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VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN THE EU

The **European Women's Lobby** (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL membership extends to organisations in all 27 EU Member States and three of the candidate countries, as well as to 20 European-wide organisations, representing a total of more than 2000 associations.

Violence against women is a cause and consequence of inequality between women and men

- Violence against women is a human rights violation.
- Violence against women has an impact on all women.
- Violence against women is an obstacle to women's full participation in economic, social, political and cultural life.
- Violence against women is in direct contradiction with the EU Treaty goal of promoting equality between women and men.

In addition to the direct impacts on individuals and the aggregate costs to society, violence against women shapes women's place in society: their health, access to employment and education, integration into social and cultural activities, economic independence, participation in public and political life and decision-making, and relations with men. At the same time, inequality between women and men creates the conditions for violence against women and legitimises it.

The EWL has repeatedly stated that there should be an EU action to end violence against women, based on the 6 Ps: Policy, Prosecution, Prevention, Protection, service Provision, Partnership.

Such action should therefore materialise into a comprehensive *Policy* framework building on the international human rights definitions of violence against women, and encompassing legally-binding instruments to ensure that all forms of violence against women are addressed in all EU Member States (*Prosecution*) and strengthen the *Protection* of all women; a European Year on ending violence against women to raise awareness and foster *Prevention*; and substantial and sustainable EU funding to support service *Providers* and build *Partnership* with NGOs working towards a Europe free from male violence against women.

The EWL members and experts have identified the following key challenges, and developed evidence-based recommendations to feed an EU action to end violence against women.

- Violence against women is a very serious phenomenon.
- Women experience male violence everywhere, everyday.
- There is a massive tolerance for violence against women in our societies.
- Violence against women is invisible and underestimated.
- Violence against women is depoliticised or culturalised.
- Violence against women is trivialized.
- Impunity of perpetrators is still high.
- Women's diversity of needs is still denied in public policies.
- Women face a worrying backlash on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- Women not equally protected in the EU.
- Despite EU directive condemning sexual harassment at work, such form of male violence remains prevalent and unpunished.
- Violence against women impacts on all society.
- The recession has a very negative impact on the prevalence of violence against women and recession.

You will find also in this briefing:

- An overview of recent developments on violence against women both at **EU and Council of Europe levels**;
- A call to join the **European Coalition for an EU year to end violence against women**.



21st Century Challenges and Recommendations to the EU and its Member States

Violence against women is a very serious phenomenon. It takes many different forms and leads to long-term psychological and physical consequences, when it's not purely to the death of women. The persistence of male violence against women in our societies therefore strongly questions our vision of human security and peace: are we really living in peace when half of the world's population is experiencing or might experience some form of male violence just because they are female?

- Women aged 15-44 are more at risk from rape and domestic violence than from cancer, motor accidents, war and malaria, according to World Bank data.¹
- 45% of women in Europe have suffered from men's violence.²
- In Europe, 7 women die every day from male domestic violence.³
- 68% of women in prostitution meet the criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in the same range as victims of torture undergoing treatment.⁴

Women experience male violence everywhere, everyday. *'Learning the strategies for survival is a continuous lesson about what it means to be female.'*⁵

- 95% of all acts of violence taking place within the home are against women.⁶
- In an online study, 99% of women said they experienced some form of street harassment, including: leering, honking and whistling, sexist comment, making vulgar gestures, saying sexually explicit comments, kissing noises, following, blocking path, sexual touching or grabbing, masturbating, assaulting.⁷

There is a massive tolerance for violence against women in our societies. Such tolerance is supported by sexist stereotypes and patriarchal representations of masculinity and femininity. Key professionals, such as the police and the justice, should benefit from regular and substantial training on what violence against women is really about and how to contribute to its eradication. Combating such degrading stereotypes would help to shift the blame onto the right person (the perpetrator) and to support women victims to denounce male violence.

