality 2016-2019.

Throughout 2017, the focused actions involved several European umbrella activities and events, including the Annual Fundamental Rights Colloquium on "Women's Rights in Turbulent Times" on 20-21 November, which had violence against women as one of the core topics. Additionally, a social media campaign under the hashtag #SayNoStopVAW² was launched to raise awareness and take a clear stand against violence. This campaign is being continued throughout 2018.

Moreover, the Commission regularly funds projects tackling GBV through the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme, with the latest call for proposals open for application from 8th March 2018³. We have also launched work on the development of an EU-wide prevalence survey on GBV coordinated by Eurostat which currently involves 11 national statistical institutes during its pilot phase. We will launch a new call next year to get more Member States on board so that the full survey can cover all of EU-27 in 2019-2020.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/item-detail.cfm?item_id=37131

² <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/saynostopvaw/>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/opportunities/rec/topics/rec-rdap-gbv-ag-2018.html>

As you recalled in your letter, enforcing and reinforcing the EU legislative framework was another important pillar of the year of focused actions. We have in particular pushed for the EU to sign the Council of Europe Convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence (the Istanbul Convention). The EU signature of the Istanbul Convention was an important step to establish a clear legal framework to prevent and combat violence against women in Europe. We are now working on a hopefully swift ratification.

I will continue encouraging all EU Member States to consider ratification of this important instrument, and I will continue working intensely, together with the European Parliament and the Council, to combat gender-based violence. We thank you, once again, for your commitment to eradicate this scourge across the EU.

Yours sincerely,

Věra Jourová