



THE RIGHTS OF TODAY'S  
GIRLS: THE RIGHTS  
OF TOMORROW'S WOMEN



## News

### IT DIDN'T HAPPEN

Ignoring the wishes of hundreds of democratically elected MEP's for over a decade, a European Year to End Violence Against Women and Girls didn't happen.

As far back as 9 December [2005](#) the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality was asking the European Commission 'to declare a European Year against men's violence against women, as repeatedly requested by Parliament.' This happened far before The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, was opened to signatures. The final draft of which was produced in December 2010.

On 9 September 2010 the European Parliament, made a [written declaration](#), signed by over half its members, asking that the European Commission establish a European Year of Combatting Violence against Women within 5 years.

This was unusual.

Normal procedure would be that the Commission would propose the theme for upcoming years and the European Parliament and Council would vote on whether to adopt it. However, the members of the Parliament felt that violence against women was such 'a critical problem' that they decided to make a written declaration to the Commission asking them to establish it. At that time a written declaration signed by over half the Members of the European Parliament had the same standing as an adopted resolution, in that it represented an [official position](#) of Parliament.

It didn't happen.

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, again on 21 August 2013 produced a [working document](#) on Combatting Violence against Women stating that 'The Commission should establish, in the next three years, a European Year Against Violence Against Women with the aim of raising awareness among citizens.'

Again on 13 May 2015 in its [report](#) 'on the EU Strategy for equality between women

and men post 2015', The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality reiterated 'its appeal to the Commission to designate 2016 as the European Year for combating violence against women and girls.' On 9 June 2015 the European Parliament adopted this as a [resolution](#).

Eventually on the 30 November 2015 Parliament made another [appeal](#), 'Will the Commission officially designate 2016 European Year for combating violence against women and girls?

If not, why not?'

They were [answered](#) on 14 April 2016 by Věra Jourová, the European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, 'The Commission has not made a proposal to the European Parliament and the Council to designate a European Year for 2016 or future years. Any future European Year dedicated to a worthy topical issue would need to have demonstrable added value over and above the ongoing and programmed actions at European and Member State level.'

For over a decade the European Parliament had again and again tried to encourage the Commission to establish this official year.

It didn't happen.

## WHAT DID HAPPEN



Věra Jourová, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, took the initiative to 'dedicate' 2017 to ending violence against women through a year of focused actions that aimed to connect all efforts across the European Union to stop violence against women.

The Commission together with Member States, EIGE, European Parliament, civil societies and other institutions, under the umbrella of the campaign ran several activities over the year, including:

- Social media campaign [#SayNoStopVAW](#)
- On 13 June 2017, the EU [signed](#) the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, also known as the 'Istanbul Convention'
- Published a [Eurobarometer](#) on gender-based violence
- Made 4 million euros available to EU countries to develop and implement national practical and targeted information, awareness-raising and education activities aimed at preventing and combating violence against women
- Allocated 6 million euros towards civil society organisations that combat

violence against women or support its victims

[more](#)

2016 couldn't be the 'official' European Year to End Violence against Women and Girls but 2017 was 'dedicated' to it, so why couldn't 2017 be the official year?

Why was it that 'a year of focused actions that aimed to connect all efforts across the European Union' was not able to include it being an 'official' European Year 'to End' or 'to Combat' or even just 'Against' Violence Against Women and Girls.

[The aim](#) of an 'official' European Year 'is to raise awareness of certain topics, encourage debate and change attitudes. During many European years, extra funding is provided for local, national and cross-border projects that address the Year's special topic.

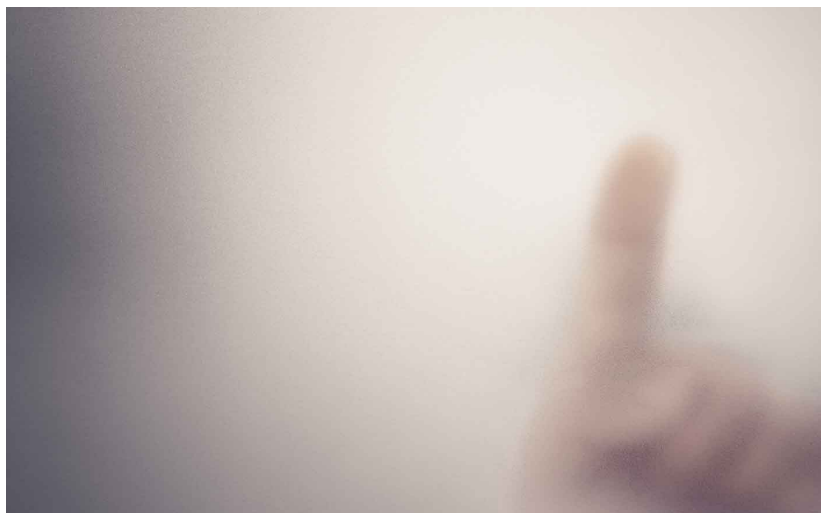
The European Year can also send a strong commitment and political signal from the EU institutions and member governments that the subject will be taken into consideration in future policy-making. In some cases, the European Commission may propose new legislation on the theme.'

