



To:

Ms. Ursula von der Leyen

President of the European Commission
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels

Ms. Helena Dalli

Commissioner for Equality
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels

Mr. Charles Michel

President of the European Council
Rue de la Loi 175
1048 Brussels

Brussels, 19 March 2020

Dear President Von der Leyen,
Dear President Michel,
Dear Commissioner Dalli,

As Greens/EFA Members of the European Parliament, we want to express our deep concern regarding the possible increase of domestic violence linked to the preventive measure of self-isolation, which a number of European member states have announced to stop the spreading of the virus COVID-19. In addition, schools have also been closing down, often leaving children and caretakers with no other choice but to stay at home.

We acknowledge the necessity to self-isolate but would like to remind you that not every home is a safe place to do so. The threat of domestic violence is a reality in Europe, affecting women and children the most. Our concern is based on the fact that in China reports of domestic violence have nearly doubled since cities were put under lockdown. Human rights activists state that while everyone's attention is on the epidemic, the rights and needs of victims of domestic violence are very much being neglected. We are highly concerned that the same is happening in Europe. Situations of uncertainty such as the one we are living can cause frustration leading to the rise of aggression and violence rates within households. This will lead to women being stuck with their abusers for weeks, amplifying the abuser's ability to restrict women's freedoms.

Therefore, we call on the Commission and the Council to ensure that member states will not reduce or divert existing resources from critical services that women rely on, such as routine health checks, help lines, shelters or any other essential gender-based violence service. We must take this problem very seriously from the beginning, and work to ensure the enforcement of support infrastructures, so that no person is left behind facing abusive situations at home.

In addition and in light of the foreseeable circumstances of more member states imposing strict curfews for the next weeks, we respectfully urge you as the President of the European Commission, the President of the European Council and the Commissioner for Equality to recommend and encourage member states to implement proactive preventive measures such as the following to avoid that this crisis produces even more victims:

- Reinforcement of helpline services
- Set up of online legal help
- Organisation of networks of support workers
- Financing of refuge shelter for victims
- Awareness raising in the public and in administration
- Ad-hoc campaign run by Commission to inform and warn about this phenomenon

The Commission and Council should do its utmost to ensure that women and children exposed to domestic violence know their rights and are being empowered to contact help services. Concurrently, authorities need to be prepared to guarantee that victims' rights are being respected and that shelters are available. Only if every person can find a safe space to stay, the actions against the spread of COVID-19 will be sustainable in the long-run.

In order to be effective in this field, we would like to also remind you that it is vital to introduce gender-based violence in the European list of crimes. The EU has the obligation to ensure justice and gender equality. It is therefore necessary to guarantee that the EU is well equipped with the necessary legal tool to make sure that all women in the EU are equality protected and their rights respected.

Acknowledging your great efforts to handle this unique situation effectively, we thank you in advance for addressing this urgent matter and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Terry REINTKE, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament

François ALFONSI, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament

Rasmus ANDRESEN, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament

Benoît BITEAU, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament

Michael BLOSS, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament
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Francisco GUERREIRO, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament
Henrike HAHN, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament
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Monika VANA, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament
Salima YENBOU, Greens/EFA Member of the European Parliament