- In Italy, the Supreme Court can decrease the perpetrator punishment if the cause is jealousy. Italian news is used to talk about "jealousy acts, and too much love".⁸
- For 27% of men surveyed, it is "ridiculous" to talk about rape for a woman in prostitution.⁹
- Limited availability of services, stigma and fear prevent women from seeking assistance and redress. In 2005, between 55 and 95 % of women who had been physically abused by their partners had never contacted NGOs, shelters, or the police for help.¹⁰

Violence against women is invisible and underestimated. The lack of official data, both at European level and in some European countries, perpetuates the invisibility of some forms of violence against women and the underestimation of its prevalence as a structural phenomenon. The lack of adequate assessment of the prevalence of the phenomenon leads to a lack of services protecting women and on activities aiming at preventing violence against women.

- There are only 23 countries all over the world (17 of them European, 5 American and Japan) that register and publish the data related on women murdered by their partners.¹¹
- Only five EU Member States comply with the requirement of one place in a safe shelter per 7500 inhabitants.¹²
- Nine out of ten women in prostitution would like to exit the system of prostitution but feel unable to do so.¹³

¹ UN Secretary-General, 2008. *F&F VAW general*

² *Everyday Violence – How Women and Men Experience Sexual and Physical Danger*, Elizabeth Stanko; Pandora; 1990; cited in Women's Aid

³ Psytel, *Estimation de la mortalité liée aux violences conjugales en Europe*, Programme Daphne III.

⁴ Melissa Farley et al., "Prostitution in five countries: violence and post traumatic stress disorder", *Feminism and Psychology*, 8, 1998

⁵ *Everyday Violence – How Women and Men Experience Sexual and Physical Danger*, Elizabeth Stanko; Pandora; 1990; cited in Women's Aid 'Violence Against Women – an obstacle to women's participation submission to the Community Platform from Women's Aid', Dublin, 1999

⁶ <http://www.violences.fr/>

⁷ stopstreetharassment.com, 2008

⁸ <http://www.observatorioviolencia.org/noticias.php?id=2534>, 2011

⁹ Melissa Farley, Julie Bindel and Jacqueline M. Golding, "Men who buy sex. Who they buy and what they know. A research study of 103 men who describe their use of trafficked and non-trafficked women in prostitution, and their awareness of coercion and violence", *Prostitution Research and Education and Eaves*, 2009

¹⁰ Data collected from 24,000 women in 10 countries: *García-Moreno et al. 2005. WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women. Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*, Geneva: WHO. 74.

¹¹ <http://www.observatorioviolencia.org/noticias.php?id=2534>, 2011

¹² PACE, Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, "Parliaments united in combating Domestic Violence against women": follow-up to Resolution 1582 (2007), *Replies from Contact Parliamentarians and national Delegations on the Assessment of the implementation of the key measures identified by PACE*, 7 May 2008



Violence against women is depoliticised or culturalised. There is a tendency to differentiate between structural (public) violence and individual (private) violence. Violence against women cannot be considered as a private matter, it is a human rights issue. There is also a tendency to classify some forms of violence against women as cultural forms, therefore implying that violence against women is not structural in all societies and communities. The struggle against all forms of violence against women should know no excuse or reason for tolerance.

- In Europe, acts of domestic violence against women are not classified by law as criminal offences in Estonia, Hungary and Italy.¹⁴
- At least 10% of adolescents marry before the age of 18 in Britain and France. Forced marriages often bring forced sexual initiation and/or ongoing unwanted sexual experiences for girls and women.¹⁵

Violence against women is trivialized. Degrading images of women referring to the pornographic imaginary are used in advertising and media, therefore trivialising men's access to women's bodies and sexuality. This makes raising awareness on the different forms of male violence against women very difficult, as the hypersexualisation of bodies conveys a contradictory message.

- The states with higher circulation rates of pornographic magazines have higher rape rates.¹⁶
- Children Now reports that 38% of the female characters in video games are scantily clad, 23% baring breasts or cleavage, 31% exposing thighs, another 31% exposing stomachs or midriffs and 15% baring their behinds.¹⁷

Impunity of perpetrators is still high. Sexual violence in particular still has one of the lowest conviction rates of any crime, and high levels of 'attrition' (the process by which reported rape cases are lost from the legal process, and thus do not result in a criminal conviction) in the course of investigations and prosecutions. The **EU victims' package** is a good tool to guarantee women's rights when they fall victims of a form of male violence, but it won't solve the issue of discrepancy between national legislations and might therefore not apply to many women if their country doesn't qualify violence against women as a crime.

