**Executive PR – draft**

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**PES Women: Inaction in 2022 will cost women’s freedoms, safety and lives**

EU leaders and politicians at all levels must step up the fight for gender equality, the PES Women Executive demanded as it met online for its first meeting of this year.

Words and promises must finally be put into action if Europe wants to protect women from all forms of gender-based violence, safeguard sexual and reproductive health and rights, guarantee equal access to public services, to decision-making and career opportunities, and achieve equal pay.

PES Women President **Zita Gurmai** said:

“Just a few weeks into 2022, there have already been brutal femicides across the EU. We can and must do more at European level to prevent this from happening. We cannot afford to wait until the end of this year to lament the direct and indirect victims – including children, and society as a whole – of all types of gendered violence. On harassment, Female Genital Mutilation, murder, and all other crimes we demand zero tolerance.”

Patriarchal culture, still heavily present in our societies, has a strong and direct influence on these crimes against women, which should be codified as such at EU level, and included in the upcoming European directive against gender-based violence. The directive must contribute to creating a more gender-aware and consensual culture and should at least cover the standards of the Istanbul Convention, as PES Women recently called for in its 2021 [manifesto](https://pes.eu/cms/att/Adopted%20PES%20Women%20Manifesto%2015102021%20Zero-Tolerance%20Zone%20-%20A%20Europe%20Free%20from%20Gender-Based%20Violence.pdf) ‘Zero-Tolerance Zone: A Europe Free from Gender-Based Violence´.

Zita Gurmai added:

“We regret the lack of a gender focus in the EU Digital Services Act, especially given the increasing levels of online violence we are experiencing: one in four women between the ages of 16 and 29 has experienced cyber harassment since 2017.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Conference on the Future of Europe must address this. As an exercise to reflect on what we want our Union to become, it must be a watershed moment towards gender mainstreaming at EU level. Failing to act, or blocking political action, constitute in themselves institutionalised forms of violence against women.”

PES Women also urged leaders not to turn a blind eye to what is happening outside EU borders. From the brutal situation for refugees trying to enter Europe, to the situation of women in conflict zones like Afghanistan, the EU has a moral obligation to act.

PES Women welcomed steps announced by the French presidency, such as including abortion in the EU charter for fundamental rights, unblocking the women on boards directive and moving forward with the pay transparency directive. Progressives will stay vigilant and work to ensure progress on those issues is solid and progressive.

1. Data from the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](https://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2021/violence-and-harassment-across-europe-much-higher-official-records) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)