Maybe the official European Years no longer fulfilled their stated aim 'to raise awareness of certain topics, encourage debate and change attitudes', or no longer sent 'a strong commitment and political signal from the EU institutions and member governments'.

In a written [question](#) on 22 January 2016 the European Parliament asked, 'The Commission has decided that there is to be no 'European Year' in 2016, thus ending a successful 33-year tradition which began in 1983, at the initiative of the European Parliament...

1. What were the Commission's reasons for deciding not to hold a European Year in 2016, and how was this decision reached?
2. Does the Commission consider it has made a political error in deciding to arbitrarily terminate the 'European Year' tradition, initiated by Parliament, without consulting Parliament or the associations?
3. Was the Commission aware of Parliament's suggestions for a 'European Year against violence' or a 'European Year against violence against women'? If so, why were these suggestions not taken up?

## **SO, WHY WASN'T IT?**



President Juncker's [reply](#) to these 3 very specific questions was that the Commission had received consent from Parliament on the basis of the political guidelines of his 'A New Start for Europe' and so would focus its communication work on those. Presumably it was clear to the European Parliament that by assenting to President Juncker's 10 point plan they were also discarding decades of campaigning.

Apparently there are no minutes available of any of the meetings when these decisions were taken.

Even [asking the Commission](#) under the right of access to documents in the EU treaties, as developed in Regulation 1049/2001, to read all minutes, notes of the discussions, position papers, and any other documents where is mentioned the decision of not accepting the request of the written declaration signed by over half the Members of the European Parliament on the 9 September 2010, there is no chance to have an explanation as to exactly when, why or by whom the decision was made.

The available [documents](#) only refer to the appeal of the [13 May 2015](#) by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, where just 35 people voted. Apparently there are no documents referring to the [request](#) backed up by the 402 MEP's of that term.

However, there is still the question 'why was it not allowed to be recognised and listed as an Official European Year?' No clear answers were given, but it does seem that they are [suggesting](#) that an official European Year was not going to be complementary or add value to the range of activities that were already being carried out by the Commission and the Member States.

In March and April 2018, of 751 active MEP's, just 22 answered the [question](#) 'why 2017 was not allowed to be recognised and listed as an official European Year, but could only be an unofficial, informal, off-the-record one?' These are the more interesting [answers](#) which express personal, different points of view without a definitive clear point.

## FACTS AND NUMBERS



In Europe, as worldwide, many girls are subjected to many forms of gender based violence from an early age. Frequently these are justified as being an inherent element of their historical cultural values, traditions, customs or religion. So it is



strange that the European Years were stopped for 2 years because there was some issue with the EU putting all its weight behind a campaign combatting violence against women and girls, but the European Years were reintroduced with the theme of a European Year of Cultural Heritage.

It is estimated that at least [500,000](#) girls and women living in Europe have suffered Female Genital Mutilation. [180,000](#) girls and women are estimated to be at risk every year. This barbaric torture continues to be practiced in name of cultural and religious requirements.

In the [European Union](#) 1 in 3 women has experienced sexual violence, physical violence, or both and 1 in 20 has been raped.

As the #MeToo movement has taught us, we have all been raised with cultural values that establish men as the dominant and authoritarian figures in society and diminish women and objectify their sexuality. On 11 December 2017 during a discussion at the European Commission, the Secretary-General of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Mr Angel Gurría said, according to their research, “one in three women believe that violence against women is justified” [\[24:45\]](#).

In just 20 European countries mapped by Eurostat in 2015, [1014](#) women died from femicide, almost six times as many as the men and women who died from terrorism attacks which, according to the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), numbered [171](#).

To date the majority of the abuses against women and girls in Europe, as worldwide, are not only tolerated, but often justified, normalised and institutionalised in the name of cultural values, tradition, customs or religion.



The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, also known as the Istanbul Convention, is 'the first instrument in Europe to set legally binding standards specifically to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims of violence, and punish perpetrators'. Despite the fact that the Convention is an effective way to coordinate policies and measures to combat violence against women throughout all European countries, a number of governments and religious groups opposed it because they see it as a threat to their ideology, traditional family structures, gender roles and culture. In February 2018 [Bulgaria](#) and [Slovakia](#) voted against ratifying it.

For preventing violence against women and girls it is important to change cultural

and social norms including gender stereotypes and beliefs about masculinity.

2018 has been the 'official' [European Year of Cultural Heritage](#).

An official [decision](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council dated 17 May 2017 on a European Year of Cultural Heritage, bound the Union, the Member States, regional and local authorities to act following a common plan bonded by a legislative framework. The document ensures coordination and the monitoring of all the initiatives launched during the European Year.

Among many activities at Union, national, regional and local level, bi-monthly [newsletters](#) have been sent to support and push the objectives of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

This newsletter, clearly, was not one of them.

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This alternative newsletter is not meant as a criticism of any lack of effort by the Commission in this area, it is an expression of my surprise that it feels like, for some reason they were not able to fully endorse a European Year to End Violence against Women. I can't work out what that reason could be. And actually, I can't imagine a big enough reason.

I would, though, like to congratulate commissioner Věra Jourová for the extraordinary amount of great work she pushed through in 2017 and I invite everyone to listen to her [words](#), which are the words of a strong and inspiring woman.

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