- In France, 205 women are raped every day, only 2% of perpetrators are condemned, only 1 victim out of 10 will report to the police, 74% of rapes are committed by someone the victim knows.¹⁸
- In France, for 350 cases of sexual harassment followed, there are only 50 convictions per year.¹⁹

Women's diversity of needs is still denied in public policies. Women are not a homogenous group. Policies should ensure that they don't leave any woman or girl behind.

- Women with disabilities are four times more likely to experience sexual violence and face forced sterilisation or abortion; many of them depend on the perpetrator for their daily care or even survival.²⁰
- In the UK, one in five homeless women has resorted to prostitution to escape a night on the streets.²¹
- 3rd-country national women are denied access to shelters; undocumented women can face deportation when reporting facts of male violence.²²
- A lot of teenagers, especially girls, have a negative or restrictive concept of 'love': a. they accept abusive behaviour from their partners (they associate love with suffering), b. they don't realise that they have other options, c. they don't realise that what they suffer or submit to is a form of abuse.²³
- Roma women and transgender persons often face forced sterilisation.²⁴
- Lesbian and bisexual women face targeted sexual harassment and abuse.²⁵

¹³ UK Home Office, *Paying the price*, 2004

¹⁴ PACE, Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, "Parliaments united in combating Domestic Violence against women" : follow-up to Resolution 1582 (2007), *Replies from Contact Parliamentarians and national Delegations on the Assessment of the implementation of the key measures identified by PACE*, 7 May 2008

¹⁵ <http://www.plan-uk.org/early-and-forced-marriage/>

¹⁶ Baron & Strauss (1984), in Mary Anne Layden, *Pornography and Violence: a new look at research*, 2009

¹⁷ Children Now, 'From Sidekick to Superwoman: TV's Feminine Mystique', Report on the 1995 conference on Children and the Media, 1995

¹⁸ www.contreleviol.fr

¹⁹ AFVT, in EC feasibility study to assess the possibilities, opportunities and needs to standardise national legislation on VAW, Daphne, 2010

²⁰ European Disability Forum, Response to the consultation on an EU strategy to combat violence against women, July 2010, and http://www.edf-feph.org/page_generale.asp?docid=14007&sub=1&search=forced+sterilization.

²¹ Newspaper's article, in dash.com: <http://www.24dash.com/news/housing/2010-12-23-One-fifth-of-homeless-women-turn-to-prostitution-study> 2010

²² Amnesty International Spain Report: *More than Words - Spain: Making Protection And Justice a Reality for Women Victims of gender based Violence in the home* (in Spanish), 2005.

²³ Daphne II: Secondary Education Schools and Education in Values . The Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies and the University of Zaragoza. 2006

²⁴ On Roma women: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=3757>; on Transgender persons, see Transgender Europe: <http://www.tgeu.org/missionstatement>

²⁵ ILGA Europe: http://www.ilga-europe.org/home/issues/hate_crime/resources



Women face a worrying backlash on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Women's control over their bodies and their sexuality is a key human right, the violation of which is a clear form of male violence against women and patriarchy. New strategies are being used to prevent women's access to reproductive health care such as the abusive and unregulated use of conscientious objection in many EU Member States.

- The right to abort is still denied or restricted in four EU Member States (Malta, Cyprus, Ireland and Poland) and its access is made difficult in many countries in practice due to cases of conscientious objections, incomplete information and lack of sexuality education, lack of public health funding, community pressure or excessive cost of contraception.
- As many as 1 in 4 women experience physical and/or sexual violence during pregnancy which increases the likelihood of having a miscarriage, still birth and abortion.²⁶

Women not equally protected in the EU. Male violence against women is prevalent in all EU Member States, yet tackled in widely differing ways, ranging from an absence of its recognition as a fundamental violation of women's human rights, to a broad policy framework based on a feminist analysis of gender power relations in our societies. This has important consequences on the ability of women to resist and survive male violence. The newly adopted **European Protection Order** will be a very important tool to guarantee women's protection when they travel in the EU.

- Out of the 31 countries analysed by the experts to the EWL Observatory on VAW, only Sweden has a national action plan including all forms of VAW. 10 others (France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Serbia, Spain and Turkey) have National Action Plans on specific forms of VAW with a gender perspective.²⁷
- In Lithuania, marital rape is still not considered as a criminal offence (exemption in the law).²⁸
- Sexual harassment at work is not penalised in Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Slovakia.²⁹

Despite EU directive condemning sexual harassment at work, such form of male violence remains prevalent and unpunished. A significant proportion of cases are sexual offences that are 'downgraded' to the status of sexual harassment because they occur in the context of a work relationship. The EU needs to qualify such harassment as a form of violence, and not only discrimination at the workplace.

- Women employees are still significantly more exposed to workplace bullying than their male colleagues and that the difference is even greater in the case of sexual harassment: more than three times as many female as male employees report having experienced sexual harassment in the previous 12 months.³⁰
- One in four female students on UK campuses says she had been subjected to an unwanted sexual experience at university or college.³¹

Violence against women impacts on all society. Without a comprehensive policy aiming at ending violence against women, we are paying the price of the tolerating for violence against women, be it financially but also in terms of not realising equality between women and men.

- The cost of domestic violence in the EU is estimated at 16 billion Euros per year, amounting to 1 million Euros every half hour. The annual EU member states' budgets for prevention programmes of male violence are 1000 times less.³²

The recession has a very negative impact on the prevalence of violence against women and recession. An EWL/Oxfam study shows that economic recession aggravates the unequal power relations between women and men and leads to an increase of domestic/intimate relationship violence, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation, and a rise in prostitution and attacks on prostituted women. It also impacts directly on women, as service providers and

²⁶ UNIFEM 2011

²⁷ EWL Barometer 2011

²⁸ European Commission, DG for Justice, DAPHNE (2010), [Feasibility study to assess the possibilities, opportunities and needs to standardise national legislation on violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence](#), Luxembourg.

²⁹ 'Protecting women against violence', Council of Europe, 2010

³⁰ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007, 'Women and violence at work'

³¹ National Union of Students, 2010

³² Psytel, Ingénierie de l'Information, Projet Daphné 'IPV EU_Cost', *Estimation du coût des violences conjugales en Europe*, Maité Albagly-Sandrine Baffert-Claude Mugnier-Marc Nectoux-Bertand Thellot, 2006



public services face funding cuts and cannot therefore provide adequate quality services to women. This is why the **EU Daphne Programme** is instrumental to support the work of NGOs.

- Ruhama, an Irish NGO working to support women affected by prostitution, has experienced budgetary cuts of up to 30% from statutory funders in the last 3 years, with additional cuts expected in 2012.³³

Violence against women is the most pervasive violation of human rights in the EU

Violence against women is structural, not accidental

- CEDAW General Recommendation 19:
'Gender-based violence against women is violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately, and includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty'.
- Beijing Platform for Action (1995):
'Violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women's full advancement'.

EWL recommendations for an EU strategy to end violence against women

- A comprehensive policy framework
- Based on the definition of violence against women from international human rights instruments
- Link with EU commitment to equality between women and men
- Mainstream violence against women in all policies (coordination)
- Address all forms of violence against women
- Address the five Ps: prevention, protection, prosecution, provision, partnership
- Include a wide range of actions, from legally-binding instruments to awareness-raising activities
- Allocated with sufficient and sustainable human and financial resources

Concrete measures should include:

- A European Action Plan on violence against women
- A European Year on violence against women, possibly 2015
- Awareness-raising and educational activities
- More funding for women's NGOs
- Legally-binding instruments (like a Directive with a common definition of violence against women)
- Data Collection, research and policy developments
- Gender Budgeting
- Coherence between internal and external policies
- Member States to develop national actions plans

EU recent developments on violence against women

To date, the EU has no binding legislation in place to deal with what activists highlight is the most pervasive human rights abuse within its borders. But in the last years, the issue of violence against women has gained increased attention on the political scene. We believe that there is now political momentum for an EU action to end violence against women. However, despite many declarations, we don't see any concrete policy measures coming up. The EWL calls on the EU institutions to be accountable towards their promises and deliver action to end violence against women in Europe!

³³ <http://www.ruhama.ie/>



The **EU Trio Presidency** gathering Spain, Belgium and Hungary (2010-11) set up the question of violence against women as a priority, and on 26 March 2010, they issued a Trio Declaration on equality between women and men which clearly identifies violence against women as an issue of gender equality. In November 2009, the **European Parliament** passed a Resolution calling for a Directive and an Action Plan on violence against women.³⁴ The **Council of the EU** backed this position in March 2010, issuing Conclusions calling on the Commission to devise a Strategy on violence against women and consider additional legal instruments.³⁵ On the same date, the **European Commission** launched a Women's Charter which included a promise to 'put in place a comprehensive and effective policy framework to combat gender-based violence',³⁶ and in an April Communication on cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs, duly committed to the elaboration of a Strategy followed by an Action Plan, with a time-frame of 2011-2012.³⁷ In September, the new EU Strategy for Equality between Women and Men included the adoption of an EU-wide Strategy on combating violence against women in its provisions for 2010-2015.³⁸ In April 2011, the **European Parliament** reiterated its call for a new comprehensive policy approach against violence against women through a resolution³⁹ with concrete proposals for the strategy's content. In February 2012, the MEPs expressed their support to the Daphne Programme through a Resolution⁴⁰ calling on the EC to maintain, in its 2014-2020 Rights and Citizenship Programme, the Daphne Programme's objectives and to allocate the same level of funding to that of the earlier programme.

In parallel, the **European Fundamental Rights Agency** and the **European Institute for Gender Equality** have launched initiatives to gather much needed comparable European data on the issue, the **Daphne Programme** has built up a solid foundation of expertise and good practices throughout the Union in the prevention of violence against women, and several **Eurobarometers** highlight the population's concerns for the tolerance for violence against women in the EU.⁴¹

Council of Europe Convention on violence against women

In 7 April 2011, the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted its **Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence**, which leaves the possibility for EU ratification. This new landmark Council of Europe treaty is the first legally binding instrument in Europe creating a comprehensive legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence, and prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence. The Convention also establishes an international mechanism to monitor its implementation at national level. Would the EU join the Convention, then all provisions of the Convention for which the EU has a competence would become EU law. The Convention is opened for signature since 11 May 2011; 18 countries have signed it yet (as of 1 March 2012).⁴²

The EWL believes that the EU should become a party to the Council of Europe Convention.

EWL action: European Coalition for an EU Year to end violence against women

In 1999, **the European Commission had already run an awareness-raising campaign** on eliminating violence against women following the 1997 EP call for a European Year against violence against women. This precedent gives no space for arguments against the establishment of a new European Year to End Violence against Women, which should be the awareness-raising part of a comprehensive EU action. The European Commission is currently reflecting on developing an EU awareness raising campaign to end violence against women; the EC Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities should deliver an opinion on a possible EU awareness raising campaign in August this year.

³⁴ European Parliament resolution of 25 November 2009 on the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – An area of freedom, security and justice serving the citizen – Stockholm programme

³⁵ Council conclusions on the Eradication of Violence Against Women in the European Union, 3000th Employment and Social Policy Council meeting, Brussels, 8 March 2010

³⁶ A Strengthened Commitment to Equality between Women and Men A Women's Charter Declaration by the European Commission on the occasion of the 2010 International Women's Day, COM(2010) yyy final

³⁷ Delivering an area of freedom, security and justice for Europe's citizens - Action Plan Implementing the Stockholm Programme; Brussels, 20.4.2010; COM(2010) 171 final

³⁸ European Commission, Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015, 21 September 2010, COM(2010) 491 final

³⁹ European Parliament resolution of 5 April 2011 on priorities and outline of a new EU policy framework to fight violence against women (2010/2209(INI))

⁴⁰ European Parliament resolution of 2 February 2012 on the Daphne programme: achievements and future prospects (2011/2273(INI))

⁴¹ Special Eurobarometer 344 on Domestic Violence against Women, September 2010. Special Eurobarometer 326 on Gender Equality in the EU in 2009, March 2010.

⁴² <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/ChercheSig.asp?NT=210&CM=1&DF=&CL=ENG>



The European Parliament has been calling for years for an EU Year against violence against women. Already In 2006, in a resolution on the current situation in combating violence against women and any future action,⁴³ the European Parliament had called for the EC to establish a European Year against men's violence against women. Such call for a European Year has been repeatedly demanded in many EP resolutions and reports dealing with women's rights and equality between women and men over the last three years. In 2009, the European Parliament asked the European Commission to declare, within the next five years, a 'European Year on Zero Tolerance of Violence against Women', in a written declaration adopted in April.⁴⁴ In October 2010, more than half of the MEPs adopted a new written declaration on establishing a European Year of Combating Violence against Women.⁴⁵

The European Women's Lobby has initiated a broad European advocacy movement, gathering NGOs and decision-makers, lobbying for a European Year to end violence against women. This [European Coalition](#) is active in lobbying the relevant decision-makers to ensure that the voice of its members will be heard. As of 1 March 2012, 9 MEPs have expressed their support to the Coalition and many more are on the way to join.

EWL publications and projects on violence against women

- *Unveiling the Hidden Data on Domestic Violence in the EU (1999)* → first European-wide data!
- *Towards a Common Framework to Monitor Progress in Combating Violence against Women (2001)* → Indicators on violence against women
- *Reality Check: When women's NGOs map policies and legislation on violence against women in Europe (2007)* → shadow report to the Council of Europe stocktaking study
- *Three-year project 'Nordic-Baltic Network', with NGOs and government agencies* → concrete activities to support and assist women victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation (2005-2008)
- *The links between prostitution and sex trafficking: a briefing handbook (2006, EWL-CATW)*
- *Not for sale (2006, EWL-CATW)* → awareness raising film on women survivors of prostitution
- EWL position paper *Towards a Europe free from all forms of male violence against women (2010)*
- EWL contribution to the EC consultation on an EU strategy on violence against women (2010)
- EWL lobbying kit for a strong Council of Europe convention on violence against women (2010)
- EWL study on sexual violence (commissioned by EIGE, 2011)
- EWL European Women's Voice *Violence against women in the European Union (Spring 2011)*
- EWL 2011 Barometer *National Actions Plans on violence against women in the EU (2011)*
- EWL campaign *'Together for a Europe free from prostitution'* (2010-2012)
- European Coalition for an EU Year to End Violence against Women (2011-2015)

EWL quotes on male violence against women

- 'Male violence against women is the fundamental and extensive violation of women's human rights in the EU. It is unacceptable that, as yet, no EU legislation exists to tackle it. We expect to see this change soon with the Commission proposal for an EU Strategy to combat Violence against Women.' (EWL Executive member, Rada Boric)
- 'Male violence against women is a structural phenomenon intrinsically linked to gender inequalities.' (Director of the EWL Observatory on Violence Against Women, Colette De Troy)
- 'Prostitution is male violence against women. Refusing to tolerate a system of prostitution is about setting a standard of human dignity for all women and girls around the world.' (EWL Policy Officer and Project Coordinator, Pierrette Pape)
- 'Ending violence against women is not a luxury for times of growth; it is even more crucial in times of crisis as women are hit very hard.' (EWL Secretary General Cécile Gréboval)

⁴³ European Parliament resolution on the current situation in combating violence against women and any future action (2004/2220(INI))

⁴⁴ Written Declaration of the European Parliament of 22 April 2009 on the 'Say NO to Violence against Women' campaign

⁴⁵ Declaration of the European Parliament of 9 September 2010 on establishing a European Year of Combating Violence against Women